

Research Article

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## Exploring opportunities for CSR interventions in small cities: A case study of Varanasi

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### Abstract:

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not a new concept in India. Ever since their inception, corporate giants like the Tata Group, the Aditya Birla Group, and Indian Oil Corporation, have been serving the society. Tata Steel even came up with the famous tagline - "And we also make steel". In earlier times, a CSR activity of any organisation usually meant donations and charity events. However, today corporations are increasingly taking CSR as an integral part of their activities. The basic objective of CSR in these days is to maximize the company's overall impact on the society and stakeholders. CSR policies, practices and programs are being comprehensively integrated by an increasing number of companies throughout their business operations and processes. A growing number of corporates feel that CSR is not just another form of indirect expense but is important for protecting the goodwill and reputation, defending attacks and increasing business competitiveness.

### BACKGROUND

#### Corporate Social Responsibility

Across the globe, the concept of CSR has been accepted as an element for success and survival of business along with fulfilling social objectives. Demands for CSR may be viewed in the context of four major arguments (**Porter and Kramer, 2006**):

- 1) Moral obligation to "do the right thing";
- 2) Sustainability, focused on environmental and community stewardship;
- 3) License to operate, since corporations need approval to do business; and
- 4) Reputation in terms of the company's image, brand, morale, or stock value.

Michael Hopkins' explains CSR as follows: (**MHC International Ltd.**)

1. Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned with treating the stakeholders of a company or institution ethically or in a responsible manner. 'Ethically or responsible' means treating key stakeholders in a manner deemed acceptable according to international norms.
2. Social includes economic and environmental responsibility. Stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside.

3. The wider aim of social responsibility is to create higher and higher standards of living, while preserving the profitability of the corporation or the integrity of the institution, for peoples both within and outside these entities.
4. CSR is a process to achieve sustainable development in societies.

#### Benefits of CSR

As mentioned earlier, CSR should not be viewed as a mere expense to a company. It translates into long term financial performance, better business environment and stake holder confidence. (**Prasad, 2015**) states the following benefits of CSR for any corporation:

- Improved financial performance;
- Lower operating costs;
- Enhanced brand image and reputation;
- Increased sales and customer loyalty;
- Greater productivity and quality;
- More ability to attract and retain employees;
- Reduced regulatory oversight;
- Access to capital;
- Workforce diversity;
- Product safety and decreased liability.

### The City of Varanasi

According to P.V. Kane, "Banaras has been a holy city for at least thirty centuries." (V Jairam)

The holy city of Varanasi is a beautiful heritage city situated on the banks of the river Ganges. But large number of national and international tourists and pilgrims and an apathetic administration have led to a deterioration of living conditions. With the adoption of modern culture, the city has witnessed tremendous change. The city is struggling amidst garbage and filth. The river Ganges, which is known as the heart of the city, along with historic ghats is also not untouched with the impact of pollution. It seems to turn to a dumping ground both for the tourists who visit the city as well as the residents rather than to be a sacred and pious centre.

This paper focuses on the aspect of environment (including waste management, sanitation, etc) and employment generation. These indicators for the city of Varanasi are discussed in brief below:

#### Pollution Levels in Varanasi, India

Air Pollution	81.82	Very High
Drinking Water Pollution and Inaccessibility	53.12	Moderate
Dissatisfaction with Garbage Disposal	78.12	High
Dirty and Untidy	81.25	Very High
Noise and Light Pollution	59.38	Moderate
Water Pollution	71.88	High
Dissatisfaction to Spend Time in the City	67.50	High
Dissatisfaction with Green and Parks in the City	60.71	High

**Note:** If the value is 0, it means it is perceived as very low, and if the value is 100, it means it is perceived as very high. Source: World Health Organization (September 2015)

The table above clearly suggest for some serious steps/action. The city produces almost 520 MT garbage every day. It is not only the task of the Municipality and government bodies; it becomes the task of each and every organization commencing their business in Varanasi.

#### Employment Scenario in Varanasi:

Varanasi district occupies an area of 1,535 square kilometres (593 sq mi) and as of the 2011 Census of India had a population of 3,682,194. (2011 census). According to the 2006 City Development Plan for Varanasi, approximately 29% of Varanasi's population

is employed. Approximately 40% are employed in manufacturing, 26% work in trade and commerce, 19% work in other services, 8% work in transport and communication, 4% work in agriculture, 2% work in construction, and 2% are marginal workers (working for less than half of the year). (Source: JnNURM 2006)

The author feels a huge scope for employment of local individuals in the hometown itself (Varanasi) in CSR division of the organizations.

### MAJOR INTERVENTIONS: GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE

#### Government Initiatives:

- Steps have been taken by Central Government in the form of Swachh Bharat Mission. This step is a joint effort of the government and private bodies.
- A *chaupal* (public meeting) is being conducted on regular basis in different areas of city to make the people conscious about proper disposal of wastes. The chaupal activity was initiated after getting inspired by the PM Narendra Modi's vision of clean Kashi. The main aim of conducting such gathering was to solve the civic problems.
- In a major initiative aimed at promoting energy efficiency in the city of Varanasi, Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of State (IC) Power, Coal and New & Renewable Energy has launched Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP) and LED-Based Smart Street Light programmes in Varanasi.

#### Private Interventions:

- The Taj Group claims an exponential increase in the acquisition of artisanal and handloom weaver's works for their use since 2010. From generating business worth Rs. 27 lakh in 2010, they touched Rs. 4.46 crore in March 2014. Handloom weaves alone accounted for Rs. 4.10 crore worth of merchandise out of which Banaras weaves account for approximately Rs. 2.14 crores. By this step the handloom weavers who were managing mere Rs 800-2000 per month are now making Rs 9000 per month and the weavers make approximately Rs. 1,800 per sari.
- Toyota Kirloskar plans to construct 500 sanitation units in schools, with 250 in Varanasi and Vaishali. The list of schools has been obtained by the organization from MHRD.
- Jalan Group planned a 7 days Project- Clean Ganga which was carried out with the combined efforts of employees of the group as well as students of Vanvasi Kshatras. The volunteers picked up litter,

removed corpses, animal carcasses and other non bio degradable pollutants from the river. The campaign further gained momentum when local people also joined in to clean the river. The Jalan group has also formed Seth Kisorilal Jalan Seva trust to open Seth Kisorilal Jalan Saraswati Shisu Mandir and Higher Secondary School to provide education.

### SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As evident from the study, although some major interventions have been made by corporations in Varanasi for the betterment of the city, there are a lot of areas which still need attention. The author suggests the following:

1. A mini disposal unit should be present in Hotels and Hospitals to dispose the waste produced by the respective organization.
2. Proper toilet facilities should be in the market area of the city.
3. Since there is a dearth of workers in the municipality, number of dustbins in the city should be increased.

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