

POLICY BRIEF

Future Trends for CSR in Public Health:

Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) As A Tool For Sustainable Public Health Development



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Introduction

The concept of incorporating socially driven perspectives aligned with business development arose from the core principle that companies which acquire material and resources from society must be obligated to give something back in exchange. Based on this principle, most corporations have long been engaged in some sort of corporate social and environmental responsibility through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), with an overarching goal of improving the well-being of the communities which they depend and have an impact on. This naturally took a formal shape when the Government of India made CSR a mandate as an Act of Parliament in 2013 though many amendments have taken place over time with overzealous amendment during COVID-19.

However, today global public health is at the crossroads. Unlike other industries, where rate is affected by one's ability to pay, the healthcare industry's price is sometimes determined by the public benefit. It is vital for us to think about health in a global framework as the world and its economies have become increasingly globalized through widespread international travel and businesses. Almost every week brings news of emergence or re-emergence of an infectious disease or other health hazard from somewhere around the world. Although non-communicable causes of death, such as heart

disease, stroke, and traumas, are increasing globally, and infectious diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and vaccine-preventable diseases, are declining, many developing countries today face a "dual burden" of disease: they must continue to prevent and control infectious diseases while also deal with non-communicable diseases.

Not only is public health neglected in terms of resources, but the concept of public health is also misunderstood by large corporations who often end up outsourcing their budgets to consulting firms with no practical grass-root connect or reach. There is a lot that corporations can do to help with health care by leveraging CSR. CSR can help address the health determinants of the 21st century through a collaborative effort between the public and commercial sectors dedicated to increasing social responsibility for health. The concept of global health is key to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which is reinforced by 13 health targets. Because the long-term implications of these goals are considerably more acceptable for the business sector than the responsibilities requiring immediate actions or the critical approach of business ethics, this can gain traction in the corporate world. Without the sustainable growth of corporations, sustainable development at all levels will be unachievable.

Post - 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda - The Global Public Health Movement

Health is a fundamental right: it is a beneficiary of progress, a contribution to development, and a strong determinant of what people-centered, rights-based, inclusive, and equitable development aims to achieve. Understanding how the SDGs and sustainability in general are affecting corporate strategy and CSR agendas is crucial as the concept of CSR matures. The post-2015 agenda's overarching goal acknowledges health as an important contributor to and outcome of long-term development and human well-being. The United Nations' post-2015 development agenda has meticulously described a World Bank-led model of "multi-stakeholder governance" that includes nation states, international organisations, society organizations, and the business sector. Corporate sustainability is seen as both fundamental to and intertwined with the delivery of sustainable development in this approach.

By the end of 2019, the 15-year worldwide effort to improve people's lives throughout the world by 2030 by achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was already off track. And now, in a short amount of time, the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed an unprecedented crisis, creating further disruption to SDG development, with the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world bearing the brunt of the consequences. Given the severity of the situation, it would be beneficial for the global community if corporations took stock of predictions about the post-COVID scenario and redefined the scope of their CSR funding initiatives. The waves that COVID-19 brings with it, has witnessed large-scale panic, corporate spending and err in logistical priorities with much of the resources now either unused or catching dust.

While rising perceptions about the private sector's accountability and responsibility is significant in the global north, it is probably even more significant in the global south, where governmental capacity is often lacking, corruption is rampant, and regulatory systems are underdeveloped and poorly enforced. From the standpoint of sustainable development, public sector participation with CSR has the potential to cover a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges, including corruption, poverty alleviation, and

human rights. The objectives of public sector involvement in CSR is likely to vary from country to country.

Motivation for CSR: Population health impact

As part of the CSR operations, businesses can do a lot to strengthen healthcare. Businesses must get into partnerships with non-profit bodies and must not set up their own foundations. Non-profits operate in different challenging and social environments which corporate bodies do not and the social bent of mind is necessary to achieve breakthrough transformation on ground. In developed nations we see that most firms have concentrated their spending on meeting healthcare and safety standards, ranging from providing basic healthcare services to employees to avoiding or mitigating the negative health effects of company operations or product use. Despite this, many businesses fail to apply a holistic approach to the health agenda and some pursue a path of CSR for compliance which is not conducive to sustainable growth. Companies, have yet to fully grasp their potential to improve public health beyond their core workforce and, to a lesser extent, their stakeholders. Few corporations have extended health campaigns to encompass suppliers, global communities, and the general public across their full value chains.

The top 200 firms in India for sustainability and CSR spend roughly Rs. 1,369 crores on healthcare and wellbeing, accounting for about 24% of total CSR spending. However, much of the money is spent on health camps, establishing hospitals, and donating to hospitals for facility maintenance which defeats the very idea of public health and tangible outcomes. Although health camps are set up with good intentions, they do not adequately address long term issues as they have a short-term focus and are driven by statistics and numbers, and hospitals are poorly focused on once they are built.

Prospects for transformation

Companies that recognize the importance of social sustainability acknowledge the advantages of their interactions with people, communities, and society. Social responsibility is integrated into their corporate strategy, and they take into account how their actions impact people.

By adopting additional efforts for bringing real solutions, CSR campaigns can derive long term benefits from developing nations' economies. Governments in China, India, the Philippines, and South Africa have made it clear that they want businesses and brands to help them advance public efforts to eliminate major health challenges. There is a compelling case to be made that CSR in developing countries is most directly influenced by the socioeconomic environment in which firms operate, as well as the development priorities that it creates. In Nigeria, for example, CSR is particularly intended to address the country's socioeconomic development challenges, such as reducing poverty, health-care provision, and infrastructure investment. This contrasts sharply with many western CSR priorities, such as consumer rights, fair trade, sustainable innovation, global warming concerns, and socially conscious investments.

Developing countries face the world's largest acute health crises, and long – term benefits of CSR campaigns can have the most significant effect on society. This implies that CSR programs are the ideal opportunity for developing countries to bridge the gap of health inequity that keeps them labelled as “developing” rather than “developed”. Creating healthier communities in developing countries can fuel economic prosperity, increase local purchasing power, and open doors to new markets for other pursuits by the same firm.

Conclusion

To address the issue, in future, officials must first recognise the importance of public health and its role in nation-building. Because of lack of awareness of the significance of public health, it is often overlooked and undervalued. Of course, building tertiary institutions and spending money on advanced medical technology is crucial for offering diagnosis and treatment options, but it should not come at the expense of investing in primary public health infrastructure and basic care, or tackling social determinants of health. More people die with common diseases than with high end sophisticated ones requiring artificial intelligence.

The 'new normal' in corporate social responsibility can be established in the post-COVID-19 world by focusing heavily on public health issues. Addressing such a wide range of activities necessitates the involvement of not just public health experts, but also projects targeted at improving health. As a result, public health is a collaborative effort including several disciplines outside of the health sector. Because corporations rely on profit to stay in business, public health is critical, and because company consumers are a subset of the population, the people must remain healthy. COVID-19 has showcased how the economy gets buried in the absence of a robust investment in global public health.

It is imperative that neither sustainable development nor universal health coverage can be achieved without investment in public health. CSR should strive not only to be sustainable with the society, but also to contribute positively and add the most value to society. Investing CSR activities in public health is thus not only a quantitative requirement, but also a moral obligation in shaping an inclusive and progressive world for our billion beats!



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