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# **A STUDY OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN INDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A progressive and enlightened world order envisions a gender uniform society where men and women are treated alike. However, the reality in the Indian sub-continent is pretty abysmal in this regard with the constant and continued perpetuation of gender biases. This targeted oppression of women has been evinced throughout Indian history and it is only in recent times that corporate firms have been drawn into the struggle for gender equality. Moreover, while it is accepted that gender prejudices are systemic in societies it is also accepted that the abnormal presence of such stereotypes within the communal institutions of the country negatively impacts its development and growth. Accordingly, this realization has given rise to a collective consciousness on the part of the corporate houses to inform this battle against bigotry in tune to elevating India to the status of a global powerhouse.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Today's age of reformist social order, the obligation to fight against developmental challenges is vital to the realisation of progressive objectives. Adapting and tackling poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, food, energy and water insecurity, lack of health care and nutrition along with climate change is a pre-requisite action prior to the realisation of any strategic operation or business endeavour. It is for this reason that the private sector is now increasingly relied upon for the purpose of boosting community action by beefing up technological particulars and applying more inclusive business models for the purpose of improve the livelihood of many low-income households while at the same time enhancing the efficiency of natural resources and decreasing environmental degradation. The concept of social upliftment which used to be a congenial and diminutive essence of philanthropy or protest movements has now extrapolated its manifestation into a form of responsibility vested upon the forerunners of business enterprises in the country by virtue of the stakes held by them in the process of development and nation-building.

As a corporate entrepreneur, one needs to be responsible to the environment in which he or she is operating. Corporate Social Responsibility, hereinafter referred to as CSR, thus includes all those practices or initiatives which help the society by inspiring the lives of the under-privileged and lend a hand in their upliftment. Among the new and emerging facets of CSR dynamics, women empowerment is an area of extra-ordinary relevance that demands particular attention. Gender equality and women empowerment are not just the regular elements in the next parade of philanthropic conundrums; rather they are indeed important aspects of organisational culture, good economics and accountability. Economically empowered women are often the stimulants for progress of the community and the society at large. Their roles in the home-making and domestic undermined, it is their affirmative voice and action on social arena through productive employment which makes a difference with regard to wholesome household as well as societal prosperity. An investment into the health and domestic accomplishments by women is a literal reflection of more investment into the capital of the future and therefore demonstrates a furthering aspect with regard to their contribution in commissarial society too.

## **II. POLICY FRAMEWORK OF CSR IN INDIA**

CSR as a radical and reformist invigoration has been given by the European Union which describes it as "the concept that an enterprise is accountable for its impact on all relevant stakeholders. It is the continuing commitment by business to behave fairly and responsibly, and

contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the work force and their families as well as of the local community and society at large.”<sup>1</sup> The commercial success of a corporate establishment is often viewed with a skewed lens of pointing towards acts of social neglect or unequivocal moral oversights. Capitalist regimes propelled by the wave of industrial revolution in western societies today are not exactly how they were imagined to be at the time of its inception, i.e. a myriad invasion into public undertakings without any acknowledgeable attempts to help in its construction. However, as the importance of being socially responsible increases every day, national governments around the world continue to generate schemes and provisions for responsible and socially obligatory corporate regimes to flourish.

Legislative advocacy with regard to CSR is a recent enumeration envisaged through the Companies Act, 2013<sup>2</sup>. Most of them are concerted efforts to integrate the preservation of corporate establishments in harmony with the community standards of peaceful co-existence in the country. The provision of proportionate allocation of resources for the realisation of CSR objectives and attainment of value-based research and development is a preconditioned investment in the process of fulfilling equivocal social obligations. Companies are essentially categorised on the basis of annual turnover of profits for the purpose of determining their contribution in the direction of meeting social responsibilities and it is ensured that the resources are allocated to pertinent channels of progressive exercise.<sup>3</sup> Such mandates are also subjected to the compulsory review and scrutiny of the individuals in charge of governance of the company; namely the Board of Directors.<sup>4</sup> Active ratification by shareholders and provision for substantiated inputs are crucial to the display of CSR Policy by a company. Besides, the

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<sup>1</sup> A Renewed EU Strategy 2011-14 For Corporate Social Responsibility (2011) [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/\\_getdocument.cfm?doc\\_id=7010](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/_getdocument.cfm?doc_id=7010) , (last accessed 15 September 2015.)

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter referred to as Act. § 135 of the Act mandates any company which falls under any of the following criteria to adopt the constitution a CSR Committee, formulate a CSR Policy and spend minimum 2% of its average net profit during 3 immediately preceding financial years on CSR activities as prescribed in Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013:

- I. Net worth of Rs. 500 crores or more or
- II. Turnover of Rs. 1000 crores or more or
- III. Net Profit of Rs. 5 crores or more

Source: GE CAPITAL SERVICES INDIA, POLICY ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ('CSR') ( November 14, 2014 ) [hereinafter Policy No.: V1.0 of 2014 ]. Available at [http://www.gecapital.in/GECSI\\_Corporate\\_Social\\_Responsibility\\_\(CSR\)\\_Policy%20v1\\_14Nov2014.pdf](http://www.gecapital.in/GECSI_Corporate_Social_Responsibility_(CSR)_Policy%20v1_14Nov2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> KPMG India, *Corporate Social Responsibility in India a Changing Landscape* (2012). Available at <http://www.kpmg.com/IN/en/Documents/CSR%E2%80%93A-changing-landscape.pdf>. (Last accessed 15 September 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Parminder Kaur, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender in Workplace*, 2 Int'l J. of Human. & Soc. Sci. Invention 36-40 (2013) available at [http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v2\(11\)/Version-3/H021103036040.pdf](http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v2(11)/Version-3/H021103036040.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

companies which do not fall under any of the threshold mentioned above may also actively pursue CSR programmes and initiatives as per the provisions enshrined under Schedule VII of the Act.<sup>5</sup>

Schedule VII essentially lays down a thematic conception of the methodical approach and precise implementation of the CSR goals envisioned by companies.<sup>6</sup> It is however observed on various occasions that the approach is left to the disposition of the CSR committee which may increase or decrease its margins of implementation once the committee's formation is finalised. Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, an institution under the aegis of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has also been established to moderate the flexibility in the above changes and create an enabling environment for their operation.<sup>7</sup>

### III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE BY DICTION OF VARIOUS APPROACHES TO CSR

Literature on this issue not only hails from business and management but also from sociology, politics and international development, adding to the diversity of opinions. Given the model significance of corporate governance in a fast-emerging commercialised economy, review of theories and philosophies with particular highlight to gender issues is a must requisite to the realisation of a gender-neutral and woman empowering organisational behaviour in corporate atmosphere.

Institutional work in these environments gives out a sum of three different perspectives on gender and CSR which range from a plethora of civic theories from liberalism to socialism. They can be summarised as follows

#### 1. The Strategic Perspective

The surmise of this approach is relied heavily upon the "business case of equal opportunities."<sup>8</sup> The conventional business theories which emphasise upon a profit-driven scheme of operation are conveniently accommodated within this theory by envisioning a state of perfect business atmosphere wherein paying and doing well to women employees incidentally catalyses the

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<sup>5</sup>¶ id

<sup>6</sup>Ministry of Law & Justice, THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 (2013). Available at <http://www.mca.gov.in/Ministry/pdf/CompaniesAct2013.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> ¶ Supra 4

<sup>8</sup> Lauren McCarthy, Gender & Corporate Social Responsibility in the Value Chain: Three Perspectives (CRRRC Conference, Bordeaux 2012), [http://www.crrconference.org/Previous\\_conferences/downloads/crrc2012mccarthy.pdf](http://www.crrconference.org/Previous_conferences/downloads/crrc2012mccarthy.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

process of enterprise.<sup>9</sup> Economic empowerment is viewed as a feasible and more attainable target over social and political empowerment by inclusion of women empowerment as one of the prominent goals under CSR objectives. Often the discussion on women's rights is analysed through a concocted prism of feminist ideals which makes it impossible to envision the economic potential of such a venture beyond a certain point. Gender inequality is not just a prejudicial caricature of a certain sex in society; very often it reflects a relationship between two actors, the state and the individual.<sup>10</sup> In the present scenario, the two actors correspond to the individual and the corporate and the pertinent disparity in question can be resolved by extensive training and monitoring, to equip women with the quintessential modern faculties of corporate management.

A particular mention to publicly traded companies could be accorded in this instance since there is an element of instrumental stakeholder that is accorded to the company in this situation. Since publicly traded shares are vested on the common-man therefore it becomes worthwhile to arrange for the common men, or in this instance, women to work up to their own cause in a most-conducive corporate environment.<sup>11</sup> Such an effort is a conscious turn towards the market in a liberal egalitarian political thought. However, one of the shortcomings of the strategic perspective is its vision of women as 'critical resources' who have no scope of contribution to the extent of contractual transactions.<sup>12</sup> This is even more derisively contentious considering the fact that the nature of most of the women employees in this tome of discussion is contractual and therefore not set in concrete.

## 2. The Rights-Based Perspective

The literature in this perspective is heavily influenced by the annals of liberalism, particularly social liberalism. Most of the social liberals substantiate the arguments of Martha Nussbaum and Moller-Okin that liberalism is the foundational element of feminism.<sup>13</sup> Their theory is imbued in the idea that gender inequality not only diminishes productive potential of half of

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<sup>9</sup> Kalaimani .G , *Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Women Entrepreneurial Development* , 7 Int'l Res. J. for Bus. Mgmt.(2014), <http://irjbm.org/irjbm2013/Dec2014/spaper9.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Jenkins Beth, Kara Valikai & Piya Baptista , *The Coca-Cola Company's 5by20 Initiative Empowering Women Entrepreneurs Across the Value Chain*(Cambridge, MA: The CSR Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School & Bus. Fights Poverty. 2013), [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI/CSRI\\_BusinessFightsPoverty\\_5by20Report\\_September2013.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI/CSRI_BusinessFightsPoverty_5by20Report_September2013.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> ¶ Supra 9

<sup>12</sup> ¶ Supra 9

<sup>13</sup> Moller-Okin, S. , *Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions'Ethics*, 108 Soc. & Pol. Phil. 661-684 (1998), <http://philpapers.org/rec/OKIFAM> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

the human race but it also robs the fairer sex of their elementary civic and human rights.<sup>14</sup> This is how it differs from the strategic perspective in reasoning out the justification of women empowerment on the basis of social liberalism and not economic liberalism which has often been antithetical to feminism on various other occasions.<sup>15</sup>

Gender is not a social construct; rather it is about experience, identity and power. Therefore, feminist theories and social liberalism are central to conceiving the nuanced realisation of CSR objectives under this perspective. The rights-based perspective doesn't adhere to general standards of occupation and circumstances for both sexes, rather it believes in making a concerted effort to adapt and cater to women's conditions in corporate sphere.

### 3. The Critical Feminist Perspective

This theory embossed in plurality of feminist ideals that mostly revolves around the gender based power relations as viewed under a socialistic lens. It says that since the reproductive functions of women are cardinal to their social subjugation, so it is high time that the work of women on domestic fronts is also explored on similar parity as their work in a corporation.<sup>16</sup> Since the foundational ethos of capitalism is premised on maximum profit-oriented operation under cheap input management, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the unpaid work of women on home turf that goes unaccounted for in lieu of having no direct bearing on capitalist output while in actual practice, they contribute largely towards sorting out major performance logjams and ameliorating institutional drawbacks in the process of corporate employment.

Critical Feminist Approach is a major critique of the strategic as well as rights based approach so much so that it dismantles the basis of liberalised philosophy behind attaining gender equality in a way that theorises neo-political and Marxist-socialist approach to be the cornerstone with regard to establishing equal rights for women not by choice, but by existence.<sup>17</sup>

At the heart of all the above imploding theories are basic questions pertaining to the situational crisis of gender equality rights in corporate workplaces. Most of the theories are not a strict

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<sup>14</sup> ¶ id

<sup>15</sup> ¶ Supra 14

<sup>16</sup> ¶ Supra 9

<sup>17</sup> Narender Kumar & Ms. Hitu, *Empowerment of Women Corporate Social Responsibility in India*, 2 Int'l J. of Enhanced Res. in Educ. Dev. 25-27 (2014), [http://www.erpublications.com/uploaded\\_files/download/download\\_05\\_04\\_2014\\_11\\_11\\_15.pdf](http://www.erpublications.com/uploaded_files/download/download_05_04_2014_11_11_15.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

categorisation into their parent affiliations, so to speak, considering the communion of feminist and neo-socialist concept in many of them. However, what they do seek to achieve altogether is a broader attention and analysis of gender and CSR, irrespective of whether they are motivated and justified by business case, human rights discourses or political struggle.<sup>18</sup>

## V. WEP AS A PART OF CSR

A comprehensive analysis of the CSR activities brought out to the fore by the top 100 companies on BSE index was conducted chiefly on the 3 basic parameters of Design, Deliver and Disclose. Increased dependence of women employment figures in manufacturing sector raised new concerns regarding protection of their interests in the business front as a whole new community.<sup>19</sup> Global Reporting Initiative reports that the proportion of women in value chains sector continues to increase by the day without substantial increase in the degree of CSR benefits meted out to them although it is claimed on behalf of MNCs that the benefits are accrued evenly across all communities.<sup>20</sup> With companies like Vodafone and Coca-Cola recruiting more number of women to cater to their distribution business and the employment of women in the 'base of the pyramid' initiated operations of Hindustan Unilever, prominence of gender issues in corporate practice has gained momentum.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, promotion of gender equity, despite criticism, has seen growing attention in practice.

While CSR theories had long ago identified the need for women's empowerment as a constituent element of CSR, there was little clarity on the matter up until the recent induction of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)<sup>22</sup>. The WEP provides organisations and companies with a uniform implementation platform to promote women's empowerment as a crucial mandate of its CSR strategies. These are a set of seven principles that were developed in an international multi-stakeholder consultation process and were launched in March 2010. As of today, more than 450 CEO's worldwide are signatories to the WEPs.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of 'Equality Means Business' underlies the core philosophy behind the WEPs. These principles make out the business case for corporate philanthropy in the light of gender

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<sup>18</sup> ¶ Supra 5

<sup>19</sup> Anupam Sharma & Ravi Kiran, *Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives of Major Companies of India with Focus on Health, Education and Environment*, 4 Afr. J. of Basic & Applied Sci. 95-105 (2012), [http://www.idosi.org/ajbas/ajbas4\(3\)12/6.pdf](http://www.idosi.org/ajbas/ajbas4(3)12/6.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> McKinsey & Company, *A Business Case for Women*, 2008 The McKinsey Q. (2008).

<sup>21</sup> ¶ Supra 5

<sup>22</sup> The WEPs emerged out of a collaboration between the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Global Compact.

<sup>23</sup> WEPs, UNGC, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights- Explanatory Note

sensitive action programmes. A body of convincing evidence<sup>24</sup> exists that substantiates the belief that women in posts of responsibility play a pivotal role in increasing a company's efficiency thereby making them more profitable.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, they attract a larger talent pool and help keep attrition in check while mitigating litigation risks associated with discriminatory behaviour.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in today's dynamic business model for corporate structures to retain the top positions they must align themselves to a progressive worldview where women are no longer denied access to leadership positions.<sup>27</sup>

The present principles work in tandem with pre-existing guidelines governing international corporate regimes such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) as well as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The central theme evinced in the UNGC is the perpetuation of internationally recognized human rights.<sup>28</sup> The support and respect of such rights is better advanced by the Guiding Principles that provide for an authoritative and uniform global standard for measuring, safeguarding as well as addressing the negative impacts of business activities in the human rights domain. These guidelines enjoy a broader ambit than the WEPs and eliminate the luxury of an exhaustive list of principles such that the guiding principles call for actions that may not have been identified under the WEPs.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the corporate commitment to further and uphold international human rights is a premise that is common to all three guidelines and the WEP supplements this endeavour by providing corporate institutions with a gender roadmap for implementation.

Psychologically speaking empowerment is reflected through a recognized set of four cognitive indicators such as competence, self-determination as well as the meaning and impact of the

<sup>24</sup>World Bank, World Development Report (2012), <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>25</sup>McKinsey & Co., Gender Diversity: A Corporate Performance Driver (2007), <http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/other/women-matter-oct-2007> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Eugene A. & Imhoff Jr., Accounting Quality, Auditing & Corporate Governance (Ernst & Young, Understanding Companies Accounting Bill 2013, Mich. 2013). <http://down.cenet.org.cn/upfile/47/2008106211917184.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> ICRW and Dalberg analysis of 31 corporate-funded programs., The Business Case for Women's Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach (2010), [http://www.oakfnd.org/sites/default/files/The%20Business%20Case%20for%20Womens%20Economic%20Empowerment\\_5November.pdf](http://www.oakfnd.org/sites/default/files/The%20Business%20Case%20for%20Womens%20Economic%20Empowerment_5November.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015). See also Catalyst, The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity, January 2004 <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/82/the-bottom-line-connecting-corporate-performance-and-gender-diversity>

<sup>28</sup> ¶ Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Chantale Stevenson, Corporate Social Responsibility: The Role of Business in the Empowerment of Women in the Workplace (Wayne State Univ. Report 2014), [http://www.umb.edu/editor\\_uploads/images/mgs/mgs\\_conflictres/25\\_Corporate\\_Social\\_Responsibility\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Business\\_in\\_the\\_Empowerment\\_of\\_Women\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace.pdf](http://www.umb.edu/editor_uploads/images/mgs/mgs_conflictres/25_Corporate_Social_Responsibility_The_Role_of_Business_in_the_Empowerment_of_Women_in_the_Workplace.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).



individual's role in the workplace.<sup>30</sup> The WEP's address these concerns and accordingly provide for seven holistic principles in furtherance of the penultimate goal of empowerment. The principle recommends that businesses must integrate a gender lens via a top-down strategy where the primary target area is the senior management and personnel.<sup>31</sup> Lending a gender perspective to performance evaluations and making business leaders accountable for such gender equality goals; while simultaneously providing for an intra-organizational platform that encourages corporate heads to integrate best practices into the workplace<sup>32</sup> can aid in successful application of these principles.

The Guiding Principles further consolidate the promise to respect all human rights including women's rights by advocating for a publicly available policy commitment that is approved by senior personnel and is clearly communicated both externally and internally to the members of the corporate body. An explicit note of the business's commitment to support women's rights embodies the spirit of this policy. "Human Rights Due Diligence" as well as "Gender Sensitive Processes to Enable Remediation" as enshrined in the Guiding Principles, can help monitor and preempt the adverse affects of certain business actions and decisions. Conversely, it can ensure that appropriate steps are being taken towards addressing such concerns.<sup>33</sup> The same can be realized by way of intra-organisational grievance or judicial mechanisms such that the interests of the affected party are accounted for.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural norms that influence societal perceptions and attitudes of men and women should not be permitted to perpetuate gender discriminatory practices. The common societal belvedere that women belong at home occupying roles of housewives and mothers while their job is relegated to a secondary commitment negatively impacts the ability of women to strive in their workplace. This custom is especially rampant in India where dogmatic notions on women and

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<sup>30</sup> Gretchen M. Spreitzer, *Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurements, and Validation*, 38 Acad. of Mgmt. J. 1442-1465 (1995), <http://webuser.bus.umich.edu/spreitze/Pdfs/PsychEmpowerment.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Helena Hede Skagerlind & Moa Westman, *Corporate Social Responsibility Through Public-Private Partnerships - Implications for Civil Society and Women's Empowerment in India* (Stockholm University: Dep't of Political Sci. Master Thesis: Minor Field Study 2011), <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:460116/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> ¶Supra 4

<sup>33</sup> The Gender Gap Report accentuates the need for counter measures as well as gender equity drives and initiatives that are closely monitored in order to determine their practical efficacy. See also Enright-Lewis Crawford, 2009, ¶Supra 30

their rights still find a place in the minds of the majority populace.<sup>34</sup> The Constitution of India seeks to remedy this antiquated mindset by advocating for gender equality in its Fundamental Rights as well as the Directive Principles. The National Commission for Women was set up by a Parliamentary Act of 1990 to defend women's legal rights and entitlements. The Indian legal system is constantly inching its way towards an egalitarian society where rights are conferred on a gender-neutral basis. However, these measures are yet to reach their full potential as gender inequality continues to be an abject reality in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, it is imperative that CSR measures promoting gender empowerment are conscientiously developed keeping the socio-cultural realities in mind and are well targeted, focused and unequivocal in their approach.

Consequently, the policy of Gender Mainstreaming is likely to find favour in CSR approaches in India.<sup>35</sup> It is a specific target oriented policy wherein the entire schematic of the organisation including its organisational framework, its growth and assessment programmes are all magnified through a gender lens. This system promotes the incorporation of a gender perspective at all policy stages.<sup>36</sup> Companies should cultivate well-outlined diversity and inclusion agendas aiming to supplement recruitment and retention of female employees. Awareness drives play a crucial role in educating women of their rights and available redressal mechanisms.<sup>37</sup> A policy level change must also negate the timeworn concepts of gender and division of work and allow for more elastic work-life balances such as flexible working hours and career flexibility.<sup>38</sup> Lending a gender perspective to policy changes need not necessarily only act as an impetus to women as men<sup>39</sup> in the workplace will now be afforded with a holistic understanding of gender rights and values thus desensitizing their masculine workplace

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<sup>34</sup> Sayantoni Datta, Empowerment Principles, Why Business Should Care?, Global Compact Network India, Care India, [http://weprinciples.org/files/attachments/WEPS\\_Primer-\\_Global\\_Compact\\_Network,\\_India.pdf](http://weprinciples.org/files/attachments/WEPS_Primer-_Global_Compact_Network,_India.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Deepali Bagati, 2010 India Benchmarking Report (Catalyst Publications, New York 2011), [http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/2010\\_india\\_benchmarking\\_report\\_web.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/2010_india_benchmarking_report_web.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> ¶ Supra 3

<sup>37</sup> Nelson, Jane, Marli Porth, Kara Valikai, and Honor McGee (2015). "A Path to Empowerment: The role of corporations in supporting women's economic progress." Cambridge, MA: The CSR Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Corporate Citizenship Centre.

<sup>38</sup> ¶ Supra 25

<sup>39</sup> Volvo's Walk the Talk initiative and Ernst and Young's Cultivating Men as Allies are initiatives that actively involve men in the gender inclusive agenda. See Jeanine Prime & Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need to Know (Catalyst Publications, New York 2009), [http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Engaging\\_Men\\_In\\_Gender\\_Initiatives\\_What\\_Change\\_Agents\\_Need\\_To\\_Know.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Engaging_Men_In_Gender_Initiatives_What_Change_Agents_Need_To_Know.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

orientation.<sup>40</sup>

There are three key focus areas under CSR namely the workplace, the marketplace and the community. This strategy is closely related to concept of Quadruple Bottom Line Reporting, which weighs the performance of the firm against social, economic as well as environmental markers. The social facet emphasizes on fair and equal treatment of human capital by ensuring equitable wage distribution, a safe work environment as well as carrying out beneficial activities within the community.<sup>41</sup>

### 1. Workplace Oriented Empowerment

Several corporate firms across the world have opted to promote women's empowerment through overall diversity strategies.<sup>42</sup> However, such a strategy may not be ideal for an India centric CSR policy given the country's peculiar socio-political landscape. A more nuanced strategy that allows specific and singular effort to be allocated to the goal of women's empowerment will prove to be more beneficial.<sup>43</sup> Women centric recruitment drives may employ the following tactics: flexible working hours<sup>44</sup>, enhanced parental leave provisions such as paid parental leave which is beyond the minimum legislative directive; early return to work bonuses, extending health insurance<sup>45</sup> to the baby, providing for crèches and day-care. It is imperative that these measures are not simply provided for in isolation but that the workforce is well informed of the same and that senior staff promotes and encourages a work culture where people availing of these schemes are not disrespected.

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<sup>40</sup> See also Gender and Development approach, which states that sustainable development in the workplace hinges on the collective consciousness of the entire workplace along with the recognition that equality of women is not merely a women's issue.

<sup>41</sup> ¶ Supra 35

<sup>42</sup> Survey Results: New Zealand Companies Policies to Empower Women Employees (UN Women: United Nations Global Impact 2010) [hereinafter Women Mean Business], <http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/content/docs/information/women's%20empowerment%20principles-survey%20final.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> ¶ Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> A study conducted by McKinsey revealed that the greatest challenged to employed women is the dual burden of professional and domestic obligations which is further perpetuated by gender stereotypes existing in India. See Women at the Top of Corporations: Making It Happen (McKinsey & Co. 2010) [hereinafter Women Matter 2010], [file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Women\\_Matter\\_2010.pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Women_Matter_2010.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Coca-Cola Amatil carried out a breast cancer awareness campaign and provided free screening services for cervical and prostate cancer respectively.

There should be exclusive focus on women's representation in leadership programmes, training<sup>46</sup> and development programmes<sup>47</sup> as well as recruitment drives<sup>48</sup>. A successful example of such an initiative is the Women in Factories Program set up by the Wal-Mart Foundation.<sup>49</sup> Another plausible step is to introduce diversity outcome and managerial performance indicators thus incentivizing senior personnel in the workforce to work towards empowerment targets.<sup>50</sup>

In today's day and age where gender crimes are on a constant rise, Indian companies may derive additional benefit and successfully persuade women to work long hours if safe travel policies<sup>51</sup> and safe work environments are guaranteed. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) undertook a novel step in this regard. TCS effected a policy level change by introducing an additional code of conduct delineating issues pertaining to Sexual Harassment at the Workplace. This was in consonance with the WEPs and the 2013 Act<sup>52</sup> governing the same.

## 2. Community Oriented Empowerment

Companies should devise empowerment programs that are consciously oriented towards women and girls in their community.<sup>53</sup> The Global Gender Gap Report has consistently recorded India's poor performance in terms of gender equality, and reveals that India is currently the fourth highest ranking country in terms of gender inequality and holds the 140<sup>th</sup> position out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (2021). While it is crucial that this gender gap is expeditiously bridged; the same can be attained only through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders.

Community empowerment schemes may be better affected in collaboration with a local Non Governmental Organisation that has experience working in the territory and is therefore

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<sup>46</sup> UDAAN by TCS seeks to enhance relevant skills sets required in the industry as well as further employment opportunities. See Corporate Sustainability Report (Tata Consultancy Services 2013-2014), [http://www.tcs.com/about/corp\\_responsibility/cs-report/Documents/GRI-2013-Sustainability-Report-271014.pdf](http://www.tcs.com/about/corp_responsibility/cs-report/Documents/GRI-2013-Sustainability-Report-271014.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> This could be done by way of online training programs which add an additional dimension of flexibility.

<sup>48</sup> ¶ Supra 40

<sup>49</sup> This move enables 60,000 female factory workers to participate in an intensive foundational training program that spans 10 hours post which 8,000 high potential workers will be identified and provided an additional 100 hours leadership program. The curriculum encompasses a wide variety of subjects including time management, leadership development, health planning as well as financial planning. Such an incentive based program has helped induce greater enthusiasm and commitment from the female workers in India.

<sup>50</sup> Rebalancing for Gender Equality, Women's Labour Markets in South Asia. (Asian Dev. Bank & Int'l Labour Organisation 2011), <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28620/women-labor-markets.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> These policies could include providing taxis, office cars or security services to escort women travelling at night.

<sup>52</sup> Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

<sup>53</sup> ¶ Supra 13

familiar with the social landscape.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the workforce may be encouraged/required to participate in voluntary work during time off such that these community oriented schemes are feasible and do not substantially detract from the company's profits. These local empowerment programs not only benefit the targeted groups but also act as a catalyst for a mental revolution against archaic gender stereotypes.<sup>55</sup> Schemes promoting rural education play a pivotal role in eliminating the psychological societal impediments to women's empowerment. Accordingly, TCS has developed a free of cost adult literacy program<sup>56</sup> in keeping with its unwavering stance towards women's empowerment.<sup>57</sup>

An agriculture oriented approach could find merit in an India centric CSR policy. Given that nearly a large part of the Indian populace is continuous to be employed in the sustenance sector; such a scheme will help elevate the lives of several women engaged in agricultural activities. The Village Women Dairy Programme launched by Nestle tapped into this potential talent reservoir of female agricultural workers and afforded them with training programs on best farming practices. Such schemes are favoured in the Indian subcontinent as they tackle the very real issue of a sustenance dependent population. Women gain from such schemes as they acquire access to better technology and develop the requisite skill sets for better utilization of resources. This in turn empowers them to gain economic independence and move up the supply chain.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, measures promoting formation of self-help groups and encouraging independent or self-entrepreneurship schemes have found a place in corporate India's CSR strategies.<sup>59</sup> These schemes have proven themselves to be successful in the achievement of their objectives and are a true reflection of the value of tailor made efforts in light of the country's socio-cultural

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<sup>54</sup> ¶Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Deepali Bagati & Nancy M. Carter, *Leadership Gender Gap in India Inc. Myths and Realities*(Catalyst Publications, New York 2010), [http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Leadership\\_Gap\\_in\\_India\\_Inc.\\_Myths\\_and\\_Realities.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Leadership_Gap_in_India_Inc._Myths_and_Realities.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Computer Based Functional Literacy (CBFL), See Corporate Sustainability Report (Tata Consultancy Services 2013-2014), [http://www.tcs.com/about/corp\\_responsibility/cs-report/Documents/GRI-2013-Sustainability-Report-271014.pdf](http://www.tcs.com/about/corp_responsibility/cs-report/Documents/GRI-2013-Sustainability-Report-271014.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> See Transforming Lives and Landscapes Sustainable Cmty. Dev. Initiative Booklet , <http://www.itcportal.com/sustainability/images/ITC-CSR-Booklet-PDF.pdf> (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>58</sup> See Project Shakti-Hindustan Unilever, Enrst and Young Corporate Social Responsibility in India(Global CSR Summit 2013 [http://ngobox.org/event/india\\_csr\\_summit/India%20CSR%20Summit%202014%20Brochure.pdf](http://ngobox.org/event/india_csr_summit/India%20CSR%20Summit%202014%20Brochure.pdf) (last visited Sept. 15, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> The ITC Choupal Women's Empowerment Programme gives assistance to women in rural areas to set up micro-credit self-help groups in order to fund independent entrepreneurship agendas. A classic example of self-employment is the incense stick rolling project that is now recognized as a profitable micro-business. See ¶ Supra 45

realities. An initiative known as Diversity and Women's Network (DAWN) introduced by one of the forerunners<sup>60</sup> of CSR in India can be cited as a prime example towards community empowerment. DAWN provides a support system for women that encourage collective action and collaborative dialogue. It offers leadership and mentoring workshops, health programs as well as discussion platforms to the masses. Such measures help boost the goal of women's empowerment and are especially beneficial in a country like India where women's education and women's need have shared a tumultuous history and have perpetually been relegated to the backseat.

### 3. Marketplace / Supply Chain Initiatives

Corporate giants like Avon<sup>61</sup>, Hindustan Unilever<sup>62</sup> and Coca Cola<sup>63</sup> have incorporated supply chain initiatives into their model of corporate philanthropy. These companies offer women with training and development programs in exchange for acting as their local sales agents. This promotes the notion of independent entrepreneurs and allows the company to target grass root level consumer bases in remote areas. There exists a vast body of evidence to substantiate the profitability of such direct-to-consumer sales initiatives in India.

CSR Policies in developing countries still bear a relatively un-traversed field of corporate governance. The progressive notion of incorporating women's empowerment in CSR strategies is a promising step towards dismantling present societal prejudices and subsequently achieving the penultimate goal of gender equality. This policy idea holds special significance in a country like India where discrimination against women is rampant in all walks of life. In order to emerge as a prosperous global economy the underlying gender gap needs to be bridged such that the untapped potential of the female workforce is realized.

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<sup>60</sup> ¶ Supra 47

<sup>61</sup> Avon Corporate Responsibility (2013) Report

<sup>62</sup> ¶ Supra 40

<sup>63</sup> ¶ Supra 11