

A study on women empowerment in North-east India through corporate social responsibility practices

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ABSTRACT

Corporates that focus on women's empowerment via their social duties have opened a new road that leads to both company development and targeted women's self-development. In India, the empowerment of women has gained importance in recent decades. Most of the studies conducted in the CSR field are concentrated on education, and rural development and less focus on women empowerment in northeast India. Thus, this research gains importance and tries to bridge the gap in CSR and women empowerment literature. The purpose of the study was to examine the importance of women empowerment in the northeast for shaping the country's economic condition and further to find the relationship between CSR and women empowerment. Descriptive research was conducted to collect the data based on the information reported by the Indian companies.

Key words: Women empowerment, women issues, empowerment, corporate social responsibility, gender equality

INTRODUCTION

Empowering women is considered the key element of sustainable development goals in the 21st century. Without the participation of women, a country cannot achieve its economic development (Dhakal, 2018). Women's empowerment is considered as an improvement in the social, economic, legal and political strength of women in the society and also ensure equality (Jamali and Karam, 2016). According to World Bank, empowerment means enhancing the individual or a group capacity to transform their desired actions and outcomes into reality and make a purposive choice. Despite the government's efforts, the situation remains bleak, owing to educated women's unwillingness to move forward and their

attachment to outdated conventions. There is a need to raise awareness to achieve the goal of women empowerment (Nayak and Mahanta, 2009). The concept of women empowerment has emerged during the women movement in the 1980s when women were not satisfied with the prevailing developing discourse, emphasis on raising the women voice, leading to organising and a movement for gender equality in society (Sridevi, 2015). In a country like India, on its developing stage both the men and women have to work together to make India an economically developed nation and Empowering the woman not only to survive of her family but also act as an important tool towards the development of the nation (Duflo, 2012). And as the United nation declared that to tackle the present global challenges, achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is necessary to have a better future. As most Indian women are lacking behind with modern technology and other things. So it is the responsibility of the government to empower women. But government alone cannot complete such projects without the help of companies to empower the women through various CSR activities such as vocational and livelihood programs implementation of empowering women would be possible (Roberts, 2015; Batliwala, 2007). Corporate social responsibility is defined as a strategy of a company in improving their image among the stakeholders and taking responsibility for the organisation's impact on the environment and by helping the society beyond the regularity compliances of the government.

Women are an essential part of every community, and their position is strongly tied to social and cultural traditions, economic growth stages attained, educational levels, and political achievements for women in society (Mehra, 1997). There is always been a long debate among the researcher regarding women empowerment through the CSR activities of the companies and generating economic stability for the country (Jatana and Crowther, 2007). Corporate social responsibility has originated in 1950 in the USA but has become popular during 1908-2000 when the companies have started recognizing and accepting their responsibility towards society (Saxena,1994). In recent decades, the emphasis on women's empowerment by companies are growing rapidly. And there is strong evidence by the researcher regarding women workforce participation helping in increasing GDP and economic prosperity and corporates claim to have various programs for empowering women which helps in breezing the gap in gender equality in society (Coleman, 2010). In India, Corporate social responsibility has gone through several stages. Some of the companies have shown tremendous efforts to make substantial differences in society and quality of life (Aggarwal and Singh, 2019). According to the world economic forum (2013), in the context of CSR, empowering women refers to narrating cooperatives, caring and lifting themselves and others out of poverty and acting as a tool for economic development for the country. Women empowerment is possible through the corporate social responsibility of a company by providing facilities to the women and most of the CSR programs are focused on individual economic empowerment and aiming at the specific outcome for wealth accumulation and it is considered the best CSR practice implemented by various companies (Abraham, 2013). Despite the increase in technology and modernisation, in India, women are still lacking behind in terms of their participation in economic development. According to Dhakal (2018), the issues of low women labour participation could be resolved through the active

involvement of the companies through various CSR programs. And for attaining sustainable development corporate should take measures towards gender equality and women empowerment in society through various CSR programs (Vilke et al., 2014). Although since the 1950s, development organisations have responded to disadvantaged women's need for income by investing small amounts of money in income-generating initiatives (Cornwall et al., 2007). Such programs frequently fail because they are driven by welfare rather than development concerns, providing women with transitory and part-time jobs in traditionally feminine professions like knitting and sewing, which have constrained markets. On contrary, certain nonprofit groups, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have been successful in improving women's economic position during the last two decades because they began with the concept that women are essential to economic growth. The study conducted by Kabeer (2005), demonstrate that the introduction of various development programs and policies by the government with the help of companies can enable women to challenge current changing conditions in the society and empower them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Objectives

- a) To examine CSR role in women empowerment.
- b) To examine CSR programs implemented by the companies in Northeast India.
- c) To examine the benefit of Women empowerment in shaping Northeast India.

Methodology

Most of the studies conducted in the CSR field are concentrated on education, rural development and less focus on women empowerment. Further, there are fewer studies conducted for Northeast India. Thus, with this gap, this research gains importance and tries to bridge the gap in the literature of CSR and women empowerment. The research is descriptive in nature and based on the information provided by the Indian companies. The data were collected from the companies CSR reports and through the National CSR portal of India with special reference to Northeast India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Companies' CSR efforts towards women empowerment in Northeast India

The government has implemented various policies and programs for the development of women in society and empowering them. Even though the government accelerating efforts towards women empowerment is not enough to resolve women problems in the country.

Thus, the companies should come forward with various programs as corporate social responsibility measures for resolving women issues by providing them with various vocational training and sustainable livelihood. After the Amendment of the Companies Act 2013, some groups of the companies must contribute 2% of their profits towards CSR activities. As per the National CSR data (2020), 4% of the total CSR funds are contributed toward the women empowerment programs.

Oil India Limited efforts towards women empowerment

Oil India Limited has made an effort toward women empowerment by providing three years diploma in the GNM (General Nursing and Midwifery) in Oil Nursing School, Duliajan, Assam to the 30 students and training them to become GNM. All the facilities are provided free of cost. The company launched Handicraft training and production centre are also provided by the company for empowering women especially in the state of Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Handicraft training was started in 1984 and since then, every month nearly 40 underprivileged women are trained in sewing machines, cutting, tailoring and embroidery. A flagship CSR program Rupantar was launched in the Assam state for the creation and providing training for self-help groups (SHG) in various fields. Since its inception company can create 3,531 Self Help Group in Assam.

Indian Oil Corporation Limited efforts towards women empowerment

Before there was a shortage of nurses in the northeast region. But after the establishment of the Assam oil nursing school in Assam, has helped the region in bridging the gap of a qualified nurse. It provides an opportunity for the girl child to get the best training and bright career. The company provided a computer in Govt. regional ITI for women, Tinsukia and entrepreneur development program was launched with the help of NSICL for the underprivileged women of the rural areas of Tinsukia districts in Assam. The company has provided Tata sumo to the women residing in the East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh as an effort towards women empowerment. In the year 2017-18, women in the Northeast were provided with 90 days of residential training in industrial sewing machines operator course in ITI Guwahati. As a CSR initiative by the company, 20 sewing machines were provided to each of 20 women who were underprivileged and skilled with fashion designing as a motive for increasing their financial power.

Oil and Natural Gas Limited efforts on women empowerment

ONGC has been consistent in promoting gender equality and also promoting women empowerment within the organization as well as in the area of operations. As an initiative towards women empowerment, ONGC has launched Water Hyacinth craft for the underprivileged women residing in the district of Sivasagar, Assam and were trained to become self-reliable and have a sustainable livelihood. 50 women were provided training out of which, 20 become trainers, and 5 women were trained in advanced design in the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Along with this, 120 women were trained in welding and gas cutting.

National Hydro Power Corporation Limited efforts on women empowerment

As a corporate social responsibility, NHPC has assisted in imparting the skill development and training for the women in the Sikkim state to promote self-sufficiency and generate employment by establishing a sanitary napkin unit for women empowerment in the year 2018-19.

Indigo efforts on women empowerment

With the initiative of the program, Indigo shakti enables 1500 women of the 24 villages of Ri-bhoi districts of Meghalaya enriched the women lives and allowed increase their income. The company help the women in the multiplication of the spices in the area by providing agriculture training. This effort towards women empowerment has reflected the relentless commitment of the company in strengthening the micro-economy of the country.

Besides the above-mentioned CSR activities towards women empowerment, many other companies are contributing and making an effort to bring changes in the livelihood of women. The companies have invested a large amount towards the empowerment and development of women in Northeast India (Table no. 2).

Table no. 2

CSR investment by the companies towards Women empowerment in Northeast India during 2015-2020 (INR Lakh)						
Sr no.	States	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
1	Assam	118	342	37	218	55
2	Arunachal Pradesh	NIL	NIL	NIL	1312	NIL
3	Manipur	2	NIL	6	NIL	NIL
4	Meghalaya	NIL	2	NIL	NIL	NIL
5	Mizoram	NIL	2	4	1	NIL
6	Nagaland	NIL	3	NIL	NIL	NIL
7	Sikkim	1	NIL	NIL	5	NIL
8	Tripura	NIL	2	NIL	21	NIL
9	Rest of the state	12,158	13,815	25,078	22,049	24,514
Total		12,279	14,162	25,125	23,606	24,569

Source: National CSR portal, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Govt. of India

After the analyse and from the above discussion (Table no. 2) it has to be admitted that as compared to the rest of the states in the country very fewer women empowerment programs is been conducted in the northeast regions. As per the data provided in the National CSR portal, the CSR investment pattern by the companies in the Northeast states are very minimal and it could be seen that (Table no. 2) out of 8 states in the Northeast only Assam is provided with some women empowerment programs consistently during the five financial years from 2015-2020. And the states Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura are very much less considering the women empowerment programs in the last five years.

CONCLUSION:

In the current scenario of the country, Women are still fighting for their rights and status in society even after the implementation of various policies for women. In the Northeast also the scenario are similar. From the analysis, it can be concluded that though the various women empowerment programs are implemented by the government of India and also encourages women by providing free compulsory education, equal job opportunities, assisting in livelihood, and promoting in politics, still a very less focus is given towards the women development in Northeast part of the country. Out of total investment of CSR towards women development and livelihoods, only 2.13 % was invested in the Northeast region which is considered as less investment. Northeast comprises Eight states and the amount invested in women empowerment is not sufficient to meet the needs. Thus, more women-centric programs are required in the northeast for the development of women. Besides, creating an awareness of women rights in the rural areas, and motivating women to stand for their rights will have a positive impact. From the study, it was also found that empowering women would lead to strong economic development for the country. In the Northeast, women are dependent on agriculture with low income, thus companies should come forward and provide a woman with the opportunity to enhance their income and quality of livelihood through their CSR activities. Further, a positive relationship was found between the corporate social responsibility activities and women empowerment towards the upliftment of women in the society and provide them with sustainable livelihood.

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