



CauseBecause

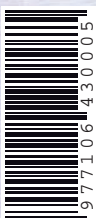
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Sustainability reports: More PR than CSR

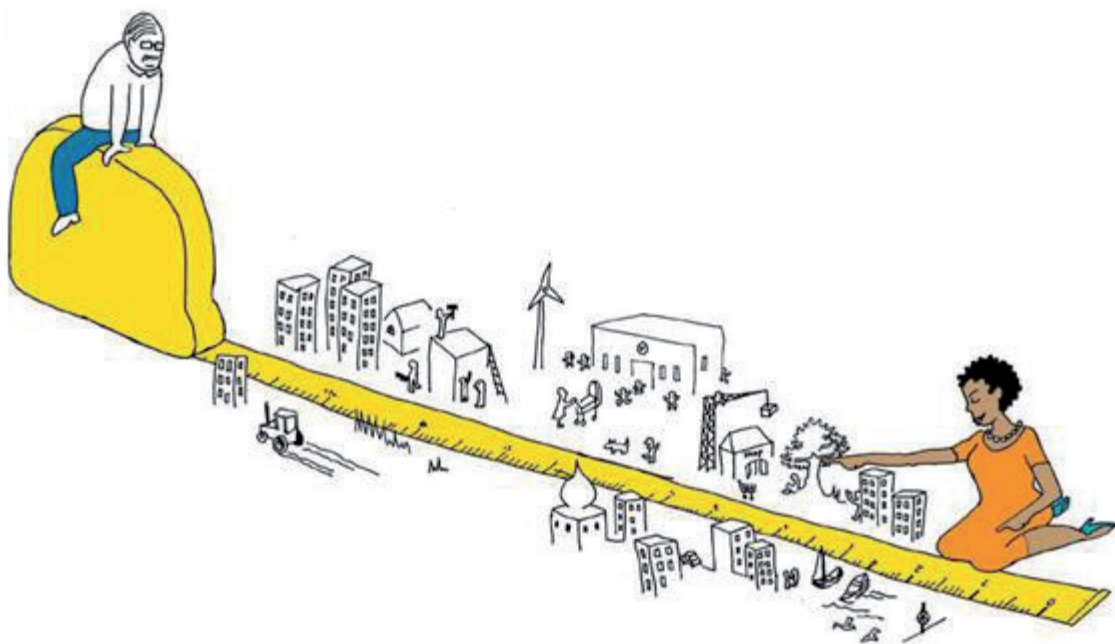


In this issue...

- FMCG: Fast-moving (and meandering?) consumer responsibility
- IndiGo: Flying high, aiming low?
- Sustainability at India Inc.: A gist of talks with 81 leaders, 119 reports



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Editorial 4

Updates 5

Feature Point

FMCG: Fast-moving (and meandering?) consumer responsibility 12

As part of CauseBecause's series on sector-wise exploration of CSR in the country, we take a look at the FMCG industry, home to many popular brands. Aside from the technology sector, these companies are perceived to be the most active in this domain and it is time to separate the myth from the facts...

Sustainability reports of some of India's biggest corporations: More PR than CSR 19

Sustainability reporting may seem like a passing fad, another PR exercise by tax-evading corporations, but despite the justified reasons for cynicism, it is one of the more transparent and reliable ways to ensure that organisations are aware of their overall impact on the society...

Viewpoint

Sustainability at India Inc.: A gist of talks with 81 leaders, 119 reports 23

For nearly a decade, Team CauseBecause has been propagating the 'people' and 'planet' aspects of sustainability amongst Indian corporate entities, most of whom have sort of mastered the profit aspect of business...

Brother, I am taking you to the cops 26

Am I not glad for having dragged this errant-driver-cum-errant-and-foul-speaking-man to the police station today? And he thought he could get away with a) taking a turn on my side of the road while entering the colony gate, landing in front of my car, and putting his fingers up gesticulating, instead of moving his car...

Corporate Focus

IndiGo: Flying high, aiming low? 27

Among the low-cost airlines (though, of late, the prices appear to be anything but low) in India, IndiGo is perhaps the most well-known. Not going bankrupt obviously helps but its on-time record is quite impressive, especially for a country notorious for running perpetually late (in more ways than one)...

NGO Focus

The Purnal ministry of women and child development 31

India's ever-burgeoning youth population has become the subject of plenty of articles, attention and speculation. As per the 2011 census data, around 41 per cent of India's population is below the age of 20 years. The potential is immense – as a human resource to be harnessed for the country's development...

Half a confused cynic, half everything else

After all, there is much and much to be cynically true about. Even the good and the well-meaning elicits a sentiment that feels stuck somewhere between ‘oh yeah?’ and ‘what is the catch?’ So, on the one hand we are in a state of ecological limbo – (admittedly) a situation of largely our own making (and of which most of us are in denial). On the other hand we don’t know where to begin, whether we can begin at all, whether it’s too late to begin, whether it’s too less too late, whether we are too few to make any difference, and who is going to take the first step.

At the same time, I do not wish to share the cynicism of the great Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had said way back in 1857, ‘When a man says to me, “I have the intensest love of nature,” at once I know that he has none.’

There are journeys and visions and stories and individuals to show us that there is faith of another kind that works. This is no magic, but is no less than a miracle too. And in a world short of ideals and ideas, there is all the more room for magic and miracle. Isn’t there?

Team CauseBecause believes it is more important to search for the questions – not in any vague, lofty way but through as much confusion as possible. There is no one answer, nor is there only one way to view a problem. Each one of us has our own bag of experiences, ideas and points of view, talents and ways. So, bring it on, create confusion, add to it, and stoke it some more. Being confused means we are alive, thinking, agitated.

Way back in 2009, CauseBecause had begun its journey as an ideas-and-conversations medium for all who believed in sustainability, with the ultimate goal of inspiring each one of us to live in harmony with the earth and its inhabitants. Because the reasons for embracing change are there and the solutions are for each one of us to understand, appreciate and accept.

All of us – individuals, communities, social workers, businesses, and governments – are stakeholders in this process. Whatever the code we live and work by – whether it’s sustainability, sustainable living, sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, ethical business, responsible governance – well, so long as we have the code and the conscience. Mere theorizing, moralizing, or posturing won’t take us anywhere.

For now, let’s part for a while and reflect upon the thoughts of poet, author and activist Wendell Berry – ‘The name of our proper connection to the earth is “good work”, for good work involves much giving of honour. It honours the source of its materials; it honours the place where it is done; it honours the art by which it is done; it honours the thing that it makes and the user of the made thing. Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known. Good work can be defined only in particularity, for it must be defined a little differently for every one of the places and every one of the workers on the earth.’

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Show me the CSR money. How much are companies investing?

A report by the ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) has revealed that more than Rs 28,000 crore was spent by companies toward CSR from 1 April 2014 to 30 November 2017. More than 70 per cent of this was contributed by the private sector – perhaps an indication of the state of our public sector that's bleeding profits.

Out of the total amount of Rs 28,111.63 crore, Rs 4,719 crore was spent till 30 November 2017 – the number is slated to go up as more companies submit their final CSR tallies at the end of the current financial year. In FY 2015, 5,870 companies invested Rs 9,564.77 crore in

their CSR, while the next financial year saw this increase to Rs 13,827.86 crore, spread across 7,983 companies. Unsurprisingly, health and sanitation, eradicating hunger and poverty, education, rural development, and women empowerment were some of the favourite causes for these corporates. The North East accounted for approximately 1.3 per cent of the overall CSR spend for FY 2016. Something is better than nothing, right?

Earlier this year, MCA informed

the Rajya Sabha that action was to be initiated against 196 companies for violating CSR norms, specifically the '2 per cent of profits' rule, in FY 2015 (about time indeed). A number of companies flouted this law spectacularly, failing to spend any amount for CSR – the figures were 8,924 and 10,547 for 2014–15 and 2015–16 respectively. This raises serious questions about the commitment of corporate India towards CSR and the efficacy of government action against violators. Both need to urgently pull up their socks. ■



Help women to help themselves

Self-help groups (SHGs) being a go-to medium for corporates big and small looking to empower women, B2BAdda.com has partnered with Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women and Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihood Mission (TNSRLM) to set up a COE (centre of excellence) and IC (incubation centre) for more than 20,000 women SHGs in Vellore, Tamil Nadu. The COE will provide on-the-job training in manufacturing, services and sales for all Detel products (an electronic goods manufacturer) like mobile phones, LED TVs and mobile accessories. B2BAdda.com is a B2B e-distribution platform for bulk buying and selling and is also the exclusive e-distribution partner of Detel. The Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women is a government-funded organisation that works for the socioeconomic development of women.

The objective of this programme is to help women become entrepreneurs by developing a ecosystem that promotes strong institutional partnerships among technical institutions, enablers, stakeholders, markets and society. Some clarity on who those enablers and stakeholders are supposed to be would have helped in understanding the details of this initiative. As of now, there's no information on when this programme will start, funding and responsibilities of the participating organisations, and the specific targets.

The press release shared with CauseBecause was titled 'B2BAdda.com extends the gift of employment to 20,000 Women Self Help Groups in Tamil Nadu'. Employment isn't a gift, though; it's a right. ■

Employee engagement: Sounds good. Does good as well?

Recently there has been a spate of employee engagement initiatives across corporate India. Here's a brief roundup:

Jet Airways recently concluded its annual employee volunteering programme called *Joy of Giving*. This is the internal, organisation-wide initiative that leverages the airline's pan-India presence to engage with NGOs and contribute towards serving the less privileged sections of society, particularly children, women and senior citizens. The programme also promotes employee sensitisation towards the cause of philanthropy and humanitarian issues.

This year, employees visited NGOs and foster-care homes in multiple cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Cochin, Udaipur and Kolkata. They not only spent time there but also donated cash and significant amounts of resources such as stationeries, food, household items, clothes and even movie tickets. They interacted with the children, participated in fun activities, and shared their flight experiences. This year the NGOs included Sunshine Foundation, Mother Teresa Foundation, My Home - Old Age Home, Mathra Chaya Mandiram Orphanage, Samarpan Sansthan, Good Life Centre, Dindayal Foster, Annesshwa and Sandesh.

Further questions from CauseBecause were met with silence on the company's side. We had reached out to Gaurav Sahni and Srirupa Sen.

On 31 January, **HCL Foundation** celebrated its Power of One initiative, which is an employee volunteering and payroll giving

programme. It also forms an integral part of the Foundation's work for positive urban transformation. Power of One is based on the belief that all that is needed is just one rupee per day or one dollar per week and one hour, one day, one month or one year of community service to make a significant difference in society.

Driven by so-called HCL Community Champions, employees can make contributions to communities through various activities: teaching, rehabilitation, counselling, mentoring, training and sensitisation programs, addressing a range of development issues including education, health, livelihoods and environment. Participation can take the form of Daily Payroll Giving wherein employees contribute one rupee every day in India (or one USD or one pound), all of which are directed to key initiatives and are over and above the CSR spends of HCL Foundation. The other way is Community Championship – here, HCL Foundation supports

employees who volunteer on community service projects.

As per the Foundation's claims, 50,000 HCL employees have so far participated in this initiative, dedicating approximately 150,000 hours this year and impacting over 200,000 people across India. 100 HCL employees have adopted 100 schools across 12 states, benefiting 50,000 students. The two key projects supported by Power of One initiative are MY SCHOOL wherein employees can give back through community service in a school of his or her choice, and MY SCHOLAR, which is a long-term scholarship programme to support the education of talented children from low-income families.

The Power of One Carnival was presented as a day of celebration of this initiative and featured cultural performances and activities led by children from HCL Foundation's project locations, stalls by NGO partners, experiential workshops, various engagement activities, and music and dance.



Related questions from CauseBecause were not answered by the Foundation. CB had sent its questions to Devneeta Pahuja, Nidhi Pundhir, and Ajay Davessar.

InterGlobe Foundation (IGF), the do-good arm of InterGlobe Enterprises (which includes IndiGo Airlines among its roster of ventures), has been actively promoting the culture of corporate volunteering through initiatives in the areas of preserving heritage and culture, promoting livelihoods, and protecting the environment. It currently supports 11 projects impacting the lives of nearly 250,000 people. Some of the major initiatives are 'No Open Waste' – a waste-management project, *Saksham* – focused on employability-enhancement training,

donation drives, and *Gramjyothi*, which promotes livelihood generation for women.

With a view towards engaging its employees on CSR, IGE organised a 'heritage walk' at Rahim's tomb on 30 January to commemorate the efforts of volunteers for the conservation and cultural revival of Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan's monument that had been taken up by the IGF with Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in 2014. Thirty-six employees participated in this walk. The project on Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan's tomb is physical restoration in the form of repair of cracks and stabilisation and reconstruction of portions as per the original profiles, using traditional craftsmanship techniques. The project

has utilised more than 250,000 man-days, generating employment opportunities for master craftsmen.

Earlier, events such as art installations during the Apni Basti mela, projects such as landscape development through tree plantation, and citizen journalism covering life stories of the craftsmen were organised. Over 100 employees have engaged in these activities over the years.

A related noteworthy step is the iServe programme that allows three days of official leave to all its employees to participate in volunteering, so as to foster and promote responsible citizenship. Over 200 employees volunteered this year for iServe activities. ■

Cairn Oil & Gas, Rajjo Devi and Resham

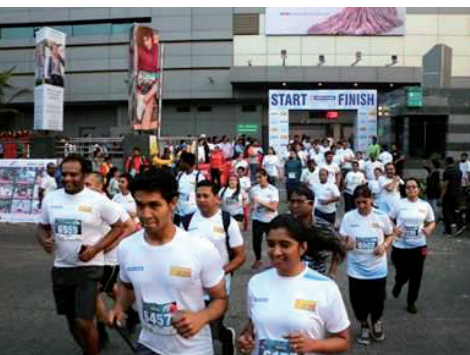
Cairn Oil & Gas has launched an initiative called Resham in Barmer, Rajasthan, focused on production of low-cost and high-quality sanitary napkins by women and self-help groups. A number of women from local villages in Barmer district have joined Rajjo Devi, a 27-year-old woman working on the issue of female hygiene, in this mission.

Cairn has helped set up the sanitary-pad manufacturing units in Kau Ka Kheda, Mundhon Ki Dhani, Dhandlawas and other villages in Barmer district. However, it is not clear if the company provides any other support to this initiative. Questions on this initiative received no response from the PR representative or the company.

The pads are sold to women and girls who were earlier using cloths during menstrual period. Each pack consisting of two napkins is sold at Rs 5.

Sanitary machines are operated through 10 SHGs that have been trained to manufacture, package, market and sell the product. Wood pulp, purchased from Coimbatore, is used to produce these cheap sanitary napkins. Currently, a woman can earn upto Rs 50 per day, with the average daily production being 750 sanitary pads per day. While still not a significant amount, the monetary gain is perhaps aided by the health benefits that come with better hygienic practices.

The aim is to reduce the issue of poor menstrual hygiene, which is linked to high rates of cervical cancer in India. This initiative hopes to combine health and livelihoods interventions by helping women from poor communities to improve their economic status and health status. The results remain to be seen. ■



HDFC Bank's run to nowhere

A run to create awareness about ending child labour – in which 2,200 people participated – was recently organised by HDFC Bank. Called the HDFC Bank Malad Run, over 200 bank employees took part in this run. It was held in three formats of 3 km, 6 km, and 10 km.

While no funds were raised or donations made to the cause of child labour, it did serve as a qualifier for all major marathons in Mumbai. The programme's impact is also not clear – for instance, were there talks, ads, short films, announcements, etc., to educate people about the ills of child labour and what was the extent of awareness generated and was it even measured? Perhaps the participants themselves raised funds for worthy causes on their own (a common practice these days), but it would have been much more worthwhile for the bank to gather funds, collect sponsorships, or even launch programmes targeted at child labour at this event. There's no clarity if there were specific reasons behind the limited goal of raising awareness.

Questions mailed by CauseBecause to HDFC Bank regarding impact and whether any funds were raised towards the cause received no response. ■

No takers for holy rivers?

Recently, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) approved a number of projects worth nearly Rs 4,000 crore, for various cities and towns of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. NMCG is the central decision-making body that is responsible for the implementation of the government's Ganga rejuvenation, anti-pollution, and conservation programme.



Among the projects are two for Kanpur, which is the origin of the most polluted stretch of the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh due to the discharge of polluted water from hundreds of tanneries that dot the nearby basins. Together, these two are worth nearly Rs 1,600 crore.

These projects are in addition to the total 187 *Namami Gange* projects, out of which 47 smaller ones have been completed. The projects cover treatment of municipal sewage, treatment of industrial effluent, cleaning, rural sanitation, afforestation, biodiversity, and awareness generation. Currently, sewage-treatment plants are being set up in all the 10 main cities responsible for the lion's share of the river's pollution. Villages along the Ganga now have 100 per cent toilet coverage, although whether they are being used is a separate matter. The timeline for completing this ambitious programme is 2020.

Interestingly, Nitin Gadkari, minister for road transport, shipping and water resources, has stated that the government will require at least Rs 10 lakh crore to clean all the major rivers in the country – this is 50 times the *Namami Gange* programme's budget outlay at Rs 20,000 crore. He also asserted the need for states, corporates, local bodies and citizens to pitch in, including CSR from companies who are in a position to help in this mission.

However, at least till last year, corporate India seems to have had little appetite for wading into these holy waters (metaphorically speaking). Till early 2017, more than 80 per cent of donations to the Clean Ganga Fund came from public sector companies and about 10 per cent (around Rs 14 crore) from private companies, with Bank of America Merrill Lynch alone accounting for a third of this amount.

In an attempt to woo corporates, in October of last year the government launched an interactive web page on the NMCG website to encourage private companies to take up projects under *Namami Gange*. It carries all details of projects and activities that can be taken up by companies as part of their CSR work. As of now, there's no indication that the biggest companies in the country are taking the bait. However, companies would do well to take note of this potential area of intervention, if only to buttress their claims of being CSR and sustainability champions. ■

Pradan: Lofty goals, vague strategies

Recently, a press release reached CB's inbox which declared the NGO Pradan's 'audacious goal to empower ten million women in rural Indian communities to improve their own circumstances to celebrate 35th anniversary.' Suffice to say, the only thing not audacious about this statement was the word 'audacious'. The NGO's goal is to positively impact 10 million people in remote areas by working with them to build self-help groups (SHGs).

The goal is to directly help the 10 million people by 2022 across 12,500 villages in the 7 states where it has its operation. This will be done through collaborations with NGOs, government and other stakeholders, besides empowering communities to mobilise on their own. So, not 'directly', after all.

Pradan hopes to achieve this by 'mobilising professionals and the right resources and sharing our portfolio of research and advocacy tools,' as stated by Executive Director Narendranath Damodaran. As part of its 35th-year anniversary, the organisation hosted Samagam 2018 at Siri Fort Auditorium, Delhi, on its Founders' Day, 18 April 2018. This was to celebrate its achievements and discuss issues and challenges. It claims to have impacted three million lives since its inception in 1983.

Pradan acknowledges the fact that its objective of 'changing values, beliefs, and norms in society' requires long-term engagement



between the Pradan team and the community institutions, and that this process will take 7 to 10 years for a team in a location. It is, then, not clear as to how it will deliver on its own target in four years.

CB's questions on how Pradan plans to achieve this – such as the actual plan and strategies, how it defines and qualifies 'empower' and 'impact', what metrics will be used and how will they track the impact – went unanswered. What we received was a long, generic document on its approach that had a lot of text but offered little insight into the actual details of the initiatives that will be taken up. We still have no idea how Pradan expects to 'empower' women although we hope that 10 million

women will benefit from their efforts.

Pradan's work focuses primarily on women and it helps them organise into collectives (SHGs) that enable them to improve their livelihoods, build linkages, and break the generational cycle of poverty. The Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Ikea Foundation have been core partners, supplying both grants and resources. Some of Pradan's work is initiating sectoral institutions like Tasar (Silk) Development Foundation (TDF) and National Small holder Poultry Development Trust (NSPDT), supporting 70 NGOs that focus on the rural poor, and building programmes in partnership with the government, such as the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. ■

Ola: Share rides, share your wallets (for a cause)

An initiative to crowdsource funds for improving cancer care in the country was launched by Ola, the ride-sharing company. The 'My Ride, My Cause' programme leverages Ola's platform to reach out to millions of customers across India. Through this initiative, Ola customers will have the option to contribute a sum of INR 1 per ride. Ola has partnered with Tata Trusts' Alamelu Charitable Foundation (ACF) on this.

The contributions raised by Ola customers will be funnelled to the foundation to make cancer care affordable and available in rural India. The funds will help in diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Such cases are seeing an increase in the country with 14.5 lakh new cases reported in 2016 alone. Lack of infrastructure, skilled human resources, and cancer-prevention programmes further aggravate this problem. While Tata Trusts is working to support the delivery of affordable and accessible care and regular screening, Ola is facilitating fundraising through its platform.

Interestingly, when CauseBecause asked the Ola spokesperson if the company was going to match the contributions, the response was evasive and the question was circumvented, which implies that Ola's only contribution will be to lend its platform for the cause without any monetary donation from its side.

Customers can contribute through these steps:

Step 1: Once a ride is booked, customers will be able to see an option to contribute INR 1 on the ride-booking screen.

Step 2: Upon clicking 'see how', customers will be able to see detailed information about the foundation and how their contributions will be used.

Step 3: The button at the bottom of the screen that says 'Donate INR 1 on every ride' enables the contribution.

Step 4: Once accepted, customers will see their contribution towards the foundation in the ride-details screen for every ride. Customers can choose to opt in and out at any point of time.



Step 5: Alternatively, customers can activate contributions from the 'Donations' section, under Profiles in the global menu.

Customers will be able to track the total amount of contributions made and can also claim tax exemption with an 80G certificate for the contributions made (available from January 2019).

In a press release shared with CB, Bhavish Aggarwal, co-founder and CEO of Ola, said, 'As a homegrown and leading mobility platform, Ola is committed to enabling holistic well-being and prosperity of the country. This initiative reiterates our commitment as it will unify millions of Ola customers to mobilise funds and ensure that aid reaches where it is needed the most in our country.'

R. Venkataramanan, managing trustee – Tata Trusts, said, 'Nationwide early cancer detection and access to quality care is a dire need. Tata Trusts is playing a facilitating role to establish infrastructure, develop protocols and trained personnel in partnership with multiple state governments, NGOs, hospitals and clinicians across the country. However, this task requires collaboration between multiple stakeholders. We are grateful to Ola and are privileged to partner with them to support this noble cause.' ■

Fortis Foundation: Helping children smile

Recently, a four-month-old baby, Vedika, was treated for her cleft-lip surgery by a team of experts at the Fortis Memorial Research Institute (FMRI) in Gurgaon. This is part of the Fortis Foundation's Umeed-Smile initiative which supports cleft-lip surgeries for children from underprivileged backgrounds. Vedika is the 100th child benefitting from the programme. The surgeries are completely free except for any voluntary contribution from the family. Two post-surgery follow-ups are provided to assess the health of the child.

Vedika was first diagnosed with a cleft-lip condition when her mother was seven months pregnant. After her birth, she was unable to drink her mother's milk and had difficulty in breathing. With a monthly income of Rs 7,500, her family could not afford the expensive treatment. After learning about this initiative, they reached out to the Foundation for help.

The Umeed-Smile initiative was started this year and has been working in collaboration with Mission Smile under the Foundation's Aanchal programme to provide free surgeries for cleft lip and cleft palate to children from poor families. The Aanchal programme aims at providing medical treatment to children suffering from congenital heart defect and cleft lip and cleft palate deformities. However, going forward, the programme will focus on Umeed-Dhadkan initiative for children with congenital heart defects, with the target to treat around 500 children this year.

In a press release shared with CB, Jasbir Singh Grewal, head, Fortis Foundation, said, 'The joy of bringing to smiles to children and their families is the greatest achievement for all of us at Fortis Foundation. These smiles give us the strength to go from child to child, knowing that we are making a difference to their lives.' ■

Parched cities – the new normal

Recently, the news that Cape Town was going to run out of drinking water for its inhabitants made shockwaves across the globe. The very idea that a modern city wouldn't be able to provide water to its citizens seemed right out of some dystopian Philip K Dick novel. Unfortunately, that nightmarish scenario is set to become a reality for 11 other cities, if this BBC report is to be believed. As mentioned in the same report, only 3 per cent of the 70 per cent water that covers the Earth's surface is fresh. Even then, there is enough water to meet the world's growing needs, but not without dramatically changing the way water is used, managed and shared, as per the UN.

Billions of people don't have regular access to clean drinking water which results in thousands of deaths due to waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery and typhoid. WHO notes that at least 2 billion people use a drinking-water source contaminated with faeces, and that by 2025 half of the world's population will be living in water-stressed areas.

Some of the world's most populous cities like Sao Paulo, Beijing, Jakarta, Mexico City and Cairo are

in danger of running out of drinking water in the near future. Then there are cities that one wouldn't expect to be in the list, like Tokyo, London and Miami. Istanbul and Moscow are the other cities in the list with Bengaluru representing India. The erstwhile Garden City's woes can be attributed to the new property developments that are putting additional pressure on already depleted water sources. The poorly planned infrastructure includes a creaking plumbing system and high levels of water pollution. Not a single lake in Bengaluru has suitable water for drinking or bathing.

One of the main reasons for this shortage is water pollution, which can make water unusable even for industrial purpose. Also, as per the UN, the global use of freshwater doubled between 1964 and 2014 because of population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and increased production and consumption. However, it is farming that is the single biggest consumer of water globally (70 per cent), most of it for irrigation. In the global North, though, industry accounts for more than half of freshwater supply. Without a drastic overhaul of how we manage this precious resource, expect more cities to join this infamous list. ■



FMCG: Fast-moving (and meandering?) consumer responsibility

As part of CauseBecause's series on sector-wise exploration of CSR in the country, we take a look at the FMCG industry, home to many popular brands. Aside from the technology sector, these companies are perceived to be the most active in this domain and it is time to separate the myth from the facts.

Companies covered

Nestle | Mondelez | HUL | P&G | ITC | Britannia | Dabur | Amul | Marico | Agro Tech

Nestle

Nestle India has (wisely) limited its CSR focus areas to nutrition, water and sanitation, and rural development. On nutrition, the main impetus is through awareness and education on the importance of nutrition (the Healthy Kids programme is the main example), done in partnership with the Department of Home Science and Food Science, while with Magic Bus India Foundation it promotes healthier lifestyles through the 'sports for development' model. In total, it claims to have reached out to over 184,000 young children.

Project Jaagriti is being implemented in partnership with Mamta Health

Institute for Mother and Child to provide education programmes for good nutrition and feeding practices for adolescents and caregivers. In 2016, the project was extended to 15 districts in 7 states and 1 UT. The goal is to reach out to 3 million beneficiaries by the end of 2018. The company has also collaborated with Drishte Foundation to set up health camps in villages in the Mathura region. Its Swasth Janani Swasth Sishu project touches upon the key issue of breastfeeding and has reached out to some 100,000 people since 2014 in disseminating its message.

Similar awareness sessions are carried out for water conservation

as well. The company has constructed clean drinking water facilities in schools around all of its factories – over 255 water projects have been taken up, benefitting over 126,000 students. Other projects include constructing toilets, water conservation in agriculture, training for street vendors, and awareness campaigns for educating the girl child as part of Mahindra's *Nanhi Kali* programme. All of these initiatives roll into its 'creating shared value' ethos, adopted by the company in 2009 and articulated by Nestle's Sanjay Khajuria, senior vice president, corporate affairs: 'While fulfilling the promise of high quality and safe products and services, we recognise our responsibility of



This table shows the progress made for some of Nestle's leading projects:

| Project | Total | Total |
|---|----------------------|--------------|
| Clean drinking water project (CDWP) | No. of schools | Over 244 |
| | No. of beneficiaries | Over 126,000 |
| Water awareness programme | No. of beneficiaries | 92,500 |
| Sanitation projects | No. of schools | Over 300 |
| | No. of beneficiaries | 117,000 |
| Nestlé Healthy Kids (with universities and Magic Bus) | No. of beneficiaries | Over 184,000 |

creating long-term value for both society and shareholders and also ensuring a healthier future.'

In the sustainability space, there have been concerted efforts to reduce water and energy consumption as well as waste water and CO₂ generation. This has resulted in water and energy consumption per tonne of production falling by 72 per cent and 57 per cent respectively, and CO₂ generation per tonne of production by 64 per cent from 1999 to 2014 (latest numbers are not available). As of the 2015 annual report, Rs 235 million was to be spent on CSR activities, with Rs 28.9 million slated to be

spent in 2016 (as part of the 2015 expenditure). This was less than the mandated 2 per cent spend (Rs 332.9 million) since some of the activities didn't qualify as 'CSR' as per the rules stated by the government.

Mondelez

Mondelez India's (better known for its Cadbury products) flagship CSR programme, Shubh Aarambh, has been structured to benefit children and their health needs, education of young people, and gender equality. Launched in 2014, the programme is primarily based around the company's manufacturing operations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and is currently active in 65 villages in 7

states. Shubh Aarambh's main goal is to provide support for children's nutrition needs, encourage healthy lifestyle through sports, and also educate them and the community at large on its importance. This it does through NGO partners like Save the Children, Magic Bus and AFPRO.

Other related initiatives are skill and livelihood training for the youth to make them employable. The target is to impact 200,000 beneficiaries across 7 states over the next few years—however, there's no clarity on what 'few' means here. Greening projects – that is, providing safe drinking water; soil and water conservation, sanitation, etc. – have been taken up in Baddi, Induri and Malanpur. Mondelez International Foundation has also committed funding for three years (2014–17) in these three areas for active play, nutrition education and access to fresh foods. Out of the prescribed Rs 6 crore to be spent on CSR activities in 2015–16, about Rs 3.96 crore was actually utilised.

HUL

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is one of the best-known FMCG companies in the country and, hence, kind of expected to take a lead on CSR as well. The company's CSR principles emphasise 'sustainable growth' and engagement with various societal and business stakeholders. Its CSR initiatives can be broadly classified into education and livelihood generation, healthcare, and sustainability. Under the ambit of education and livelihood, the most famous one is Project Shakti – it trains and enables rural women to become entrepreneurs by selling HUL products (which they receive at a lower rate than market price) to consumers and retailers. Other

projects are the Fair and Lovely Foundation and Rin Career Ready Academy – the former offers scholarships and career guidance to women and the latter gives basic English and etiquette training to young people from poorer backgrounds. *Prabhat* (Dawn) is another programme that works for the betterment of the communities around HUL's factories. On healthcare, HUL's in-house projects are Hand Washing Behaviour Change (in partnership with the Bihar government), Domex Toilet Academy (based on the SHG-MFI model), and *Sanjivani*, which promotes preventive healthcare.

However, it is sustainability that is the central focus for HUL. The sustainability living plan, launched in 2010, has three main goals: improving health and well-being, reducing environmental impact, and enhancing livelihoods – these are applicable globally across Unilever. Sustainable sourcing, water conservation, reduction in waste and GHG, and health interventions are all part of the mission to achieve these goals.



Progress is being made: reductions in carbon emissions, water usage and disposed waste have been 42, 48 and 92 per cent respectively; 200 billion litres of water conservation potential has been created; and 398 tea estates have been certified as sustainable. In terms of spend, 2 per cent of net profit, or Rs 9,212 lakh, was spent on CSR activities, with the highest amount going to Project Shakti and water conservation projects (HUL Foundation). As reported, Shakti has impacted nearly 118,000 people, Rin Career Academy has had more than 2 lakh participants, and Prabhat has had 138,000 beneficiaries. More than 70 billion litres of safe drinking water has been delivered, while Domex Toilet Academy has impacted 160,000 people – all of these are 2015 figures. One piece of information that stands out is the all-women factory at Haridwar, the same being a first for an Indian FMCG company. These are encouraging signs of growing diversity within the company.

P&G

While P&G's products have found their way into almost every rich and semi-rich Indian's house, the company has adopted the 'Live, Learn and Thrive' catchphrase for its worldwide causes, with the primary beneficiaries being disadvantaged children and youth. Accordingly, its flagship programme in India is Shiksha, launched in 2005. Through partnerships with multiple NGOs, the programme has helped 280,000 underprivileged children access their right to education and supported over 140 schools across the country. Linking product purchases to this scheme allows consumers to contribute directly towards the well-being of these



children. The intervention areas are manifold – infrastructure building, supporting schools and government schemes, girl child education, facilitating education for differently abled children, etc. The company's other large-scale initiative is rather unique in its focus area – called Parivartan, it provides timely menstrual education and protection to young girls, which is especially required in this country where any talk related to shedding of blood is commonplace unless it has to do with women's biological functions. This programme also educates girls about not using unhygienic clothes for sanitary protection. To date, over 2 million girls annually across 15,000 schools in India have benefited.

On sustainability, the company has specific goals for both operations and products for the year 2020 (with 2010 as the base year), with clear targets for reductions in waste, packaging, truck transportation and increases in sustainable sourcing and renewable energy usages. In India, there have been some encouraging results such as the Baddi (Himachal Pradesh) plant achieving 40 per cent reduction in carbon footprint over the last three years and the Bhiwadi plant saving 13.3 million litres of water last year. However, with the last sustainability report

being issued in 2011 (which was a global one), there is no data on the current status of these initiatives.

ITC

ITC has opted for the popular triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental) approach in its do-good mission, as part of its overarching 'India First' vision. The core principle guiding its CSR is that models to generate livelihood and environmental benefits through entrepreneurial creativity are far more scalable. The stated CSR policy rests on rural development schemes, women empowerment and skills training. Consequently, its three main focus areas are: social investments (or what one many call its standard CSR programmes), environment, health and safety (EHS), and promoting thought leadership in sustainability, which is its advocacy arm to build awareness in the industry about sustainability.

On CSR projects, communities local to their operational areas and long-term partners (such as small and marginal farmers) are given priority. Stakeholder identification is done through rigorous processes such as participatory rural appraisals (PRA) – in 2016, 483 such appraisals were done in numerous villages, with separate PRAs conducted for women and SC/ST households. These periodic exercises help them prioritise projects and causes as well as understand the socio-economic dynamics in project areas. Benchmarking, goal-setting, and timelines have also been set for each desired outcome and objectives in all focus areas.

ITC's social investments programmes (as it likes to call

them) cumulatively come under the ambit of 'Mission Sunehra Kal'. These are broadly classified into two distinct categories: the first is to strengthen and make sustainable existing sources of income through carefully designed interventions, while the other is to create capabilities for wealth and livelihood generation.

By far, ITC's most well-known initiative is e-Choupal. (It was singlehandedly responsible for generating half of the course component in the country's many b-schools.) Simply put, these internet kiosks provide access to small and marginal farmers in rural India to real-time weather and price information, and other services. More than 4 million farmers in over 35,000 villages, through 6,100 kiosks across 10 states, have benefited. The company's other initiatives targeting rural and farming communities include afforestation, which has created over 112 million person-



days of employment and a green cover of over 6 lakh acres; an integrated watershed development programme across 7 lakh acres, generating over 50 lakh person-days of employment; and improved agricultural practices that have reportedly impacted about 1.7 lakh farmers.

ITC's women empowerment projects take the standard course of SHGs and micro credits with skills training to make them more empowered – about 10,200 were being supported until 2016. Skills and vocation-based training is also provided to young people from rural areas, with specific focus on SC and STs (42 per cent of those trained belong to these groups). Interventions in education involve strengthening infrastructure in government schools, teacher training, and collaborations with education-based NGOs like Pratham. Until 2016, about 4.6 lakh children had been impacted and a little more than 1,300 government schools assisted. Overall, ITC's many initiatives have led to the creation of over six million livelihoods—not an unimpressive number.

On the environment side, energy and water conservation, reduction of greenhouse gases (GHGs), and waste recycling are the focal point of its efforts. ITC is one of the few companies in the world that has been carbon, water and solid waste recycling-positive in the past decade. One of its more innovative project is the waste recycling programme, 'WOW – Well Being Out of Waste', which works with the public, schools and businesses to promote recycling and source segregation of waste. It is currently working with 400 municipal

wards in southern India and has created sustainable livelihoods for an estimated 10,000 rag pickers and waste collectors. Much of the information on ITC's CSR and sustainability programmes is available in its annual sustainability report, which is easily one of the more detailed ones among all FMCG companies in India. Exact numbers on CSR expenditure amounts to Rs 247.50 crore in 2015–16.

Monitoring of these programmes is done through a mix of internal and external processes. Internally, progress is measured through feedback received from participants and stakeholders (both formal and informal), quarterly reports, and regular audits, while annual third-party audits and external evaluation are done for projects that have been in motion for three to five years.

Britannia

Strangely enough, there's no CSR-related information on Britannia's website. There's also no clarity on what the CSR objectives are in its CSR policy document – one has to look through the annual report to get some semblance of information. The two main (and only) strands are preservation of the heritage building of Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital for Children (BJWHC), which was established in 1929, and the Britannia Nutrition Foundation (BNF). The latter was set up in 2009 to promote and secure the health and nutrition needs of children from poor backgrounds. To achieve this, the company has entered into a partnership with the Maharashtra government to help build capacity and provide technological assistance to government entities in the Melghat

region in Amravati district. Another approach is to work in the communities around its factories. In total, Rs 10.46 crore was spent on CSR in 2015–16 – this amounts to 2 per cent of its net profit.

Dabur

Dabur India's CSR policy elucidates the main areas where its 'community development programmes' are run: these are promoting sanitation and preventive healthcare, promoting biodiversity, and providing vocational skills training. Other causes taken up are education and women empowerment. Promoting sanitation really means constructing toilets in 1,048 rural households (funded by sales of Sanifresh) in 2015–16 and meeting the nutrition needs of 5,000 children through distribution of juice packs, while healthcare is educating students and organising health camps (about 55,798 patients were examined at 386 such camps). Under environmental sustainability, it has taken up protection of endangered plant species and provided solar lamps to seven villages.

Dabur provided vocational training to 569 women in 2015; the *Swavalamban* programme is for

training rural youth. The company works with small and marginal farmers and tribal communities, training them on cultivating rare herbs and on bee-keeping, in order to supplement their income. It has also taken up a water conservation project in Rajasthan. On education, it has partnered with Sundesh to run non-formal education centres for out-of-school underprivileged children and provide basic infrastructural assistance to schools. Through Sundesh, it also runs adult literacy centres for women in the age group of 15–35 years.

To evaluate the needs of the community before project implementation, need assessments and baseline surveys are carried out – for instance, before starting the sanitation programme, surveys were conducted in two villages in May 2014 which revealed that nearly 50 per cent of the households in these villages did not have household toilets. Community participation and long-term success were ensured by involving women from various households in the project and linking payments to the construction. Dabur India's CSR head A Sudhakar explains this: 'The success of any CSR initiative is ensured if the projects and programmes are



implemented with a participatory approach involving the community, instead of as a charity.' Annual targets are set for each project – the sanitation programme's is to cover 1,200 new households for 2017–18. The project, which initially covered Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, is now being extended to schools in Assam and Rajasthan.

On the sustainability front, hard data is conspicuous by its absence – some of the numbers available were: energy conservation measures resulted in an annual saving of approximately Rs 60 lakh in 2015–16; 100 per cent of herbal waste was recycled; raw water consumption decreased by 31 litres/MT of production; and CO2 emission reduced by 0.01 kg/MT of production. However, it is unclear what the absolute numbers are, whether benchmarking was done, and what the targets (if any) were. What we do know is that Rs 17.44 crore was spent on CSR in 2015–16, as mandated by the 2013 Act. Small mercies.

Amul

Amul is easily one of the biggest FMCG companies in the country but information related to its CSR

is sparse. Tribhuvandas Foundation, which is the integrated rural health and development programme of Amul, looks after the entire range of healthcare needs in the villages where Amul operates, including preventive healthcare. It is a need-based programme, for and run by the villagers themselves. It covers 700 villages and is one of Asia's largest community healthcare service providers. Till March 2014, total population covered was 1,388,834.

Amul is an active participant in the ministry of rural development's Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana in Kheda district of Gujarat. This self-employment programme is designed to enable below-poverty-line (BPL) families to transition into sustainable livelihoods. Amul's role here is to organise them into SHGs, help them in the selection of key activities, build their capacities through training, technology and marketing support, and create necessary infrastructure. Other activities undertaken are tree plantation, blood donation camps, dairy demonstration farm, scholarships for students from farmers' families, and its rural sanitation programme with the explicit goal of ensuring that each and every dairy farmer follows basic hygiene practices.

Marico

Marico is one of the few FMCG companies to issue annual sustainability reports although it is far from being detailed or comprehensive. The major themes of its CSR and sustainability strategy are climate change, resource optimisation and corporate citizenship. On the first two, emphasis is on sustainable procurement, energy-efficient manufacturing relying on less

waste and less carbon emissions, and green, ecofriendly buildings. For example, its agri-extension programme has helped over 63,000 farmers in five states, while it has also partnered with the Kerala government, Coconut Development Board and the Maharashtra government on various projects to train and assist farmers. On energy efficiency, over 9 lakh units of savings were achieved in FY 2016 – this is a 5.8 per cent improvement over the previous year.

The company works on education through the 'Chote Kadam Pragati ke Aur' programme that targets poor children in the age group of 6–18 years to improve retention in schools and in-class learning. About 2 lakh children had benefited till 2016. Mobile Pathshala is another education-based initiative for young students in rural areas. On healthcare, Saffola World Heart Day is marked by awareness drives and checkup camps to educate the public on heart diseases and better health practices. Overall, the company spent Rs 10 crore on CSR in 2015–16 – this was slightly less than 2 per cent of its profit after tax (when it should be before). Honest mistake?

It is Marico Innovation Foundation (MIF) which finds the prime spot in the company's CSR efforts. Started in 2003 by its chairman, Harsh Mariwala, the Foundation has four main initiatives: a scale-up programme, Innovation awards, Innwin and Hackathon. The MIF start-up programme works with established, innovative social organisations to tackle issues afflicting people at the bottom of the pyramid. Solutions are then designed in consultation with mentors and



experts within the company and outside. Currently eight social enterprises are active, working across healthcare, education, livelihood, etc. The MIF awards are given to the 'greatest innovations' in social sectors, while Innovin (or India Innovates) is a video series that showcases people and organisations working on truly transformational initiatives. Hackathon is a fairly novel idea that takes ideas, practices or processes with the most potential to change communities and moulds them into viable solutions with maximum impact. The winners of the Hackathon sessions are given cash prizes.

Agro Tech

Agro Tech's corporate citizenship principle is 'Good for You, Good for the Community and Good for the Planet', and its CSR is based on providing health and nutrition for children. Accordingly, the company has established a programme called Poshaan, through which it collaborates with anganwadis and schools to introduce peanut butter (which is a source of protein) as part of the children's diet. Each child gets approximately 32 gm of peanut butter in the daily diet, thereby providing 47.9 per cent RDA (recommended dietary allowance) of protein for children aged 1–3 years and 39.8 per cent for those who are 4–6 years old. Currently, there are 12,000 children under this programme across the country. Various case studies have shown that peanut butter has had great success in addressing malnutrition among children in some African countries. The results of Agro Tech's programme in reducing malnutrition have not been disclosed though. In FY 2015, Rs 7.37 million, or 1.3 per cent of net profit, was spent on CSR.

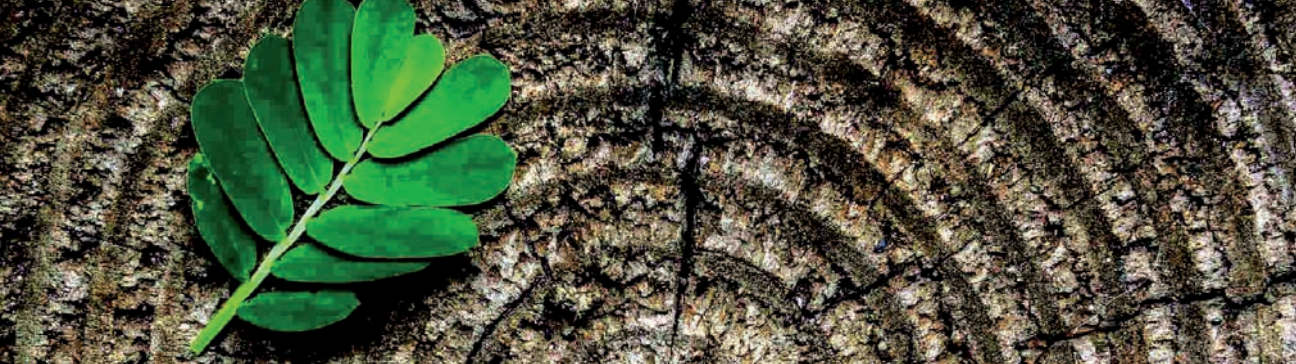
CB view

As easy as it is for companies to put up their (mandatory) CSR policies online, it seems equally hard for them to answer basic questions on how exactly those policies are implemented. **Aside from ITC, Nestle, Dabur and Agro Tech, companies simply chose to ignore our basic queries on their CSR initiatives. In a few cases (hey, Britannia!), they did send back a generous email stating 'they wouldn't be able to participate' – we weren't aware that asking simple CSR-related questions was akin to giving them a last-minute notice to run a full marathon.** With all the self-indulgent humblebrag on their own websites and annual reports, one would assume that some of that would have a basis in real work and hence enough to express and expound when media comes calling for information. Right now, all evidence points to the contrary.

A few observations on the efforts of these companies – to the extent that information provided online is true, there seems to be enough and more going on in the sustainability space, with a broad commitment towards more 'green' practices. Reductions in carbon emissions and waste coupled with better usage of water and energy are the predominant themes of conservation initiatives. The issue, though, is that without explicit benchmarks, targets and timelines (as well as the rationale behind them), sustainability work tend to be more like sales pitches than sincere efforts. Percentage increase or decrease doesn't mean much when you don't know the underlying denominator or the aspiring goals. Also, companies of this size and scope need to come out with detailed annual sustainability reports. Right now, very few do.

On the CSR front, there seems to be a concerted effort by most FMCG companies to champion every CSR cause there is – health, sanitation, nutrition, education, livelihood, women empowerment, you name it. However, as Dr Ashesh Ambasta, executive vice president and head–social investments, ITC Ltd, explains, 'End-to-end solutions are required to address the full spectrum of needs of communities, rather than one-off interventions. Also, given the realities of the Indian social structure, it is essential that conflicts of interest between different classes/castes of farmers be anticipated and resolved before undertaking any programme.'

However, for most of the companies, the evidence seems to point towards a ragtag coalition of half-baked but well-intentioned ideas. To us, it looks like nobody in their CSR departments tried to come up with some sort of a screening process or even a skeletal, broad plan that actually played into their company's core capabilities. While working with communities on their myriad problems is partly worth applauding, there is only so much long-term, *meaningful* change that can be brought about to so many deeply entrenched issues. Better to do one thing really well than multiple half-hearted attempts. And simply partnering with NGOs and giving them money to spend isn't really CSR, is it? Companies would be wiser to not only identify which issues need their help but also grasp why *they* would be a good fit for that particular intervention. CSR is not benevolence; it is part of the social contract that these companies have with those same communities. They would do well to remember that. ■



Sustainability reports of some of India's biggest corporations: More PR than CSR

With sustainability becoming a key part of most large corporations' annual reporting exercise, one institution that plays a key role is the Global Reporting Initiative, or GRI, which is an international independent organisation that standardises and reports the impact of businesses and organisations on key sustainability-related parameters. It is like a standards organisation, like the ISO or the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, except that its domain is sustainability reporting. The GRI guidelines are used by MNCs, private companies, NGOs, industry groups, government bodies, etc. – in short, any organisation that has an impact on the environment, which more or less means all. Currently, it is the world's most widely used standards on sustainability reporting and disclosure. Sustainability goals, performance and impact are now released by 92 per cent of the world's largest 250 corporations, which is a testament to its growing importance in light of increasing awareness about global warming and climate change.

About GRI G4 guidelines

Till 2016, the G4 guidelines have been the GRI's standard reporting

framework. These include two types of disclosures: the General Standard Disclosures, which provide information about the organisation and its reporting process, and the Specific Standard Disclosures, which focus on the approach to managing impact and the indicators that are used to measure such impact. The guideline categories are economic (market presence, procurement practices, etc.), environmental (materials, energy, biodiversity, emissions), and social (labour practices, human rights, anti-corruption, product responsibility). Material aspects are those that reflect the organisation's significant economic, environmental and social impacts or have a marked influence on stakeholders. Apart from these, there are principles (such as balance, accuracy and timeliness) that define the report content and quality. Omissions are also expected to be mentioned when, in certain unavoidable cases, it is not possible for the organisation to disclose some information.

There are two types of options for organisations to prepare their sustainability reports: Core and Comprehensive. The former consists of the essential features

expected from such a report, while the latter requires additional details related to its strategy and analysis, governance, ethics and integrity, and all necessary economic, social and environmental indicators.

Sustainability reporting may seem like a passing fad, another PR exercise by tax-evading corporations, but despite the justified reasons for cynicism, it is one of the more transparent and reliable ways to ensure that organisations are aware of their overall impact on the society and planet. It helps them set targets, design interventions, measure impact, compare against best-in-class companies, and find ways to make improvements. It helps the organisation communicate its social and environmental impact to the public, and ensures that there's enough at stake for them to constantly strive to minimise the harmful effects and amplify the good ones. The reality of today's hyper-connected, globalised, neo-liberalised world at odds with rampant environmental damage needs mechanisms like sustainability reporting, at least till the time our Anthropocene world actually decides to do something concrete about climate change.

Here we take a closer look at some of the sustainability reports issued by the large Indian corporations.

Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)

Reliance Industries Limited proudly proclaims that its sustainability reports have adhered to GRI guidelines since 2004 and GRI-checked A+ from 2005 onwards. The application-level A+ indicates that the report has been externally assured by a third party and provides all disclosures on company profile, management approach and performance indicators. However, the scope of the reports is limited to RIL's petrochemicals and oil and natural gas businesses only. Community impact and employee diversity are considered to have 'low impact' on stakeholders and business, while ecosystems and biodiversity have only low to medium impact on stakeholders according to its materiality matrix, which is the importance given to different aspects that matter to the company and its stakeholders. Even then, what stood out in their omission from the report's most 'pertinent' material issues were GRI's aspects related to labour practices and decent work, and society (anti-corruption, public policy, anti-competitive behaviour, grievance mechanisms, etc.). One may be persuaded to conclude that the country's biggest corporation doesn't consider such petty matters to be important to its ongoing and future business. There is also this piece of declaration that this author found to be quite amusing: 'There was no incident of discrimination across our locations during the reporting period. Also there was no operation identified in which the right to exercise freedom of association and collective bargaining

was at significant risk.' RIL must feature in the next list of Great Places to Work.

While prima facie the report appears to tick all of the GRI boxes, a closer look reveals plenty

their absence. While glossy, heavily textual, and sporadically detailed, RIL's reports are a perfect example of the wise saying that what is hidden (or omitted) reveals the truth. We await the latest report with bated breath.



of missing information – for instance, metrics like benefits provided to fulltime employees which are not provided to temporary or part-time employees, percentage of the total workforce represented in formal health and safety committees, ratio of the basic salary and remuneration of women to men for each employee category, and number of suppliers subject to impact assessments for labour practices, to name a few. Some details that are conveniently redirected to the annual report are amiss – such as the nomination and selection processes for the highest governance body and its committees, and the criteria used for nominating and selecting highest governance body members. Risk assessments of its various processes, products and overall business are also conspicuous by

Indian Oil (IOCL)

Indian Oil has been publishing sustainability reports since 2005–06 and the latest one (2014–15) adheres to GRI-G4's comprehensive reporting guidelines, although it has not been vetted by an external party. On the subjective materiality aspects, human rights, impact on communities, and biodiversity score low. Incidentally, these are the topics on which the report chooses to highlight IOCL's many CSR-friendly initiatives and preventive measures, rather than providing hard numbers on the actual impact due to the company's activities—a not-so-subtle attempt to sidestep the negative repercussions of being in the oil business.

However, some level of attention is given to risk assessment, grievance, and corruption matters. The report

also does well on environmental aspects and covers most of the specific disclosures required. Management approach on their response to identified material aspects is not clear, nor are details on remunerations and benefits broken down by gender, hierarchy and backgrounds. Again, specificities related to G4 guidelines are missing – for example, key topics and concerns that have been raised through stakeholder engagement and the organisation's response, details on procurement practices, and labour practices. On the grievance mechanisms for impact on society aspect, a one-liner response is: 'No operations were recorded to have a significant actual and potential impact on the local communities.' Despite the obvious flaws, the report is still a fairly detailed one that at least attempts to cover all the G4 bases, and that is quite commendable.

Tata Power

Tata Group's various companies have their own preferred reporting methods. Tata Chemicals, JLR, and Tata Motors follow GRI's 'core' option (no reason given why), while Tata Power issued its last sustainability report in accordance with the G4 'comprehensive' option guidelines. Others like Tata Teleservices have not issued sustainability reports yet.

Tata Power's report excluded its international operations and JVs—not insignificant omissions. While the report itself does not seem to be structured traditionally, there are some interesting points to note. The report is focused primarily on promoting the various programmes and policies put in place to showcase how great the organisation is (like a standard

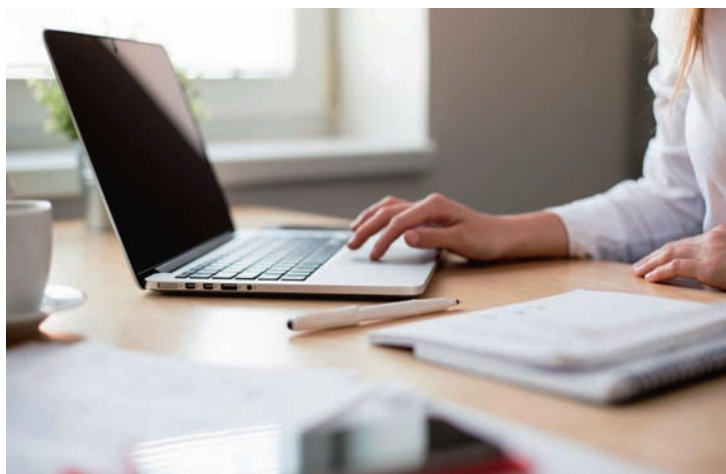
CSR report), rather than providing a factual understanding of the G4 aspects and hard data. On the materiality assessment, what stood out was the low importance accorded to 'transparency' and 'ethics and integrity' for both business and stakeholders.

The process for consultation or delegation between stakeholders and the highest governance body is left unexplained. On a sort of related note, the contractor workforce is much higher than permanent ones (a trend visible across industries), probably the reason why there is no information pertaining to benefits that are standard for fulltime employees but not provided to temps. Some aspect data are marked as green but when one actually goes looking for it, information is strangely missing, like the extent to which various health and safety topics are covered by the agreements with trade unions. Same is the case with the required details on product and service labelling. The report also makes some bizarre pronouncements – for instance, under management approach for product responsibility, there is no mention of what this

approach is; instead, one finds general remarks about the number of customers and its growing business. Information on omissions is also omitted.

Maruti

Maruti Suzuki's 2014 sustainability report was prepared in accordance with the Core option of the G4 guidelines – which means that the report provides a less detailed understanding of the company's social and environmental impact. Unsurprisingly, on its materiality matrix, freedom of association and collective bargaining is marked low in importance for both stakeholder and company's impact. Possibly, Maruti wants to deflect attention from the 2011 incident which dented any claims of the company being a worker-friendly one. Hence, even while contractual/temp workers form a huge chunk of its workforce, information on them, including benefits provided, is conveniently withheld. The report is mostly focused on CSR, community development, road safety initiatives—in other words, PR-friendly aspects. Even then, basic information—for example, 'describe the organisation's values,





principles, standards and norms of behaviour’—is missing even though it is marked as a given. Because Maruti has opted for the Core option, it can conveniently choose which indicators (or data points) it chooses to disclose about each one of its identified material aspect. Hence, the report provides an overview of what Maruti wants to disclose, rather than what it is compelled to.

Adani Ports

Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd’s first sustainability report was issued for 2015–16, adhering to the G4 Core option. It does not take much investigative skills to find out missing pieces of information. For example, it has been mentioned that in terms of materiality assessment, ‘the selection of the entities “outside organisation” was done using same parameters as those for selection of stakeholders to be engaged’, but there’s nothing on what those initial parameters are. Interestingly, there are no trade unions at APSEZ and, consequently, data related to benefits, injuries and lost

days according to employee type, and workforce representation in various committees is not available. Other missing details are key topics and concerns raised through stakeholder engagement, the basis for selection of stakeholders to engage (both marked as green), and actual reduction in emissions (surely an important indicator if emissions

is considered to be a significant material aspect). Of course, what is most impressive is that for an Adani company, there was no official case of corruption, labour grievance, discrimination, or any other human rights violation except for a minor case of non-compliance with environmental law amounting to Rs 25 crore.

The others

Some large companies like Mahindra and Godrej are yet to transition to the G4 guidelines, while banks like HDFC, Yes Bank and IndusInd Bank have already adopted them. Asian Paints issues its sustainability reports but they do not conform to G4 guidelines, while Dabur and State Bank of India’s (SBI) reports are based on the ministry of corporate affairs’ National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities of Business (NVGs). Bajaj, Britannia, LIC, P&G India, and pharma companies like Sun, Alembic, Biocon and GSK do not issue sustainability reports.

CB view

Core or comprehensive, GRI or not, a common theme among most sustainability reports is that they seem like an extension of the companies’ marketing and PR efforts. Much of the reports are heavy on the wonderful things being done on the environment and CSR front, while negative aspects of the corporations’ work, which are inevitable and fairly substantial, are suppressed or diluted by doling out bits and pieces of information. The GRI guidelines are great for conveying the right work being done by organisations, but these fail to highlight the work that’s left to be done. Much of it is because of the way the guidelines are framed but also due to the fact that it is quite easy to navigate them to avoid answering the uncomfortable questions. While the new GRI guidelines should help mitigate some of these issues, it would be even better if all companies start to follow these guidelines without fail and, more importantly, consider it to be a necessary and natural consequence of being a part of the larger society, instead of treating it as a self-promotion exercise. ■

Sustainability at India Inc.:

A gist of talks with 81 leaders, 119 reports

By Ranjan Rayna

Sustainability, ensuring the future of life on Earth, is an infinite game, the endless expression of generosity on behalf of all.

~ Paul Hawken



For nearly a decade, Team CauseBecause has been propagating the 'people' and 'planet' aspects of sustainability amongst Indian corporate entities, most of whom have sort of mastered the profit aspect of business.

This writer has, in the year past, engaged in one-on-one interviews, telecons, insightful conversations and light-hearted tête-à-têtes with sustainability and responsibility decision-makers at large corporate houses (see *names toward the end of this article*) in India. During these discussions, the writer collated their views on what efforts they were making, approaches used, and programmes implemented as well as the big and small decisions they took to make their company fare better on the sustainability index.

Here we share the gist of the conversations in terms of the common thoughts, ideas and practices that emerge – and

thereby also get a broad overview of the dynamics that are shaping this domain.

The common and constant refrains

Right intent but ambiguous plans

One common aspect amongst all leaders – whether they are spearheading mining companies, FMCG and food processing giants, automobile entities, or fashion brands – is a desire to improve the sustainability performance of their respective organisations. However, most of them do not have enough sustainability content and information available and have not been able to answer our queries with regard to future targets. The ones who do have some targets do not have a structured strategy or long-term action plan to share.

Holistic problem?

Most of us will agree that 'sustainability' as a concept is yet to be decoded in the Indian context.

Most sustainability leaders we spoke to have developed unique skills of their own to implement sustainability solutions. While some professionals heading large corporate groups (with stakes in almost every kind of business) will impress you with their knowledge of subjects like green building certifications, efficient lighting, solar and other renewable energies, some others at comparatively small companies seem to have mastered the talk about recycling, reusing and reducing waste, water efficiency, etc. The ones in the services sector seem to have excellent understanding of green jobs, carbon accounting, green finance, green skills and so on.

Only a handful of companies have a holistic suitability model on paper. Nevertheless, their execution plans sound challenging, if not impossible.

Interestingly, when some leaders were quizzed about

'their understanding of a holistic approach to sustainable projects', they agreed that while that was the need, the Indian industry (read business owners/shareholders with controlling powers) was not necessarily at that level of maturity. *A holistic sustainability approach with long-term outcomes is difficult to explain in a 10–15 minutes window with our CEO who prefers 5-slide presentations*, an experienced CSR leader at one of the country's largest consumer goods companies had told this writer on the condition of anonymity.

At this point, after the interactions as well as looking at the sustainability reports of major companies, it would not be wrong to say that many of the Indian companies' approach to sustainability unfolds in fragments – they tend to practise it in a focused way, usually on narrowly scoped projects or programmes that are woven around their technical speciality. When you go to a sustainability-focused event in India, you see a roomful of 'green leaders' engaged in a sustainability project linked to their own or their businesses' speciality – they fail to achieve a holistic sustainable solution that can make their company/brand a truly sustainable one. Fact is, none in India can confidently boast of being a sustainable brand. The ones who do so in their reports are yet to answer some of the simple questions that CauseBecause has sent them in the last couple of years.

The case of missing indices

This writer also scanned the sustainability reports (44 organisations from India filed GRI G4 reports in 2017) of all who

published them last year. In all of the reports, a promising vision has been articulated and some fresh and innovative strategies have been discussed with half-heartedly narrated implementation plans. In most of the reports, impact-measurement indices are limited to a particular strategy; the planner of the strategy missed out on the holistic impact or outcomes that would make the whole business actually 'sustainable' – the larger picture or the outcomes (even if hypothetical) do not really match the well-articulated vision in most reports.

Anyway, when the same was pointed out to some leaders, they agreed that this was one of the major challenges. While the need is for larger scalable plans, their linear approaches are falling short. Off the record, most sustainability and CSR heads also agreed that they feared any unintended consequence of their board of directors being in denial or being short-sighted with regard to sustainability issues.

Who can connect all the dots?

To move towards a holistic approach, sustainability leaders at this point need an outside eye that can give them a bird's eye-view of their sustainability practices. There's a need of the outsider who can draw linkages between sustainable manufacturing and sustainable packaging and sustainable supply



chain and ethical promotional and HR practices and meaningful corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes and superior governance. A generalist—not a specialist—can help organisations build their 'inner sustainability culture' – an environment where capacities and ideas from different domains are welcomed and a balance is struck regardless of competing interests and opinions.

Bookkeeping in fashion

The lack of holistic approaches (read fundamental understanding of the meaning of sustainability) has brought us to the point of 'sustainability bookkeeping', an exercise being done by accountants.

Rather than recognising that all human activities have an impact and taking responsibility for them, sustainability bookkeepers use a limited set of performance indicators that can obscure the real issues. Competing organisations in any sphere, from retail stores to car manufacturers to telecom companies, vie to be more 'sustainable' than the other. Social media discussions, Tweetathons about sustainable leadership, or conferences on how to 'leverage' sustainability in businesses are now a common sight and are apparently being hosted or organised mostly by 'business' consultancies and event companies. However, come to think of it, if one understands the real meaning of sustainability, all of this is utter baloney.

CSR is good, but it is just one pillar of sustainability

In the Indian context, CSR has a different, relatively skewed and a legal meaning, and is being executed quite well by India Inc.

(CauseBecause is doing another story on India Inc.'s three years of mandatory CSR, and initial updates from companies' performances are quite encouraging). Yes, it has its own significant role towards making a business sustainable, but it alone cannot shoulder the company's unsustainable deeds.

Let's define sustainability again

Sustainability as defined in the Oxford Dictionary is 'the property of being sustainable'. I checked 'sustainable' too. It means 'to be capable of enduring'. So, a sustainable business will mean a business that is capable of outliving us all, while an unsustainable business will someday cease to exist—in any case, it will not exist in its current form.

In simple terms, it will not be wrong to say that a leader who fails to lead a business sustainably will sooner or later bring about its

demise. Hence, the only variable to define a 'sustainability timeline' is how long the organisation can survive or sustain.

Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability as per the Oxford Dictionary is defined as 'the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continues while avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources'. Hence, environmental sustainability means a continuous system or cyclic activity that maintains an ecological balance. Holding on to this thought, will you not wonder how companies that manufacture products, build infrastructures, or provide services by utilising natural resources (that are rapidly depleting and will be 'exhausted' some day) still claim to be sustainable?

All sustainability leaders must understand that sustainability

is inherent to the system or activity – it surely cannot be added afterwards through political or corporate leadership.

Sustainable development

While we were yet to come to terms with the real meaning of sustainability, the Brundtland Commission made lives more difficult. It provided a definition of sustainable development as *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. It went on to define 'needs' specifically in terms of prioritising the essential needs of the world's poor. This was a body blow to business leaders for whom development had become synonymous with economic growth. So, now they use sustainability bookkeeping to convince commoners that sustainability can be achieved through economic progress alone.

Writer's view...

In one of my sustainability-focused talks with the CEO of one of the largest automotive OEMs, she said: *at this growth rate in the industry, ours will be one of the richest companies in this business space...* Can this growth be called sustainable? I asked. She thought for a while and said: *I think it will be, but frankly I need to go back and look at the investments that are yet to be made on the sustainability front. I am yet to get a figure from the respective department.* I refrained from asking another question about how did they even create a separate budget for sustainability – wasn't that supposed to be the way to do business?

I did tell her that contrary to popular belief, sustainable companies were not the ones who focused solely on some programmes finding solutions for the doom and gloom around their business and stakeholders. They are in fact the ones with a positive and empowered view of the future. They focus on innovation, improvement, and furthering knowledge and understanding of sustainable ways of doing 'business'. They are the companies that understand that the business of business is not solely making profits and multiplying its capital... *While I was at it, she intervened saying, I know what you mean, therefore I admire Google...* Our talk concluded with

an anecdote about her experience with one of those quick-nap couches at the Google office in America, and I did not bother to question more.

At this point in time, businesses have to understand that in order to sustain our communities and our environment, they will have to do with 'less' of everything. This will mean this: less usage of natural resources, creating less demand for their own products, which in turn will mean less advertising, less sales and less production of whatever they produce. And yes, this will mean less money for the shareholders too. ■



Brother, I am taking you to the cops

By Padma Pegu

Am I not glad for having dragged this errant-driver-cum-errant-and-foul-speaking-man to the police station today? And he thought he could get away with a) taking a turn on my side of the road while entering the colony gate, landing in front of my car, and putting his fingers up gesticulating, instead of moving his car; b) daring me to call the police when I got off the car and said I was going to dial 100 (even as I took photos of the car and him), and c) having his employer (who appeared within minutes of his driver calling him up on the phone) gang up with him and gather 'witnesses' (where there was none, save for the gate guard and a guy eating his ice cream somewhat busily, it being 35 degrees already) to vouch for his innocence. The lone policeman appeared after what was easily more than 10 minutes (if this is the response time in south Delhi, what should one expect elsewhere?). His first reaction was along these lines: so much for such a 'chhoti' thing (he said *chhoti cheez*). Clearly he was not my (police)man.

What followed belonged to bizarre and surreal territory, because the driver had modified his version, as per which he had requested me to turn the car towards the left, there being more space on my side, and that I in my fury just reversed my car and then manoeuvred it back to the front to almost bang into his car (he forgot that there was a red car behind my car all the while, honking like only Delhiites do). That did it for me. I (and Ranjan, who had in the meantime come out of the office a few hundred metres inside the colony, and Georgie too) decided to make a formal complaint at the police station. There, the man and his employers fumbled with their narrative and defence. There was no internal logic to what the driver man was putting together. (The CCTV footage would have anyway given his lies away.) The staff at the police station didn't take much time to demolish the man's narrative. To cut a half-an-hour story short, he was

told that he would be released only if I withdrew the complaint. Which I did, because the employer had made sure to tell us all that his driver had eight children (two were children of his deceased brother) to take care of, and also because I thought I did what I needed to do, which was putting a question mark in his mind about what he had done.

As of now, though, I am tired and have the feeling that a lot of energies were spent. In my pessimism, I wonder if anything has changed even a teeny-weeny bit. Did his formal, written apology signify an inner realisation? Most likely no. All that it has most likely achieved is that in future he won't mess around with a woman. More for fear of the prison cell than a newfound respect for women and their right to not take the male ego and patronising lying down and driving away.

My condensed narrative may have rendered the actual proceedings quite dull and non-dramatic. It was anything but that, though. So, when the inspector asked the driver how many fingers did he gesticulate with, he put all his five fingers up and mouthed some lines that he apparently said while he did so, unwittingly giving a lively demo and of course not realising that he had given a different version earlier. The employer and his father, when they realised that their guy's version was not holding up, started talking about his children, how he had been their trusted employee for eight years (while writing out the apology letter on his driver's behalf, the employer realised he knew only his first name, didn't know where he was from, had never got police verification done, and so on).

For all that, though, they did put up a spirited, aggressive and false defence of him a while ago outside the colony gates. I had never before been up, close and against such lies. To see such a blatant and sudden misrepresentation of facts was a jolt out of the blue. Made me think I was in a bubble all the while, only reading about women facing and facing up to male violence, male power and male truth. To be honest, I was for a few moments intimidated by the gathering of men and 'witnesses' who were willing to vouch for those men, though I didn't feel fear because I knew that I would have the wherewithal to deal with them.

So, now I have the assurance of an apology letter and police warning for the errant man. Does that make me feel safe? Should it? Can it? How can it but? Until there is even a single policeman who thinks a man trying to shout down a woman is a 'chhoti' thing, I will think twice, thrice and more before getting out of the car. I should, shouldn't I? Or, shouldn't I anyway? ■



IndiGo: Flying high, aiming low?

Among the low-cost airlines (though, of late, the prices appear to be anything but low) in India, IndiGo is perhaps the most well-known. Not going bankrupt obviously helps but its on-time record is quite impressive, especially for a country notorious for running perpetually late (in more ways than one). It is India's largest passenger airline with a market share of 38 per cent as of August 2017, and has been recognised as a great employer by quite a few reputed organisations. Interestingly, it is the only Indian airline that has aircraft communications addressing and reporting system (ACARS) on all its planes; ACARS is used globally to record the exact landing

and takeoff timings. While these facts are certainly impressive, we decided to see if their corporate social responsibility (CSR) matched up to these high standards. Happily enough, IndiGo does issue separate CSR reports to make the job slightly easier.

CSR through collaborations

IndiGoReach is the CSR programme of IndiGo. The main focus areas are children and education, environment, and women empowerment. The initiatives are taken up in partnership with grassroots not-for-profit entities. IndiGo also contributes toward disaster relief and has an employee volunteering programme (iServe) as well.

Judging by the number of initiatives taken up, education seems to be the primary focus for IndiGo. The modus operandi is to partner with NGOs on specific causes, with the latter responsible for monitoring the daily work being done. This approach has been adopted in view of the fact that creating awareness and changing the mindsets of local communities are challenges that most companies grapple with – through partnerships with local bodies who understand local nuances and requirements and have similar core values as IndiGo, these problems can be dealt with in an effective manner.

Here we take a closer look at the various projects taken up by the company.

1. Children and education:

The primary goals are to help educate children from poor and underprivileged backgrounds as well as provide employment opportunities and guidance to young people. Both set of interventions are in collaboration with NGOs.



Bandhan Education Program is a four-year project that IndiGo has taken up with Bandhan Konnagar to start 400 primary schools in the rural areas of Bihar, Tripura, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The overall project budget is Rs 11 crore and will fund the primary school education of 12,507 children – all first-generation learners. An encouraging sign is the slightly higher proportion of girls among the students. Aside from providing free education, teachers are also involved in raising awareness among the parents and communities on the importance of nurturing their children's education—and hence their future.

Manas Primary School is a more interesting example – started in 2015 in partnership with the All India Human Development Council, the school caters to children of migrant labourers from villages

in and around Gurgaon. It uses an 'objective-based education' approach, where the child is taught as per his or her learning capacity and moved to the next class only once they are ready. IndiGo employees volunteer here regularly to conduct knowledge-sharing sessions. Until last year 389

students were enrolled, with about Rs 3 lakh taking care of operational expenses on a quarterly basis – this, admittedly, doesn't seem like a lot for quality education.

The third major initiative is the 6E Scholar program (named after the eponymous IndiGo flight code) implemented jointly with Mensa India (the high IQ society). Children with high IQ from various schools run by the government and NGOs in Delhi NCR are selected and provided support in the form of a monthly stipend, stationeries, mentoring and remedial classes. Most of these students are from grades 5 to 9. The mentorship fee per child is Rs 1.3 lakh and overall project budget is Rs 1.3 crore. Career guidance is provided to these students once they enter Class 10.

Other NGOs supported by IndiGo are SOS Children's Villages, through

which it has adopted ALNA, a family home run by the NGO in Faridabad, and Smile Foundation, extending support to Nai Disha School in southwest Delhi in providing education to children of migrant workers (IndiGo has been supporting about 200 children at this school for 3 years, with a project budget of Rs 64 lakh). The company provides infrastructure support to the primary and senior secondary schools in Dhela village located in Corbett Tiger Reserve, and funding, logistics and stationeries to the Autism Center–School of Hope maintained and run by Tamana. It also supports the education of 38 students at Neev, which is a school for children of poor, migrant labourers, as well as the operations of the Divyangs hostel that helps autistic children. The company has mentorship programmes for the 6E scholars.

2. Women empowerment: As with education, IndiGo works with Bandhan Konnagar on their Hard-Core Poor Programme. The target beneficiaries are families with an income of Rs 1,000 per month and with no male earning member. The purpose of this initiative is to help the selected women with employment and capacity-building opportunities within a two-year cycle through on-site/ on-job assistance and business skill development training with monitoring and guidance. IndiGo's role is to provide assets for potential enterprise development, advocacy and institutional linkages. Many of these women now earn more than Rs 4,000 per month. The ultimate goal is livelihood enhancement and to facilitate village-level committees to

guide and help these women. Currently, IndiGo supports 600 beneficiaries with total funding of Rs 2.3 crore.

The company is also a partner of the Nanhi Kali programme of KC Mahindra Trust. As part of this, it sponsors the education of 83 girls each in Chennai and Pune. Over a period of one year, the sponsorship



fee for each girl child was Rs 3,000. The company has collaborated with Pradan on WATER (Women Collective Action towards Environment Rejuvenation), which is a project that targets 40,000 women beneficiaries across 430 project villages to enhance their capabilities over a five-year period. The focus here is on enhancing the capabilities of women through community groups and environmental sustainability by helping them organise themselves into various collectives. The idea is to facilitate the creation of 'institutions' of women at the grassroots level.

3. Environment: It is quite encouraging to note that IndiGo has acknowledged the disproportionately high contribution of the aviation sector to carbon emissions—and thereby global warming. For example, as per industry projections, aviation emissions will account for as much as 22 per cent of global emissions by 2050.



As part of their environment and sustainability efforts, the company is working to reduce its environmental impact on multiple fronts. For instance, in its operations, shortening of routes and using a single engine during taxiing for takeoffs or landings have been implemented. Reducing water consumption during flights and eco-wash of its planes have helped in water conservation, while it is also attempting to bring down the weight per aircraft to reduce fuel consumption. Its newer aircraft, A320neo, is more fuel-efficient than older models that are slated to deliver 20 per cent fuel reduction by 2020, equivalent to a reduction

of 5,000 tonnes of CO₂ per aircraft per year. The new wing-tip extensions improve aerodynamics for lower fuel burn, saving over 900 tonnes of carbon emissions per aircraft per year. To date, these new aircraft have resulted in 15 per cent fuel-burn savings and 4 per cent reduction in noise footprint. The company also gives all used waste paper, inflight magazines and other scrap paper that it generates to Greenobin, which then recycles the lot into fresh paper, ready to be used again.

IndiGo's main climate-related initiative is its partnership, since 2013, with the Fair Climate Network (FCN), a consortium of NGOs committed to improving rural livelihoods and reducing carbon pollution. Apart from its own funding, IndiGo gives the option to its flyers to voluntarily contribute Rs 100 (per reservation) towards this cause. The money generated is ploughed back into green projects including climate-friendly technologies like domestic biogas units. In 2013, IndiGo signed the first ERPA (emission-reduction purchase agreement) with FCN for 5,000 biogas units in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. Another agreement was signed in 2015. Since these are clean energy projects, the carbon emission reductions (CERs) achieved are purchased by IndiGo – a form of carbon offsetting or carbon credit. To date, the company has purchased 97,896 CERs for Rs 11.17 crore (average price Rs 1,141 per CER) over a tenure of 7 years, and another 66,523 CERs for a total of Rs 8.5 crore for 9 years. Till now, 4,178 biogas units in Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand have been installed. These climate-change certified projects have

environmental as well as social benefits.

Other projects and future plans

Aside from these programmes, IndiGo was active in disaster-relief operations and donations for the Kathmandu earthquake and the Chennai floods in 2015. In February last year, it worked with the Manipur government to transport emergency medicines free of cost to people affected by the blockades on the national highways. The company has also been recognised for its disabled-friendly infrastructure in its services, products and campaigns.

Employee volunteering is encouraged and all stations are associated with local NGOs and work closely with them. IndiGo

has partnered with Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre to raise awareness on preventive measures for cancer, especially for children. Overall, according to the company, its various CSR programmes have impacted 51,000 individuals through 33 projects in 16 locations across 8 states. In the last FY (2016–17), the company spent Rs 215.81 million on CSR, with Rs 96.80 million left unused from the total Rs 312.6 million (2 per cent of net profit).

The company is aware of the positive impact that a strong CSR programme can have on its brand value, such that it can influence consumer behaviour. While these are welcome side-effects of good CSR work, care needs to be taken that self-interest does not

supersede genuine altruism and social obligations as the reasons for doing CSR. Monitoring of their programmes is done internally and through monthly and quarterly reports provided by the partner NGOs, indicating metrics like carbon-emission reduction status, units installed, economic impact, jobs created, and financial inclusion for village women. IndiGo also conducts regular on-site visits to assess the projects and evaluate the progress made. The long-term vision is to emerge as a key CSR player in the country with best practices, systems and processes, and implement development programmes through partnerships and decentralised planning.

However, there's no indication that any new major project will be adopted in the near future.

CB view...

Unlike other corporates, IndiGo, thankfully, has limited the scope of its CSR activities. At the same time, while branching out in terms of its partners and projects on education can be seen as a smart strategy, one would like to see the company take up its own flagship programme that has medium- to long-term goals and timelines. This has the capacity to create truly transformative change for its beneficiaries and the potential to be scaled up. It can provide invaluable learning and also ensure continuous engagement and investment from the company instead of sporadic projects that are usually of two to three years' duration. Such a programme can be taken up with one of their many existing NGO partners. **Inventive projects**

that are a natural fit with the company's core function, such as sponsoring education and training for would-be pilots and flight attendants from underprivileged backgrounds, can be explored.

In terms of sustainability, while IndiGo has acknowledged its carbon emissions problem, much more can be done to reduce it drastically. Its current efforts, while laudable, don't go far enough in terms of scope or ambition. Equally worrying is that there seems to be no indication of benchmarking done (internally or externally), no clear targets or any rationale provided behind the current goals or programmes. Globally, the most sustainable and green companies are ensuring that each and every part of their business has its cur-

rent emissions and environmental impact thoroughly assessed, and targets are set accordingly, keeping in mind factors such as local and international regulations and agreements, steps taken by other best-in-class companies, and their own capabilities and limitations. Metrics like emissions per employee and even suppliers' environmental impact and human rights record are being tracked.

There's much that IndiGo can and should do to ensure that it takes its responsibility and contribution towards a greener future in a manner befitting the country's largest airline. It has already taken the first step – being aware of its own impact; now one would like it to go several steps further and set an example for the rest of the industry. ■

The Purkal ministry of women and child development



India's ever-burgeoning youth population has become the subject of plenty of articles, attention and speculation. As per the 2011 census data, around 41 per cent of India's population is below the age of 20 years. The potential is immense – as a human resource to be harnessed for the country's development, as a customer base ready to be exploited by wily capitalists, and as the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and problem solvers. But without education, employment and opportunities, this potential can be easily wasted and become an intractable problem of an enormous size. After all, only 4.5 per cent of the rural population and 17 per cent of the urban are college-educated or above (the figures are lower for women—no surprises there), while out of the 74 per cent literate population, primary school level and below accounts for the major share (around 32 per cent). As things stand today, the case for outright optimism is less compelling than cautious anxiety.

With the State grappling with this risky and unpredictable asset, civil society intermediations are imperative to bridge that yawning gap between expectation and

delivery. NGOs have a huge role to play in channelling this segment of the population. Whether this sort of dependency is desirable is a separate matter. But there can be little doubt that they are vital in every socio-economic sphere of our society in its current state.

One such NGO that has been quietly doing the good work is Purkal Youth Development Society (PYDS). Officially registered in 2003 but with roots that go back to 1998, PYDS works with children from socially and economically backward sections, providing them with free education of high quality, healthcare and nutrition, and long-term mentorship. Their efforts are not one-time or of limited duration. Recognising the undeniable fact that meaningful impact takes time and nurturing, they ensure that all their interventions are designed to deliver the right results, with deep and focused—rather than broad-based—investments.

About PYDS

The genesis of the NGO can be traced back to the time when GK Swamy decided to help the children from poor families in Purkal, Uttarakhand, who were deprived of the resources needed to successfully complete their

education. He began by spending innumerable hours in tutoring them and securing scholarships for the more gifted students. In time, this good work morphed into a school specifically set up for children from impoverished backgrounds. The society and its supporters managed to collect enough funds to establish this school in 2006 (called the Yuva Shakti programme), even as the scholarship programmes were flourishing. Since then, the school has added facilities such as computers, science labs, basketball courts and a library; what has remained constant is its dedication to its target cohort. It has collaborated with well-known organisations in the education space such as International Award for Young People (IAYP), iDiscover Education (XSEED Programme), and The Global Education and Leadership Foundation (tGELF). The scholarship programme was gradually disbanded in favour of a greater focus on the school.

Aside from free education, four nutritional meals are given every day to the students; not surprisingly, these also claim a healthy chunk of the Society's expenses. The truth is, the provision of nutritional meals becomes even more indispensable when you consider the statistics

on the malnourishment problem in India – as per a 2013 nationwide survey by the ministry of women and child development and UNICEF, the proportion of underweight children in India was 29.4 per cent, and that of stunted children 38.7 per cent. India also has the dubious distinction of having the highest number of underweight children under five in the world. The twin curses of poverty and malnutrition (the former being a major contributor to the latter) make it near impossible for these children to have a reasonably dignified future. As an aside, it has been observed that targeting girls and young mothers tremendously helps in bringing down these rates.

PYDS places special emphasis on the girl child while Purkal Stree Shakti Samiti, a sister organisation, works exclusively for women empowerment. The Purkal school also provides comprehensive health check-ups and vaccinations. The school, which took its first steps towards building the primary school in 2010, has evolved into a day-boarding programme with 400 students, more than half being girls, and is affiliated to CBSE till Class 12. The teachers are aided by a coordinator who makes sure that their performances are up to the desired levels; there is also an activity coordinator to keep tabs on competitions, field trips, student-exchange programmes (including to the United States), and other activities. Aside from studies, children get to dabble in different kinds of extracurricular activities and sports. The long hours favoured by the school are meant to enable critical learning and skills training. The underlying idea is diverse, holistic development of these children, keeping in mind the

harsh realities of their lives and the toll that it can take, mentally and physically. Each child's progress is reviewed periodically on emotional, physical and scholastic parameters. In terms of performance, its students do better than the national average in learning abilities, and its board-exam results have been improving year on year with practically zero dropouts (about 96 per cent of its students scored 60 per cent and above in 2014–15), thanks in part to its teaching and non-teaching staff of about 75.

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On to life and ongoing plans

The support doesn't end here. Even after passing out from the school, the Society ensures that its help and guidance are at hand for these young students who are encouraged to pursue higher education; many of its alumni are doing exactly that in reputed institutions. Its 'On to Life' programme assists them in counselling and admissions, getting access to grants and loans, finding the right mentors, placement help, and financial support in some cases. As of 2014–15, out of 108 pass-outs, 40 are successfully employed, 50 are pursuing professional degrees, and over 25 are financially supported by PYDS

in their higher education. Most of PYDS' alumni, be it through its erstwhile scholarship programme or its school, are pursuing higher education in diverse fields such as technology, tourism, mass communication and economics.

One of the key learnings for the Society has been that for truly well-rounded education, children need a caring environment that constantly enables their strengths, minimises their weaknesses, and encourages them to perform at their highest level. This paved the way for hostel facilities for 60 girls and 25 boys this year which has heralded a marked improvement in their performance. Future plans include buying a two acres land for more hostels – this will require a couple of crores at the very least. They also plan to establish a Science Recreation Laboratory with the objective of making science a fun learning affair for students and germinating a passion for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in them, especially crucial for girl students who are woefully underrepresented in this field. The Society hopes to have additional sections in its secondary school and a new programme for the commerce stream, with the sole aim of getting 25 girls admitted to the best commerce and law universities in the country. All these plans urgently require funds from donors old and new.

PYDS is also active in community development projects, with an emphasis on community participation and sustainability. Student involvement is encouraged. Some of its environmental initiatives involve eco-friendly practices such as rainwater

harvesting, planting of trees, and collection of biodegradable waste (the initial campaign was run by its students). It has constructed over 50 toilets in homes and villages around its base location, in collaboration with ADOPT Charity. Community-sensitisation efforts against evil social practices like dowry and child abuse take the form of street plays and the ever-popular *nukkad natak*s.

Issues and learnings

PYDS doesn't see these interventions as merely operating a school. It acknowledges the fact that without suitable opportunities and education the poor have very little chance of a decent existence. Staying true to its mission of 'creating leaders for individual, social and global change', it sees its students as change agents who are capable of becoming catalysts for a larger transformation in the society, thanks to their experiences, intelligence and empathy. The hope is that the students of today will become the future leaders in every professional sphere. The power of education has also led to a gradual transformation in the mindset of the community that it works in,

who now recognise the importance of literacy, knowledge and practices such as maintaining hygiene.

Staying true to its mission of 'creating leaders for individual, social and global change', Purkal sees its students as change agents who are capable of becoming catalysts for a larger transformation in the society, thanks to their experiences, intelligence and empathy. The power of education has also led to a gradual transformation in the mindset of the community that it works in, who now recognise the importance of literacy, knowledge and practices such as maintaining hygiene.

However, issues are aplenty—as they always are in this country. Despite the overwhelming number of families that approach the Society, current constraints force it to take in only about 21 new students every year, which is only 21 potential lives helped on a yearly basis. Scaling up geographically as well as in terms of infrastructure and resources

demands copious amounts of funds—something that the Society recognises. No less challenging are the trauma and exploitation that these children have gone through and are constantly vulnerable to, community sensitisation and efforts to change existing mindsets, and fruitful partnerships with other NGOs. As expounded by its CEO GK Swamy, education is a long-drawn-out process that needs patience but poverty demands constant attention and short-term, quick-fix solutions. The two are, by nature, incompatible.

Some of the more critical learnings include helping these students choose a future that is best suited for them. This may take the form of deciding which field of higher studies to go for or what jobs best fit their interests and skill sets. The right guidance to prepare for the inevitable challenges goes a long way in ensuring that their promising future becomes a happy reality. The children also become more driven and focused once they have a clear goal and are then ready to take on the accompanying challenges. The other key takeaway is that they require dedicated mentors, especially in higher classes. PYDS has taken cognisance of both learnings and, accordingly, are revamping their organisation. It doesn't plan to increase the number of students significantly in the near future, choosing to focus on improving the performance of its students and doubling their efforts to ensure that they reach out to the poorest of people.

About Purkal Stree Shakti Samiti

Purkal Stree Shakti Samiti (PSSS) literally translates into 'empowering the women of Purkal', and this



Despite the overwhelming number of families that approach the Society, current constraints force it to take in only about 21 new students every year. Scaling up geographically as well as in terms of infrastructure and resources demands copious amounts of funds—something that the Society recognises. No less challenging are the trauma and exploitation that these children have gone through and are constantly vulnerable to, community sensitisation and efforts to change existing mindsets, and fruitful partnerships with other NGOs. As expounded by its CEO GK Swamy, education is a long-drawn-out process that needs patience but poverty demands constant attention and short-term, quick-fix solutions. The two are, by nature, incompatible.

is precisely the mission of this NGO established as an offshoot of PYDS in 2003. The idea is twofold: impart skill training to women from underprivileged backgrounds from the nearby villages, thereby creating a separate stream of income, and then enable them to



become leaders and entrepreneurs in their own right. The training comes in the form of teaching them the workmanship behind handmade products (patchworking, appliqué and embroidery) for home and fashion which are then sold to customers, primarily through word-of-mouth referrals. This is a not-for-profit exercise for PSSS. During the six-month training, the enrolled women receive an honorarium (about Rs 750 per month) as well as nutrition and limited medical support. More importantly, preschool education (Shishu-Shakti) is given to their children while they are in training or at work. This is a free seven-hour-long day-care facility wherein

the children are given healthy meals, participate in games and activities, and are taken care of. Without this service, many of the women would have been unable to partake in this programme – this demonstrates that care and thought have gone into planning it. The day-care centre is run and funded by PYDS.

Post completion, the women are free to either join one of the existing SHGs operating under PSSS or form their own group. The SHGs are responsible for production of specific items. They are independent entities with their own leadership structures. They have full ownership of their bank accounts and profits although they are free to use the Society's infrastructure and other assets. Most of the SHG activities are managed by these women, thereby giving them invaluable experience in accounting, finance, management and retailing. The ultimate objective is to enable these SHGs to become mature, independent commercial bodies, with these women as successful entrepreneurs. PSSS' role here is to be the facilitator and guide with its well-qualified trainers and staff (which includes



designers and accountants) and a pool of volunteers, while collecting only a basic management fee from the SHGs. Marketing support is provided as well and this includes exhibitions at popular locations such as Dilli Haat and Kala Ghoda Arts Festival. The initial working capital provided by PSSS is gradually being paid off by the SHGs and the medium-term goal is to build their own capital fund.

Following the standard SHG model, a maximum of 10 members can form one group, which then maintains its own bank accounts – one for savings, which each member contributes to on a monthly basis and can be used by members as and when they need it; the second is the business account wherein all sales proceeds are directed. Raw materials, wages and operational expenses are paid for from this account. The underlying agenda here is economic independence for these SHGs and their members, a mix of social benefits with pure profit-making, if you will.

Due to space and resource constraints as well as mobility restrictions for some women in remote areas, an outreach programme was set up in 2012–13 at Gangol Panditwari, a village eight kilometres away from the original PSSS building; it could support 50 women. However, due to rental issues it has been closed down, even as the one in Jharipani has flourished with 35 women working there currently, thanks in no small part to a supportive landlord. Some of the expected benefits of the Stree Shakti programme are the income generated and the skills and education imparted to these women. Less obvious are



the increased aspiration levels with regards to their children's education and nutrition as well as their own life decisions, hygiene and sanitation, and proactive involvement in local self-government.

Funding gaps and plans

Despite its strong network of supporters and donors, funding continues to be an issue, as is the case with smaller NGOs. For

instance, PSSS received donations to the tune of Rs 23 lakh in 2014–15 – that hardly covered its day-to-day operations and left little scope for expansion, in terms of the number of women it could take in or additional centres that it could set up. The current subsidised lunch programme is a huge drain on available resources while also not being utilised by all the women since they are unwilling or unable to pay the five rupees per meal. PSSS is currently on a mission to raise funds for a free lunch programme and extensive healthcare and medical facilities for these women to help them work longer and better. Interested donors are encouraged to reach out to them.

Transport facilities are also incredibly important to enable more women to join this programme. As anyone who has travelled in the rural areas of this country will tell you, even travelling from one village to the next can be a difficult task. A free bus service in Purkal and a reimbursement mechanism at Jharipani has helped tremendously in recruiting women from the poorest neighbourhoods

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to join PSSS. When there is so much work to be done with so little money, even spending a rupee on transport is a significant investment for these women. To this end, PSSS hopes to raise the required amount to continue delivering this service.

PYDS received about Rs 5 crore donations in 2015–16 but its expenses are also bigger, with a major portion spent on education, food and transport. All surplus amounts go to the general fund. Around 50 to 60 per cent of its donations come from India, with foreign donors not far behind. Some of PYDS' more famous donors are The Hans foundation, Big Tech, Max India Foundation, and Institute for Education.

The Society understands the ongoing need to strengthen the



reserve and corpus funds and constantly seeks out corporate sponsorships. PYDS and its affiliates are also distinguished from the NGO pack by their willingness to share financial information, as demonstrated by the fact that all relevant details,

key metrics, progress reports, expense breakdown and bank account information are readily available on their website. FCRA compliance (which has acquired new urgency in the past couple of years) documents are also up on the website.

CB view...

There is little doubt that PYDS and its sister organisation are doing some great work in an area that finds little attention from the government or the media. Uttarakhand is in the bottom half of the Human Development Index among all Indian states, and also has high levels of inequality when it comes to income, education and health dimensions. In this harsh light, PYDS' work becomes even more invaluable for the people of Purkal. The next step is to expand in terms of student intake and additional programmes and centres. These will need careful, long-term and detailed planning, not to mention an obvious increase in donations as well as more efficient operations and expense management. The Society understands the

need for additional donors and, hence, actively seeks out corporate sponsorships and partnerships. While it does have a presence in NGO-related websites and newsletters, a more robust media strategy with special importance given to social media can help tremendously in getting its message out there in front of people who matter. This has become vital in today's hyper-connected world where attention spans are limited; thankfully, there's always space for good work to be highlighted, if pursued in a smart way. Plus, it is much more cost-effective and can supplement traditional ways (like networking and PR) of seeking out funds. There's also a strong case for PSSS to expand to new locations and branch out on the training skills imparted, so that

the SHGs can delve into a diverse range of businesses. There's also a case for educating these women in basic finance, English and Math.

The Purkal model and learnings are assets that can be replicated in other areas with the right strategy and intentions. One would like to see PYDS partnering with other NGOs to deliver similar kinds of social service, with the former acting as a mentor thanks to its over 10 years of field experience. This can circumvent the current issue of funding for its various sub-projects. One hopes that this issue becomes a thing of the past so that this Society is free to explore its potential to the full, just like its many students. ■



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