Need Identification for CSR Activities through GRAMASABHAs – A Kerala Model

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Abstract

Need identification is always a challenge for organizations in India, while planning CSR activities. This is mainly due to geographical widespread of the country as well as language barriers. The need of the bottom line will be known to the regional leaders and other community development activists. This kind of need identification at bottom level is required not only for CSR activities, but also for any government funded projects, which normally comes under the financial budgets of central and state governments. Kerala, the southernmost part of India, has a proven method for dispersing such benefits to the society. In Kerala, these needs were identified at each Panchayats, through a process called "Gramasabha", where members from each household and the elected representatives along with government officials will come together for finding out the genuine beneficiaries, based on the fund allocation for that particular financial year. This system is followed for the last two decades and is found to be a successful model as there is not much ambiguities. At some points, there will be a gap between the allotted fund and the beneficiaries – that is – the government may not be able to fulfill the requirements and demands of the society and to satisfy the bottom line. This gap may be efficiently filled using CSR funds.

Some real needy people may miss out to have their opportunity, while prioritizing the list of beneficiaries, by the Panchayats. These 'miss out' list may be escalated and integrated at state level and may handed over to the corporates to plan and disburse their CSR activities. Thus, Gramasabha can play a significant role in need identification for the organizations, across the country. The projects, which are funded by the government are mostly implemented through the Self Help Groups (SHGs), which is considered as a homogeneous and non-profit group, with a decentralized manner of functioning and having same socio-economic strata, which has its roots along the length and breadth of the state, even to the remotest rural areas. The group share their ideas and knowledge to achieve a common cause and they help the society by identifying their own problems as well as that of the fellow-people in the community. These SHGs can also perform their part by providing feedbacks from the grassroot levels of the village and then passing on the information through proper channels; thus, supporting the government machinery in identifying the beneficiaries, which otherwise, might have unintentionally missed out by the officials and other elected representatives. Ultimately, this can even cover-up the lethargically moving CSR fund allocation process and convert it into 'smart' by implementing the CSR projects as envisaged and budgeted by organizations during respective financial years itself.

Keywords:
Need Identification, Corporate Social Responsibility, Self Help Groups.

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