

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AND FUNDING FOR RESEARCHES

ABSTRACT :

Quite often various corporations use the term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to denote their donations for social reasons. Corporate bodies are commercial companies whose only target is to make profit. There is no wonder that they would maintain the same target in their CSR activities also. It is known to all that they use CSR activities for two major reasons. These are : (01) Exemption of government taxes, where there are such provisions and (02) Sale Promotion through advertisement. Even though it is usually believed that organizations or people availing various facilities due to CSR gets additional gain due to it, what have been discovered in reality are the following : (01) the activities due to CSR do not come to any "real help", (02) the activities help to create wrong impressions, (03) the activities at times does more harm than benefit for the so called beneficiaries. The above phenomenon in the context of Bangladesh will be the subject of discussion of this article.

INTRODUCTION :

In view of ever-increasing displeasure against the aggressive nature of various corporate bodies, the brains employed by such organizations are constantly endeavoring to devise means to prove or show that they have ample concern for the common people. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one throughout of such endeavor. In this endeavor, the real objective is not ensure welfare of the people, but (i) to show that they are really concerned for their welfare, (ii) to ensure advertisement of the name, brand or product and (iii) tax-evasion, where applicable. Quite often the news and entertainment lords take this opportunity and arrange "round-table talks" and "talent-search" projects respectively. It is now known to all that such ventures ensure profuse financial benefit to both types of lords where they use various affluent corporate bodies as sponsors. It is also known that

- (01) The round-table conferences are one type of get together where they talk for the sake of talking, with no definite target or mission for its fulfillment and
- (02) Talent search creates tremendous disturbances for the educational institutions, the students and their parents.

The experience of this author, however, is that at least some of the corporate-bodies realize the truth and is prepared to show CSR in alternate ways. In this article I shall discuss this issue in brief.

DARK FACES OF “CSR” :

We shall present here in brief the various types of dark faces of “CSR” we notice in Bangladesh. Some of these are :

(01) “CSR” FOR URBAN DWELLERS : Local and foreign visitors may be amazed to see the “beautification of roads” in Khulna city. The islands have been decorated with fences of stainless-steel and other costly materials, the islands have been adorned with sculptures and fountains and even some light posts have been transformed into artificial tree-trunks bejeweled with beautiful elements. All these have been done by the City Corporation with fund from various corporate bodies. Naturally their names glitter in prominent positions. While this is the visible bright side of the story, the invisible side is :

- (i) The city corporation whose responsibility is to supply pure drinking water to the inhabitants has not still been able to meet 70% of the total demand.
- (ii) The city corporation has failed to provide drainage, which is their another prime responsibility.
- (iii) Most of the city roads are in pathetic condition.
- (iv) The city corporation whose another responsibility was “solid waste disposal” has cleverly shifted the same unto a number of NGO’s, where the inhabitants have to pay them and where no tax was lessened.

Thus, in a city where then authorities could not address the most important issues like water supply, sewerage, solid-waste disposal, good roads etc., have spent huge sum for decoration. If the city corporation was asked to prepare a priority list, could they think of “decorating the light posts” before attaining 100% goal in drinking water supply ? This indicates that the corporate bodies are interested to help in the fields where they can find big publicity, and not in the real welfare of the people.

(02) “CSR” FOR THE UNIVERSITIES : Let me narrate a story. On one working day, in a university the teachers heard tremendous sound. When inquired about the source it was reported that one “Entertainment media” financed by “corporate lords” was taking shots for a television program. When asked “who gave them permission to make such sounds on a working day”, the university authority dealing in sports and games politely replied “sir, this “corporate lord” sponsored our sports the previous year. If we do not give them permission we may not get the same any more”. The teachers immediately controlled themselves. They were aware, in case there happens anything adverse with sports then the students may revolt against them. The teachers however, did not expect anything excess. They wanted just silence during the working hours.

If the sponsorship of corporate lords in the universities goes on increasing in the above way, soon the university-authorities might face demands for :

- (i) "admitting the daughter of Lord -X, failing which there would be no sports" or
- (ii) "giving pass grade to the son of Lord-Y, failing which there would be no cultural week",
- (iii) "appointing the son of Lord-Z as teacher, failing which there would be no convocation", etc.

Let me narrate another interesting story. The Vice Chancellor of a university called a meeting and declared that they would have to arrange convocation the following month. The deans and heads could not agree because they told, it would hamper their academic schedule. But finally they all had to agree. Why ? Because one sponsoring "Corporate lord" promised to donate their "soon-to-be-expired" food items. In case the university did not agree, they would have to spend a lot for their destruction. When the authority financing the universities openly declare that they don't have adequate fund and by that way compels them to take fund from outside, naturally they have to look for sponsors. And, when the corporate bodies act as sponsor, it is natural for them to look into their selfish interest first.

(03) "CSR" BY THE NEWS-MEDIA LORDS : Occasionally a number of newspapers arrange round table conference on current and hot issues. They launch costly programs in which leading personalities express their views. No body knows how far the society or the country is benefited from such public get-togethers. They have never been seen to endeavor for finding a decision or solution or continue 'monitoring' activities, which is essential for the success of such program. What is true in such colorful-festivals is, the media-lords earn a lot from the sponsors, who want their names and logos to be displayed all over.

(04) "CSR" BY THE ENTERTAINMENT-MEDIA LORDS : Occasionally various entertainment media lords express their great concern for the performing artists and arrange programs like talent-search. They launch programs, where they collect entire expenses plus overhead from the corporate sponsors. In such program interested participants are made to remain standing in long queues to be examined and selected to the "door of heaven". The few who are really selected for the heaven find extremely alluring gifts. By this time, however, thousands of students have lost their valuable time resulting in poor results in examination and other natural consequences. In this case, however, in place of spending the entertainment-media lords earn huge sum, because all costs with overhead are borne by the corporate lords.

BRIGHT FACE OF CSR :

From my own experience I, however, find bright side also of CSR. One corporate-body on one occasion proposed to me for organizing a competition, where they agreed to give the awards and bear all costs. I denied doing that for fear of losing academic hours. I proposed that in my usual process I know the students having best-grades in the class. So, they can give awards to them. To my amazement the corporate body agreed. I also proposed that the award ceremony must be held on a day on which the university holds any function. In this case they complained saying that, that does not give the desired publicity. I proposed that in that case they can arrange the ceremony in a local hotel or auditorium and on a non-working day. To my further amazement they agreed. That gave me the idea that at least some of the corporate bodies really realizes the situation and the ill-affect of their big-sounding CSR programs.

“CSR” FIOR RESEARCH :

While the schools and colleges can increase their knowledge base prepared by their higher institutions like universities, the universities do not have that scope. Thus the only way left before the universities for increasing their knowledge base is to do the same by themselves. And the only way to do the same is through research. The story of research in our universities is not at all bright. Previously our universities had to handle the additional job relating to affiliation of degree colleges. The government thought that the universities could not continue research jobs due to this additional job. So, they were relieved from that job and this responsibility was given upon the National University. However, neither there was any significant improvement in research in the universities, nor the National University could prove its efficiency. It is natural that the government is now re-thinking of giving the previous responsibility upon the universities.

FIELDS OF RESEARCH :

Even though we always stress upon research in all fields, a careful though may reveal that it is not essential in all fields. It is evident that the scope of research in some applied and highly technical subjects and fields like Physics, Automobile, Computer engineering, electronics etc. is extremely limited in our country. Since the developed countries are far ahead of us in these subjects/fields, it is better for us to import or purchase their research findings. Research should better be carried out in subjects/fields in which there is less or limited scope of research abroad. These are the subjects specifically of our country and our people, or in other words these are the subjects/fields which are specifically dependent upon our special context and climate. By this consideration preferences on research may be given on the following subjects and fields :

(i) Bengali language : We have already discussed why adequate and high level research should be conducted on this subject.

(ii) Agriculture : There is little possibility that a foreign country would suggest the best seed, animal species, fertilizer or technology suited to our soil and climate. Even though they may conduct experiments in controlled environment that cannot give suitable results.

(iii) Physical Planning : The problem with the physical planning of Bangladesh is, our planners get higher degrees from abroad, where the context is entirely different. When they apply those knowledge here we find complete failure. Such failures can now easily be felt in the capital city and other large cities, where the planners have applied their knowledge. Places where they could not still apply their knowledge are relatively better. While the oil-rich, automobile-manufacturer, less-peopled and affluent countries may look for planning solutions involving (a) more use of automobiles and fuels, (b) less use of men etc., our need is completely different. In such case, researches should be conducted in our this land in order to find out planning solutions appropriate for our country. It has already been proved that 'foreign solutions' in this subject is extremely harmful for us.

(iv) Architecture : There is little possibility that the research findings on Architecture obtained in foreign countries can ever be helpful for the people of our country. In our country we are having completely different types of climate, building materials, people's culture, personal, familial and social needs etc. Thus researches in architecture to find out the best architectural solution for our people and society is a must for the success of architecture here.

(v) Water resources engineering : There is no possibility that any foreign country would be able to give solutions to the water related problems we are facing now. It is well-known that the morphology of aquifer, river, soil condition, rains, perennial and long-time variations of various contributing factors etc. have unique characters in this country.

CSR FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS :

Various affluent corporate bodies spend huge sum on advertisement on newspapers and television screens. In this age it is quite doubtful how far such advertisement help to increase the sale of their products, or if good manufacturers at all need any advertisement for their products. The news and TV medias, however, constantly shout about the "success" and "essentiality" of advertisement, even though we know that

(01) The nice, colorful and costly advertisement in the newspapers sacrifice itself in the waste bin or in making paper bags the following day,

(02) Interesting and expensive television advertisements entertain one group of viewers as merely entertaining items, with no consequences on purchase of product,

(03) Many of the costly and interesting but over-used television advertisements are used as “toilet-break” by the viewers,

(04) Top personnel of some corporate bodies use advertisement as good source of income through underhand kick-back or commission and

(05) Knowing fully well that good products and services need no advertisement, most of the corporate bodies use advertisement as means of aversion of taxes.

CONCLUSION :

In the above situation I believe, the best way for the corporate bodies to show their CSR and even the spending on advertisement is to sponsor “research works in the universities”. While such jobs would associate their names with something worthwhile (that would not turn to paper bag within a day, or be used as toilet break). The university can publicly show their names along with funding for various researches. In case any fruitful and innovative throughput is obtained through such researches, the name of the sponsoring corporate body would always remain associated with it. By following this path the corporate bodies can not only show but prove their concern for the society.

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