

## STRIVING TOWARDS EQUALITY: GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN INDIA

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CSR is something of a trend in contemporary business, especially in the UK. Although, the concept's application is essentially contested, it has been defined as business responsibility for its economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic activities. These responsibilities arise both from the social imperatives of business success and from the social externalities of business activity. With the expanding role of the private sector in national and global governance systems, the issue of corporate accountability on social (including gender) issues has become increasingly important.

As business involvement in governance increases, so stakeholders have increasingly regarded corporations as appropriate sources of redress and expansion of their civil, social and political rights. This 'puts the question of corporate accountability up to the top of the social, political and economic agenda'. Gender mainstreaming has involved an extended debate about how to ensure women's voices, as well as men's, are heard in governance structures, and are thus able to influence the development and evaluation of all areas of policy making. Participation is essential because gender mainstreaming involves 'identification as to how organisational systems and structures cause indirect discrimination and altering or redesigning them as appropriate'.

This paper investigates the possibilities of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in advancing gender mainstreaming. This paper puts across an argument that despite some limitations, CSR provides an important new political space where tools for such accountability are being developed. It will discuss as to how CSR now extends beyond the traditional 'business case' to encompass new governmental and social drivers therefore increased participation by women's organisations in this field is necessary if gender equality is to be addressed. The objective is the development of 'new standards for both men and women, that is, the transformation of gender relations'.

**Key Words:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Women, Gender mainstreaming, Governance, Rights.

With the coming of the globalization, the corporate houses are increasingly being drawn to social obligations that can be ignored only at their peril. Besides adhering to the laws of the country the companies are expected to fulfil social expectations as well. What is most critical in today's corporate governance is to define what 'Corporate Social Responsibility' stands for in context of the kind of the social obligations needed to be followed by the companies. Corporate houses are being as the argument goes, 'challenged to be inclusive, sustainable and socially responsible'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Manmohan Luthra, 'Matter of Diversity-I, *The Statesman*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

As early as 1939, David Packard, the co-founder of Hewlett Packard Company, thus proclaimed that “I think, many people assume, wrongly, that a company exists simply to make money. . . .we call a company something collectively that they may not accomplish separately—they make a contribution to society, a phrase which sounds trite but is fundamental.”<sup>2</sup>

CSR is therefore an outcome of a process drawing the companies towards their role in social well-being. CSR has thus two dimensions: a internal dimension which refers to ‘running the business responsibly by being responsible to the stakeholders’ and an external dimension meaning ‘the contribution to the sustainable development.’<sup>3</sup> Second, it is also evident that CSR has to be conceptualized in the global perspective in which the ‘southern perspective’, identifying different dimensions, is also critical. CSR initiatives are to be ‘legitimate’ and acceptable, their content and implementation ‘need to be adapted to the particular country in which they are taking place.’<sup>4</sup>

Put differently, corporations have come to realize that one way of strengthening business is to link the “Wall Street to the Main Street.” Many businesses are beginning to recognize that social problems are a shared responsibility and that the public expects them to do their share. Businesses now see themselves in a process of evolution that is changing the way they conduct business. This evolution is aimed at meeting the new expectations of communities and society.

## **Promoting Quality Governance**

### ***Stakeholder’s Rights:***

Employees are the immediate stakeholders in any corporations, and corporate governance can foster social organization by recognizing their rights as stipulated by the law. The competitiveness and ultimate success of a corporation is the result of teamwork that includes contribution from employees, among other resources. Corporations should recognize that the contributions of employees constitute a valuable resource for building competitive and profitable companies. It is therefore in the long-term interest of corporations to foster behavior that promote non-discriminatory practices in hiring, firing, and promotion. Good corporate practice requires that the rights of employees to be protected by law and be respected as well. Such protective laws include labor law, business law, contract law, and insolvency law.<sup>5</sup> By adhering to these laws, firms foster a sense of belonging and identity among their employees. Many employees identify with the firms that employ them in positive ways, usually using first-person references such as “my firm” when referring to their places of work. When the rules of promotion and hiring or firing are discriminatory, the trust that the employees have in the firm as stakeholders is betrayed, usually leading to a workplace with conflicts. Such conflicts may be carried over to households and even the wider community, thus disrupting the social cohesiveness of the society.

<sup>2</sup> David Packard, cited in Charles Handy (2002) ‘What a Business For?’, *Harvard Business Review*, December, p.54.

<sup>3</sup> Pushpa Kumari, Comparison of Major Issues pertaining to Social Responsibility in Corporate and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India, a survey of SME cluster development programme and corporate social responsibility, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Prieto-Carron et al., Critical perspectives on CSR and Development: What we know, what don’t know and what we need to know’, *International Affairs*, 2006, Vol.82, No.5, p.977.

<sup>5</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1999, *OECD, Principles of Corporate Governance*, Paris.

But corporations that adhere to these laws, and even go further in areas where the employee interests are not legislated, make additional commitments that build on the corporate reputation<sup>6</sup>. The recognition of such larger interests is a way in which firms contribute to social cohesion. In addition, employees should have the opportunity to obtain effective redress for violation of their rights. Mechanisms for employee participation in corporate decisions should be in place. Examples of mechanisms for employee participation include employee representation on boards, employee stock ownership plans and other profit-sharing mechanisms, and governance processes that consider employees' viewpoints in certain key decisions.

### ***Responding to Shareholders***

Investors' confidence that the capital they provide will be protected from misuse or misappropriation by corporate managers, board members, or controlling shareholders is an important factor in corporate governance and social cohesion. Corporate boards, managers, and controlling shareholders should not engage in activities that may advance their own interests at the expense of the non-controlling shareholders (OECD, 1999; World Bank, 2003). However, the optimal structure of a firm is best decided by management and boards, subject to the approval of shareholders. In addition, insider trading and abusive self-dealing should be prohibited. Abusive self-dealing occurs when persons having close ties to the company exploit those relationships to the detriment of the company and investors. Such practices can be seen as constituting a breach of good corporate governance in as much as they violate the principle of equitable treatment of shareholders.

### **Disclosure and Transparency**

Good corporate governance frameworks ensure that timely and accurate disclosure is made on all material matters regarding the corporation, including the financial situation, performance, ownership, and governance of the company. A strong disclosure regime is a pivotal feature of market-based monitoring of companies and is central to shareholders' ability to exercise their voting rights<sup>7</sup>. Disclosure also helps improve public understanding of the structure and activities of enterprises, corporate policies and performance with respect to the environment, ethical standards, and companies' relationships with communities in which they operate. This promotes social cohesion which is a vital part of corporate social responsibility in India and elsewhere too.

### **The Role of the Executive Board**

The Executive Board is the nerve center of corporate governance. Its members are the essential eyesight of the stakeholders and shareholders in monitoring the operations of management. A well-governed corporate entity is one that ensures that the executive board is fully accountable to the shareholders and stakeholders. The possibility of community partnership is, however, only possible when firms make profits. Yet the making of profits heavily depends on the internal behavior of the firm, which wins stakeholder confidence, thus leading to company reputation and protecting the investment and trust that shareholders have in the firm. According to Pettigrew, it is now time for businesses to use the new strength that globalization given them to help governments and other social partners in shaping the future of their communities and determining

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

the economic and social progress of societies.<sup>8</sup>

For boards to be effective in discharging their defined responsibilities, they must have some degree of independence from management. These boards are expected to take due regard of, and deal fairly with, other stakeholder interests, including those of employees, creditors, customers, suppliers, and local communities, as these are not only relevant to the firm but beneficial to the wider society and in gender mainstreaming the organisation should incorporate the above ethics and good practices for better work.

### **Social and Economic Initiatives taken by various countries**

The Career Edge Program, a Canadian initiative put in place by a group of businesses in an attempt to assist with the difficulty that a number of graduates have in finding a first job, is another example of corporate social involvement. It started as a private-sector-funded initiative, and it has now evolved to a tripartite partnership between business, the federal government, and the voluntary sector. The program celebrated the 1,000<sup>th</sup> intern placed in the spring of 1998. About 85% of those interns are getting their first jobs either during the internship or within 2 months of their internship.<sup>9</sup>

‘Levi Strauss & Co. and Levi Strauss Foundation’ foster positive change in communities where Levi Strauss has a business presence by awarding grants, encouraging volunteerism, and standing behind controversial issues. More than \$16 million is donated annually in over 40 countries. Levi Strauss contributions focuses on four areas:

1. **HIV or AIDS:** Providing funds to organizations working to prevent the spread of AIDS/HIV and care for those who are affected, including support services for individuals and their families.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Supporting programs that seek to improve economic opportunities for low-income people, particularly women, minorities, the working poor, and other disadvantaged populations. The priorities of this area include job creation, small business development, training and placement, and capacity building for nonprofit organizations to assist them in economic development projects.
3. **Youth Empowerment:** Supporting programs that engage youth in decision making, giving them a voice in the community, and encouraging training in the media field, community service, and issues-based activism.
4. **Social Justice:** Supporting those who are working to support basic human rights and combat institutional discrimination issues in mostly low-income areas. Funding is provided to non-profit organizations to do effective anti-racism work.

For Levi Strauss, social responsibility and value-based business practices are the guiding strategy for the company. They stand behind some of the most controversial social-based issues because of their importance to the quality of community life.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. (1999). *Final report on social cohesion*. Retrieved March 18, 2005, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/36/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/repfinaljun99part3-e.htm> as cited in Kate Grosser & Jeremy Moon, ‘The role of corporate social responsibility in Gender Mainstreaming’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, p.36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.41

<sup>10</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Corporate Social Responsibility: Partners for Progress—Governance*, 2001, Paris, p.66.

Another company named 'Rio Tinto' was formed in 1973 to mine the ancient copper workings at Rio Tinto, Spain. Today, Rio Tinto interests in industrial minerals, coal, iron ore, and aluminum span five continents. Its headquarters are in London. On a global scale, Rio Tinto aims to be the best mining company in the world, but the company remains responsive to national and local issues, basing its policies on a tradition of social responsibility and contributing to the economic and social development of communities where it operates. The company recognizes that its presence in a region can accelerate social change and that it is fundamental to work in partnership with the community to achieve maximum long-term benefits.<sup>11</sup>

These examples do not, of course, provide a statistically significant or representative sample of corporate involvement in social initiatives. But they illustrate the kind of creative and practical solutions that can be developed when the corporate sector is willing to do its part in addressing complex community problems and promoting economic and social well-being on the larger grounds. Partnerships also contribute to help foster social utility and enhance the public social legitimacy of enterprises. Thus, Corporate Social Responsibility should be a supplement for government responsibility rather than a substitute.

## The Role of the Government

### Overall Business Ethics:-

#### 1. *Use of moral imagination:*

Corporate leaders need to develop the ability to effectively perceive the moral relationships behind competing economic relations. When the garment company for instance, 'Gap' employs children and underpays them in its overseas production, the ethical position of the company and its leaders becomes questionable, and the consequences are demonstrations and loss of business trust among its would-be loyal customers. Over here as well the concept of gender mainstreaming comes into play as both the sexes should be treated well and paid well.

#### 2. *Identify and rank-order the moral factors of a situation:-*

For CEOs to incorporate moral choices into business decision making, they need to learn how to identify and then prioritize moral impacts of a given decision. In many cases, decisions are not clear-cut, and moral choices remain in a gray area. It should be in favour of both the sexes and fair in their treatment as well which is in itself an ethical practice.

#### 3. *Build tolerance of moral disagreements and ambiguity:-*

In any moral choice, disagreements are bound to occur. There is usually no clear-cut "right" answer. In particular, decisions that cross international borders are bound to result in cultural criticisms. An example that comes to mind is the not-so-long-ago demonstration by the women who stripped naked in Nigeria protesting the practices of Shell Oil Company in the Ogoni region. It seems there was ambiguity and misunderstanding from both sides—the community and the company.<sup>12</sup> Such instances call for careful decisions that are principally based on ethical business standards but also require a moral judgment. This also fits in the line of my argument that equal treatment to all must be ensured.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.69.

<sup>12</sup> Nigerian women take over more oil facilities, July 17, 2002, *USA Today*. Retrieved March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, from <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2002/07/17/nigerian-women.html>.

**5. Integrate managerial competence and moral competence:**

Moral issues in management are not an isolated phenomenon. Such issues permeate corporate life. Managers need to become as competent with moral judgment as they are with economic administration and economic benefit is also an important standpoint for business practices.

**6. Instill a sense of moral obligation throughout the organization:**

Integrity and moral obligation are essential to management practices. These qualities can be consistent with the free enterprise system; corporate culture needs to recognize and embrace the co-existence of morals with profit.

**Overall Business Ethics**

One sure way of building corporate trust is behaviour that ensures and promotes overall ethical business practices. The expanding role of the private sector has resulted in an increasing focus on corporate behavior. This has led to the need to build reputations and relationships based on trust, which is based on adhering to business ethics. Companies gain legitimacy when their practices are compatible to what the society considers to be ethical standards.

**Transparency and Removing Barriers**

Social cohesion refers to a situation where everyone has access to establishing basic social relationships in society, such as work participation, family life, political participation, and activities in civil society. In this sense, social cohesion means inclusion and participation. Building social cohesion means removing the different barriers that are blocking the access of certain groups in society to various forms of participation in corporate endeavors. Companies need to be aware of the problems of access that tend to be concentrated in certain communities: immigrants, ethno-cultural minorities, and women. Any corporate activity that is based on ethnicity, race, or gender undermines the influence of corporations in fostering social cohesion. Such activities are discriminatory and opaque—they are not based on transparency and business standard values. Open, honest, and transparent relationships are critical in decision making for issues that affect corporate community relations so these are needed to be spelt out clearly for more effective growth of the organisation.

“There are certain ideas regarding the greater participation of both sexes in an organization wherein economic participation (i.e., having a job and being an active participant in the labor market) is the key that gives access to all the other spheres of human or social activities. Unemployment, especially in its long-term form, often leads to social isolation, depression, apathy, and exclusion. Marginalization occurs when prolonged unemployment is reinforced by the disintegration of social networks that bind the individual to the community.”<sup>13</sup> (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 1999). Given the centrality of economic participation for social cohesion, it is important that corporations focus on removing the barriers to the labour market because it helps the marginalized (i.e., immigrants, ethno-cultural minorities, and women) become full participants in society. There lies the true essence of an egalitarian society which is the highest aim for good economic development.

<sup>13</sup> Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 1999, *Final report on social cohesion*. Retrieved on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/36/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/repfinaljun99part3-e.htm>.

## Defining Issue of Gender Mainstreaming

It can be defined as ‘the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy of making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality with the aim of transforming structures of inequality (UN, DAW, 1998:4) In this book the term is used largely to address issues of gender mainstreaming in public policy shifts is expected to create a political context in which the concerned to emphasize issues of difference between men and women is that the equality discourse tends to erase the differences between women and men, the sameness becomes the focus rather than an acknowledgement of the different needs and interests of women and men. The argument is made that the language of equality is a language of universalism, and the universal norms are really the norms of Western hegemonic societies which are inappropriate, or even counter-productive, in different cultural contexts.<sup>14</sup>

However, international bodies such as the UN and some other feminist scholars, however, have asserted the need for universal rights to be made the centerpiece of gender justice strategies. The various National machineries emerged as instruments of advancing women’s interest after the World Conference of the International Women’s Year in Mexico City (1975), but were particularly strengthened in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). They can be defined as ‘the central policy coordinating unit inside the government. [Their] main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of gender equality perspective in all policy areas.<sup>15</sup>

## Can state institutions promote women’s interests?

According to Shirin M. Rai ...we need a position which allows for a mobilization of women’s and their articulation within the space of civil society which would challenge the gender status quo. In parallel, it would allow for an engagement with the policy –making machinery of the state in order to institutionalize the gains made through discursive and political shifts brought about through these mobilizations. . . . Thus on one hand, as the different case studies in this volume show, women’s movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions such as UN have striven for state institutions in the form of national machineries committed to the gender equality agenda to be recognized, and given political space and resources.

Furthermore, it also suggests that the state is a fractured and ambiguous terrain for women, needing complex negotiations and bargaining by those working within its boundaries as well as those on the outside. One must bear in mind that issue of location and resources as well as of strong democratic movements holding the bodies accountable as far as the question of national machineries in relation to the advancement of women’s interest is concerned.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Shaheen Sardar Ali, ‘Women’s Rights, CEDAW, and International Human Rights Debates: Toward Empowerment?’ in Jane Parpart, Shirin M. Rai and Kathleen Staudt (eds), *Rethinking Empowerment, Gender and Development in a Global/Local World*, 2002, London, Routledge.

<sup>15</sup> *Op.cit*, p.17

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.18-19

This suggests that an engagement with state structures is now considered an appropriate means of bringing about shifts in public policy. As far as the goal of gender mainstreaming along with its alignment with the policy of corporate social responsibility is concerned it is invariably important that one examine the position of women in politics today, one can see that the scale of women's exclusion from political bodies needs to be addressed urgently if the nature of these national machineries has to be changed and greater participation of women is to be seen.

### **CSR and Women and Gender Mainstreaming**

The question therefore arises as to the extent to which gender issues are included in national and international CSR voluntary corporate reporting guidelines, and CSR and Socially Responsible investment (SRI) indexes. Authors namely Grosser reveals five main limitations in this field.

- First, questions about gender equality, when they are included, are often limited in scope, as in the FTSE 4 Good index (FTSE 2004).
- Second, questions about gender are often optional, for example in the FTSE 4 Good, and the optional 'Diversity in the Workplace' section of the Business in the community (BITC) CR Index (BITC,2003).
- Third, as gender equality is often subsumed within the category of 'diversity', specific information about gender may be omitted. The detailed questions about diversity in the workplace in the BITC CR Index for example, and those on EO in the workplace in the widely used GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (GRI 2002), generally fail to differentiate among diversity issues. This problem is discussed more broadly in the gender mainstreaming literature in terms of the danger of losing the specific recognition of women as a category for policy making (eg. Woodward 2004, Walby 2005)
- Perhaps as a result of a lack of gender mainstreaming in CSR organizations, one can point out few references to CSR stakeholder engagement tools, which aim to ensure equal gender representation. This is despite the fact that there is a business case for consulting women employees as stakeholders, for example in recognizing the importance of women's voice and expertise as workers and as managers on company boards.<sup>17</sup>
- Indeed some companies also conduct employee surveys on a wide range of workplace issues with gender breakdowns. Such expertise does include an awareness that women's different experience in the workplace means that they have specific knowledge and expertise which can be of value to organizations in evaluating and improving workplace practices. For example, in some companies in the UK now report more about their gender workplace practices on their website of Aurora Gender Capital Management, which benchmarks companies as employers of choice for women seeking employment in the private sector, than they report on their websites.<sup>18</sup> As far as India scene is considered, in order to convince mothers not give up their jobs, PRIA allows women to

<sup>17</sup> S. Vinnicombe, 'The Business Case for Women Directors'. Paper presented to ESRC Gender Mainstreaming Seminar,2004, London, DTI.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Grosser & Jeremy Moon, 'The role of corporate social responsibility in Gender Mainstreaming', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Published online : 21 Aug 2006, p.545.

work half-days (five hours or more) depending on their specific home situation. When the mother feels she can resume full-time work, she is given the opportunity to do so.<sup>19</sup>

- Moreover the same society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Delhi has also brought into its good practices under gender mainstreaming, the very practice of participatory lunch has proved to be an effective ice-breaker; discussions and activities around food, cooking and menu-planning are normally considered a woman's domain, but this gender myth gets lay bare during the participatory lunch process. There is no role in this process that is considered male-or female-specific. Individuals participate in all stages of the process, and there is no pressure to conform to any stereotype. This activity is held once every three to four months and is supported by the management. It is where new staff members can be introduced and welcomed, weddings, births and farewells can be announced and where a good time can be had by all. The participatory lunch has contributed substantially to the breaking of gender stereotypes within PRIA.<sup>20</sup>

### **Building Partnerships:**

There is another interesting set of practice proposed by PRIA where it has partnered with a number of organizations such as Sahbhagi Sikhan Kendra, Lucknow; Unnati, Ahmedabad; CENCORED, Patna; Lok Jagriti Kendra, Madhupur etc. A gender audit has been done and recommendations made. Good practices like having a committee to deal with sexual harassment and having gender sensitive HR policies were the results of those efforts.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Social cohesion is about shared frameworks, or as Rosell said, "shared communities of interpretation." In the rapidly changing environment of the Information Age, "social cohesion needs continually to be reconstructed. It depends, fundamentally, on the capacity continually to build shared frameworks within which all people can learn together and coordinate their actions".<sup>22</sup> This implies the need to have business institutions participate in activities that promote good business ethics and foster community socio-economic development. Collective corporate action is a powerful tool by which businesses can enhance their ability to foster inclusion and socially beneficial partnerships in the communities in which they operate. This paper has presented discussions on business ethics and the need for corporate entities to adhere to acceptable standards to achieve the aim of gender mainstreaming and its close alliance to corporate social responsibility.

The very experience of PRIA as stated above shows that concerted efforts on the part of employing organizations can go a long way in ensuring gender sensitivity in the workplace. If heads of teams endorse the need for gender awareness and equality, these concepts will percolate down to all the employees and reiterate the importance of this concern. It is important for employing organizations to have mechanisms that address gender-related concerns, particularly sexual harassment, as this is a major but still undressed problem in most workplaces. Efforts should also be made to ensure that such a mechanism is unbiased and

<sup>19</sup> *Good Practices in Gender Mainstreaming: Case studies from India*, 2008, UNDP, p.105.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.106.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> S. A. Rosell, *Renewing Governance: Governing by Learning in the Information Age*, 1999, Oxford, England, Oxford University Press, p.155.

effective and that employees are aware that no one, regardless of position or rank, is immune from its jurisdiction. One more suggestion that is also instituted by PRIA states that encouraging gender issues amongst men and women employees is a good way of breaking existing gender stereotypes and inculcating gender sensitivity in the workplace.<sup>23</sup>

CSR has become a business tool aimed at achieving business results in publicly traded corporations. Significant engagement is needed, and a great deal of success in businesses' influence on social cohesion can be realized, when all the factors that affect corporate image are combined. These include improving quality of corporate governance, adhering to environmental standards, and opening companies to more critical scrutiny of social practices. By using ethical guidelines to conduct their business and raising issues of social concern with the communities in which they operate, many corporations are reshaping the corporate image that the society would like to see in the 21st Century.

<sup>23</sup> *Good Practices in Gender Mainstreaming: Case studies from India*, UNDP, 2008, p.107.

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