

Role of Corporate Sector in Conservation of Natural Resources and Livelihood Generation in Rural India

Dipesh Jha

Adhoc Assistant Professor, Mahatma Gandhi Department of Rural Studies,
Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat.

Abstract:- Ambuja Cements Limited is a manufacturer of cement in India. At ACL the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been an integral part of the way they have been doing their business since inception. Through the Ambuja Cement Foundation, it carries out its CSR activities, primarily in areas of their operations. For more than 25 years, the Company's CSR initiatives has played pivotal role in improving the lives of the communities and society through natural resources development at large and in & around their operations with an objective to energize, involve and enable them to realise their potential. This has also enabled them to fulfil their commitment to be a socially responsible corporate citizen. It has several Watershed Interventions, Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Institutes, which provides vocational training to local youth, agro and skill-based livelihood generation, health programs, Education, Women Empowerment and Infrastructural Development.

The paper attempts to explore Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices particularly in the context of rural development through watershed intervention. The research questions examine, what CSR initiatives taken for development of rural areas' natural resources and how the corporates implement their CSR initiatives as a part of their business strategy. Finally it evaluates impacts of CSR actions on the socio-economic development of rural people. For the purpose, Ambuja Cement Foundation has been selected to study their CSR practices in the context of rural development. The methodology of the present study relied on the web-based research, review of print literature and visit to the selected sites to witness CSR practice.

The paper concludes that social responsibility is regarded as an important business issue of Indian companies irrespective of size, sector, and business goal. Therefore, CSR actions have positive impacts not only on development of rural community but also in their business.

Keywords:- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Rural Development, Watershed.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ambuja Cements, formerly known as Gujarat Cements is a cement manufacturing company in India. It began operations in 1980s letting cement major Holcim take management control in 2006 with over 50 per cent equity. ACL is believed to be one of the most efficient cement manufacturers in the world. The organisation is driven by the philosophy that empowerment and responsibility go hand in hand.

➤ Corporate Social Responsibility

Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF), the social development arm of Ambuja Cements Ltd, was established in 1993. Focusing on rural development, it has interventions in water resource management, agro and skill-based livelihood generation, health, education, women's empowerment, and rural infrastructure. ACF initiatives are centred around the social and economic development of the community in and around Ambuja Cements manufacturing plant locations.

For the purpose of this study, ACFs initiatives in soil and moisture conservation and watershed development have been chosen.

➤ Objective of the Study

The main objective is to study CSR practices followed by Ambuja Cement Company in India as general and in Gujarat as a particular, along with to assess the impacts of CSR actions on Natural Resources and socio-economic development of rural population in India.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper is an attempt of exploratory research, based on the secondary data sourced from journals, magazines, articles and media reports as well as personnel interview and interaction with ACF staff.

Looking into requirements of the objectives of the study, the research design employed for the study is of descriptive type. Keeping in view of the set objectives, this research design was adopted to have greater accuracy and in depth analysis of the research study.

Available secondary data was extensively used for the study. The investigator procures the required data through secondary survey method. Different news articles, Books and Web were used which were enumerated and recorded.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

➤ *Thematic Areas*

Environment Protection, Natural Resource Management and Water Harvesting.

Natural Resource Management, especially water management, forms a significant part of their work in the rural sector. Water management and conservation is a very broad area of intervention.

The diverse geographical, climatic, topographical and cultural variations across the states have made it necessary for them to make suitable modifications in their water projects to cater to the particular requirements and problems of different regions. Substantial water resource management activities are conducted in 4 states – Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh.

Each of these states faced specific water-related problems which they have tried to address through their scientifically grounded, economically viable and socially acceptable techniques. A brief description of the water projects in these states follows.

➤ *Salinity Ingress Reduction :*

In the state of **Gujarat** the rural communities are situated along the coastal belt in Junagadh and Amreli Districts. Due to over-utilisation and over-exploitation of ground water over years, these areas faced a serious salinity ingress problem. The rivers in this area were seasonal and the ponds that were fed by these rivers also dried up by the time winter arrived making the water problem even worse.

To tackle these problems, ACF adopted innovative techniques like interlinking of water bodies, tidal regulators and rivers through link water channels. This technique proved to be effective in collecting the run-offs of the rivers and consequently increased the quantity of water being saved and stored.

Ground water was recharged and the salinity levels of the underground water declined to improve the quality of water. The mined out pits of the Company have been converted into water reservoirs creating a store of 11.04 MCM of water for the use of the people.

Parts of **Rajasthan** being desert areas have for centuries had chronic water scarcity. The rainfall in the state is scanty and often uncertain. Rivers are seasonal and traditional ponds have over the years become silted and hold lesser and lesser quantities of water with each passing year.

The ground water is characterised by high fluoride and other salts contents that are known to be hazardous to health. ACF is situated in the Jaitaran block of Pali and Mundwa block of Nagaur District in this State.

The water problems here were addressed in 2 ways – by revival of old water reservoirs and construction of new structures to collect water. Traditional ponds were deepened

and de-silted so that they would hold water for upto 10–12 months in the year as opposed to only 3–4 months.

Dykes were constructed in the rivers that directly impacted the ground water level and at the same time the river banks were de-silted. These immediately raised the water level by an average of 14 feet. Agricultural productivity increased. As in Gujarat, Roof Rain Water Harvesting (RRWHS) structures were constructed in Rajasthan too. These structures helped households collect monsoon water and store it for use through the year.

In the hilly state of **Himachal Pradesh**, the local people depend heavily on the forests for their livelihood. The terrain makes storage of water and conservation of the top soil issues of serious consideration. NRM in the State is aimed at enabling the people to manage their own resources and derive a fair share from them. Watershed development covered 9000Ha in the last 4 years. As a result of decreased soil erosion and increased moisture, the agricultural production has gone up. The water and soil conservation programme along with forestation have shown good results. Farmers are able to grow more than one crop a year. Their cropping pattern has diversified and consequently their incomes have increased. Wastelands have been developed as pasture lands, which have benefited villagers owning cattle. The milk yield of the cattle has also seen an improvement as a result of this.

ACF is active in Rajura, Korpana and Jivati blocks of Chandrapur District in **Maharashtra**. The focus in this State has been improving access and availability of potable water. For this, old ponds were renovated and brought into use once again. Streams and rivers were de-silted. Wherever possible check dams were built, bore wells dug and storage structures constructed. To address soil erosion, large tracts were collected under bunding and gully plugging. A fall out of these activities was that the availability of water for agricultural and household uses improved and a positive impact on agricultural productivity was noted.

➤ *Detailing specific project: Salinity Ingress Mitigation*

The water resource management work has been going on for the longest duration in Kodinar, Junagadh District, Gujarat. The scope of work being done here is extensive. As a result of numerous factors, salinity ingress is a serious problem in this location. With the increase in the population, demands on existent water resources have increased and therefore there has been an over-exploitation of these resources.

With the fragmentation of the joint family system, each of the nuclear family unit involved in agriculture is increasing the number of wells and extensively using pumps to meet their increasing water demands. Water intensive crops have been artificially introduced in the area, sharply increasing the demand on water for agricultural purposes. Mismanagement and misuse of water along with recurrent droughts have further worsened the situation. The cumulative impact of all these occurrences has been that the villagers have been facing water shortage along with salinity ingress in this area.

Taking into consideration the scale of the problem, multiple interventions were planned and implemented by ACF and the rural people. This multi-pronged approach included the following:

➤ *Interlinking of rivers and canals :*

They initiated an innovative intervention technique of inter-linking local rivers and canals. This was done in a relatively limited geographical area where the distance between the rivers and /or canals wasn't too large. A large amount of water in Kodinar gets wasted because it gets drained into the sea. This water was diverted into nearby water bodies through channels. In interlinking, excess water from one source flows into the next, almost completely eliminating water wastage.

Water conservation structures like check dams have been made at appropriate places along the rivers and streams increasing recharge of the entire area. Villagers provided crucial information for this project. Having inhabited the area for generations, they were able to help locate the potential sinks and the shortest routes to these, which were essential for identifying watershed dynamics.

There have been direct benefits of this project. The crops in the region have diversified because of increased availability of water; and there is now a sustained water table. Farmers are now also growing crops and vegetables which are less water intensive.

The household income of the farming families has resultantly increased. We have been successful in changing the farming practices of the cultivators. The crop yields have also increased.

➤ *Pond deepening and interlinking :*

During Millennium year an interlinking project was undertaken that involved five adjacent villages. The village ponds in these villages were identified and deepened to increase their capacity and interlinking canals were constructed between villages. During monsoons, the stream overflowed and the excess water got collected in these ponds. After the water level passed a stipulated height in one pond, it automatically got diverted to the next interlinked pond, thereby preventing wastage of water.

The total storage capacity of 0.42 million cubic meters benefited 339 wells and 1161 hectares of parched land thereby benefiting 316 farmers of the region. A lot of water that used to flow into the sea in the past has now been diverted into the downstream ponds which were previously starved of water. An analysis of the impact of this project showed a drastic reduction in the salinity in the area and farmers are now able to cultivate three crops in a year, as against one earlier. Due to the reduction in the salinity, now farmers also require 30–60 percent less seeds for sowing as compared to earlier, while yield in Kg/Ha increase by an average of 55 percent for the 5 major crops being grown in this area.

➤ *Utilising mined out pits :*

ACL uses open cast mines to obtain limestone and marl that are essential for cement production. Owing to the mining, large pits measuring between 12 to 15 meters in depth are created. Generally these pits are reclaimed by filling, afforestation, pastureland development.

➤ *Tidal regulator :*

Tidal regulators were constructed by the Government to act as a barrier between the agricultural land and salinity. The regulators reverse the natural flow of water from the sea to the land. To further augment the benefits of the regulators, ACF excavated link canals from the tidal regulators to the villages. This has given the villagers numerous benefits of the project. In just one village Panch Pipalwa 67 farmers covering an area of 234Ha benefited, with all their wells being recharged. There is now multi-cropping in the area and agriculture yields are higher by at least 30 percent and the salinity in drinking water wells has reduced.

➤ *Roof Rain Water Harvesting Structures :*

The droughts and water salinity in Kodinar area created a serious drinking water crisis for many years. Villagers were forced to either walk unreasonable distances to collect water or had to depend on the uncertain tanker water provided by the local authorities. In almost all cases without exception, the women and girls in the families had to shoulder the responsibility of collecting water. This meant a large chunk of daytime was spent on this activity and very often young girls had to drop out of school to help out in this chore.

ACF has promoted a simple and cost effective means to deal with the problem. Roof Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RRWHS) have been built in homes. RRWHS are simple structures that collect fresh rain water during the monsoons and store it in underground tanks for use throughout the year.

In addition to the RRWHS, ACF has also renovated wells to provide drinking water to the villagers. The renovation of wells has greatly improved the quality of the water in these wells.

IV. CONCLUSION

Early on, in the part of Gujarat where ACL was based, drought and availability of fresh water was a major problem. Water Resource Management became the first focus area, with the company focussing on community action, behaviour change, and building infrastructure like ponds and check dams to harvest and retain water. This has dramatically improved water availability, affecting agriculture, animal rearing, health, sanitation and environments-creating green patches in the desert. Focusing on the most significant problem faced by the community yielded incredible goodwill and local insight. Watershed Development Programme of Ambuja Cement Ltd. covered 9, 000 ha in the last four years. In the journey of water conservation measures estimated recharge of water through water harvesting structures reached 19,405 MCM. Which

brings upgradation and reclamation of 21,000 acres of unfertile lands. These activities put organisation to recognise by different National Awards.

Their work in water management and salinity mitigation in Gujarat has become a model for them. They have applied some of the water management techniques to other locations and found them to be just as effective.

Their projects have been appreciated by their people and governmental and non-governmental organisations. They would be very keen in sharing their experiences and learning with other organisations working in the same field. ACF's water management projects in Marwar Mundwa, Rajasthan, bagged a **National award for Excellence in Water Management, 2012, in the "Excellent Water Management Initiatives- Beyond the Fence"** category. **ACF has also bagged the first prize in the 'Community Initiatives by Industry' category at the FICCI Water Awards 2013.**

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