

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Dr. Pooja H. Ramchandani

Asst. Prof. H.R. College of Commerce and Economics.

Abstract : Women have been and will be an integral part of the Indian workforce. According to Census 2011, the total number of women workers in India is 149.8 million and interestingly, females working in rural areas amount to 122 million. 35.9 million female workers are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million female workers are agricultural labourers. As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02 percent as compared to 15.44 percent in the urban areas. The data shows enormous potential in rural areas in women, who can be given right help and they can thereby contribute to the development of self as well as the country. This research paper attempts to find the key CSR (corporate social responsibility) initiatives directed at rural women so as to understand the role corporate industry is playing in empowering women in the rural areas. It also attempts to explore the major challenges faced by the corporate industry in the area of women empowerment in rural areas and lastly suggest certain measures for the corporate industry.

Key words: CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), rural women empowerment,

I. INTRODUCTION

India has been men dominated economy. In former days, 3 Ks- Kitchen, Kids, Knitting were thought to be the responsibility, then came 3 Ps-Powder, Papad, Pickles and now at present there are 4 Es- Electricity, Electronics, Energy, Engineering. Corporates in India have gone a long way from mere philanthropy to a well established CSR policies involving women education and empowerment. This research paper attempts to find the key CSR (corporate social responsibility) initiatives directed at rural women so as to understand the role corporate industry is playing in empowering women in the rural areas

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This descriptive research paper is based on the secondary data. Various books, magazine articles, websites have been referred so as to collect the data relevant to the topic selected.

OBJECTIVES:

The research paper attempts to achieve following objectives through this study:

- a) To analyze the CSR initiatives undertaken by corporate industry towards empowering women in rural India
- b) To explore the challenges faced by the corporate industry towards empowering women in rural India.
- c) To suggest certain measures that can be adopted by the corporate industry towards women empowerment in rural areas.

CSR Initiatives by corporate industry for empowerment of Women in Rural India
HDFC Bank has been involved in Sustainable Livelihood initiative, which helped women in rural

parts of India. Through this initiative, the bank helps many people at the bottom of the pyramid by providing them with livelihood finance. It offers training, enhances occupational skills via credit counseling, financial literacy, thereby bringing people in to the banking fold.

Tata Steel helps to form self help groups so as to empower women in rural areas. Banking facilities are provided to the pilot projects involving a number of non-farm based activities requiring low levels of skills and fewer investments. Business incubators help the families and the self-help groups to understand the dynamics of managing businesses. The activities also includes collaboration with training institutes to provide employable skills in the field of IT software and hardware, nursing, tailoring, security, driving, hospitality etc.

Aditya Birla Group has also encouraged formation of Women Self Help Groups(SHG), where extensive training in different vocations is given in the areas of creating bamboo products, knitting, weaving, dyeing, rangoli, candle making, handicrafts, fashion designing, beauty treatment, goat rearing, bee-keeping, rope making, mushroom cultivation, coconut plantation, etc.

The Adhunik Group has undertaken many programmes so as to empower rural girls and women by improving their social condition, and thereby making them economically independent. Vocational training is given on soap making, envelope making, phenyl making, domestic food products, candle, paper envelopes, stitching, tailoring and embroidery, mushroom cultivation, pattals (plates made of leaves), incense sticks preparation, papad preparation, fishery and vermi-compost making so as to facilitating them to start their own enterprises for income generation.

ITC's initiative Choupal Women Empowerment Programme is basically aiming to provide Sustainable Economic opportunities to poor women in rural areas. ITC attempts to assists rural women to form micro credit SHGs so that they can build up small savings and finance their self-employment and micro enterprises. A Large number of women earn incomes as self –employed workers or as partners in micro – enterprises. In particular incense stick rolling projects have emerged as profitable micro enterprises as a result of the linkage with ITC's incense stick brand Mangaldeep. Enabling women to earn independent incomes has a positive impact on their families and communities as it is spent largely on children's education, health and nutrition.

Mahindra & Mahindra's rural initiative named Nanhi Kali is a national girl child sponsorship Programme for the needy, underprivileged girls who are at risk of dropping out of Government Schools. These girls receive special sponsorship so as to finance a range of education requirements extending right up to improvement of the government schools they go to. This program provides direct support to educate the girl child by distributing text books, uniforms, exam fees, learning material, etc.

Jindal Group, women empowerment initiatives have been undertaken across the areas of literacy as well as providing training to enhance livelihood generation opportunities amongst women. They provide women with the primary help in starting with the production facility. This in turn helps them in supplementing their family incomes. Jindal Group is also involved in various awareness programs on issues of gender parity, sexual harassment, and domestic violence and also in various skill development programs to help in upgrading traditional and new skills.

Vardhman Spinning and Weaving Mill, Ludhiana, are involved in the training and deployment of female workers and have taken several steps for the safety and welfare of female workers such as hostel facility near the factory, medical facilities, bus services for pick and drop facility, sports, cultural activities, computer training, etc.

Oxigen, India's Largest Payments Solutions Provider is shouldering the responsibility of empowerment of women by equipping them with skills and providing livelihood for a secure future by the following training programs such as stitching and tailoring centers, computer classes for girls, and the beauty course. With the help of these skills, the rural women are trained to start their own businesses. Till now Oxigen has set up 17 educational institute in Villages like Rajnota, Buteri & Behror in Rajasthan, Guna in Madhya Pradesh, Trichy in Tamil Nadu, Pehowa in Kuruksehtra, Dhankaur & Raibareli in U.P, Melpuram & Killiyoor in Kanyakumari.

A CHEMINOVA India initiative, SAHELI - Farm Women Empowerment programme is an initiative towards educating the rural women on safety, health and livelihood. SAHELI aims at spreading the message of safety and educating them in the areas of personal health, cleanliness, hygiene in the environment they live, animal husbandry, child nutrition, saving for the future, etc to provide them a comprehensive knowledge which would empower them.

Challenges in Women empowerment in rural areas:

Major challenges in women empowerment can be listed as economic backwardness, lack of family and community support, lack of motivation, inhibitions, ignorance of opportunities, tough

competition from men, limited financial capacity, lack of proper entrepreneurial training, limited legal awareness, etc are some of the challenges that hinder growth of women in the rural areas.

SUGGESTIONS

The researcher has come up with the following suggestions for the corporate for the rural women empowerment:

- a. Frequent and regular women training and development programmes.
- b. Regular updating of programmes conducted for women in rural areas.
- c. creating a Rural Women Empowerment fund so as to provide easy finance to the women in rural areas.
- d. an attempt should be made by the corporate to bring about attitudinal change in rural areas towards women.
- e. It is necessary to connect the rural areas so that every area is able to take advantage of the new initiatives.
- f. Government can encourage the larger corporate industries to adopt the nearby villages and shoulder the responsibility of development of that area.
- g. Corporate can make an effort to make small women groups and train them in various areas. These small groups then take the responsibility of training further smaller groups thereby creating a network of trained women.

CONCLUSION:

Women empowerment in rural areas symbolizes rural development. It can be looked as the best solution to overcome the twin problem of poverty and unemployment faced by the rural areas. Hence it is necessary for the government and the corporate industry to work hand in hand to tackle major problems faced by women in rural areas. It is necessary to overcome the major problems of inadequate flow of credit, use of outdated technology and other equipments, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, development and support of NGOs so as to open many opportunities for the women in rural areas.

Though many corporate organizations are involved in women empowerment in rural areas, but there is a lot more to be done to overcome the challenges of shyness, financial availability, traditional outlook, family support. As Jawaharlal Nehru rightly had said that “You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”

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