

# Reflections for Panel Discussion on Leveraging CSR

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The panel discussion held on August 22, 2015 provided a good insight in the reason for formation and working of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) law in India, enacted through Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013. The CSR provisions enacted in India were contrasted with the CSR provisions applicable in other parts of the world, whereby it was clarified that CSR in India is not a part of the business, but a corollary to the same. This was understood more efficiently by us, with the help of the CSR activities performed by ITC Ltd., as detailed by the panelist Mr. Vijay Vardhan. A deeper understanding for the same was developed when Mr. Nikhil Pant explained how a company may conduct a CSR activity with the help of various NGOs, Section 25 companies, etc. Here, the work conducted by TERI (as briefed by panelist Mr. Debajit Palit) was helpful in understanding how the entire process works.

Mr. Pant enabled us to effectively understand that any CSR activity, apart from being corollary to the business, can only contribute to enhancing the brand of the company and not its revenues directly. The brand can, thereafter, contribute to additional revenues for the business. The answers to the various questions asked by us fellow students were also helpful in understanding this concept.

All the panelists were extremely effective in the various answers they gave to all our questions, even for the most ludicrous of them. At the end of the session, we could correlate as to why the government thought of introducing the 2% CSR via the Companies Act, 2013, what was its sheer importance, and the reason and form in which it is directly and indirectly beneficial to all the society, the business and the government too.

Here, I would specially like to commend the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India for their two particular efforts:

- a) In their effort to introduce the BSE - Corporate Social Responsibility Index with collaboration with the BSE, since this, as rightly put by Mr. Pant, would enable the investors to make a more informed choice of their investments in their selected companies, and
- b) In the Government's efforts to introduce an online platform 'Sammaan' (a joint effort by The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA)), wherein the right NGOs can be identified to work with companies listed on the CSR front, so that it is beneficial to both of them: the companies so that the areas of their CSR interest is more easily met and their small CSR budget does not end up with negligible value addition, and the NGOs so that it is easier for them to raise money for their activities.

One area wherein I think the discussion could have had a more value impact is if more concerns that companies and / or NGOs have could have been discussed on such a forum, something similar to what both Mr. Vardhan and Mr. Palit clarified on a few occasions. This, I feel, could have helped us to increase our understanding how a company / NGO thinks, how the Government thinks, and how an amicable solution to them is developed. However, I understand that this would depend upon the time available with the panelists, since a session of an hour and a half will simply not be sufficient for it.

Concluding, I would like to thank all the panelists for their extremely valuable contribution on the said topic, and our professor and Moderator of the Panel Discussion, Prof. Kasturi Das, for her hard work and dedication, without which such a discussion would not be possible, since this was the first time ever that such a discussion was held in the area of BGSi in our college. Without your efforts, professors, we would really not know how exciting and important the area of CSR is to the Indian context, especially for the next few years, and how we will be one of the critical influencing factors to it. I also thank The Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad for organizing such an amazing session for us.

Thank you for such an interesting session.