

Caring and socially responsible are our core value, Says Vinita Singhania, VCMD, JK Lakshmi Cement

By
India CSR Network

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NEW DELHI: Caring for people and Being a socially responsible corporate citizen are a core organizational value which drive JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd CSR, says Smt. Vinita Singhania, Vice – Chairman & Managing Director, JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd. Vinita says, “our focus in the near future would be on skill development and livelihoods including employability.”

India CSR Network interacted with Vinita Singhania. Edited excerpts:

What is JK Lakshmi Cement (JKLC) philosophy of CSR? What are the key thrust areas for your CSR? Please also tell us what has been your prime focus on CSR intervention.

Large Corporation like JK Lakshmi Cement have the ability to socially and economically influence the region surrounding its organizational premises. We are a professionally managed business house that has retained its core values of caring for people and working together as a big family. The organizational philosophy is simple, just like a family nurture its young, we believe nurturing our people – this includes our workforce, our suppliers, dealers and our local communities around business operations.

At JK Lakshmi Cement we are committed to create environmental and socio-economic value in our society by responsibly utilizing the resources we have at our disposal. This realization had given our organization a great opportunity to systematically develop and adopt an effective CSR approach to implement multiple intervention in the surrounding region our organizational premises. For many years, we have been undertaking initiatives for the welfare of the underprivileged sections in the areas in close proximity to our plant locations.

Our inclusive growth model fosters a passion for changing the lives of local communities that we operate in.

The major CSR thrust areas of the organization are health, water, sanitation, education, skill development and livelihoods, environment sustainability and community development etc. Our community CSR projects are in the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat.

You started CSR programme as early as 1984 around your cement plant in Sirohi district of Rajasthan. What motivated you to do that?

The philosophy of giving back to the society was laid down by the founding father of JK Group over a century ago and the group takes this as a moral responsibility to build a better society through focusing on areas such as education, healthcare, skill development, livelihoods interventions, water & sanitation etc., by contributing towards community services as well as working towards uplifting and empowering the disadvantaged sections of the society. For ours, the business priorities coexist with the commitment for extending the help to the poor and the needy.

We also, in collaboration with Population Foundation of India, started an integrated family welfare programme, named *Naya Savera*, with an objective to improve reproductive and child health in July 2004 for the selected villages of Pindwara Tehsil of District Sirohi, Rajasthan. Pindwara tehsil of Sirohi is one of the most backward areas in the district where the primary need of the people like basic education, health, work opportunities continue to be inadequate.

Lack of awareness, poor health seeking behavior, prevalent myths and misconceptions and the poor outreach of the government health services were some of the reasons for dismal health indicators in the area. Before Launching the Project *Naya Savera*, due to absence of health and transportation facilities, in the tribal communities deliveries were conducted at home in unhygienic conditions by local untrained hands. MMR (Maternal Mortality Rate) and IMR (Infant Mortality rate) were much higher than the urban/nontribal community. Realising this situation, we decided to initiate this project.

***Naya Savera* is your one of the flagship project. Tell us about this project's key objectives, strategy and the results/ impacts which it has achieved.**

The key objective of *Naya Savera* project is to build capacity, generate awareness and provide basic health services in the project area so as to improve the reproductive and child health status including maternal and infant mortality in the project area. Empowering the local women to take the responsibility of the health, delivering counselling and services at the door-step through trained village level motivators; provision of quality health and medical services and collaboration with government departments are some of the key strategies.

The project work in close collaboration with the government service delivery system and encourages people to use it to for health services rather than seeking from local quacks and traditional healers. The impact of this project on various maternal and child health indicators have been very positive, for example, the full immunization of less than 2 years of children have in the project area have gone up from a baseline of 25% in 2004 to 80% in 2017.

Similarly the project has impacted other indicators like maternal and infants mortality, use of contraception and institutional delivery very positively.

One of your *Low Cost Sanitary Napkin project* was replicated by Government of Chhattisgarh and implemented at 261 government schools. Tell us in detail about this project and the key changes it has brought to the beneficiaries.

To improve health and hygiene of women and adolescent girls living in the villages around our plants, we had initiated promotion of the low cost sanitary napkins. This project was launched in the name of *Mor Sangwari (My Friend)* at Durg district of Chhattisgarh.

Under this project, low cost sanitary napkin manufacturing units were installed and the local women and girls were trained for the production. Sanitary napkin vending machines and incinerators for its disposal were installed at girls' toilets at schools. Awareness building activities were also organized to create awareness on the menstrual hygiene. The project resulted into higher attendance of girls in the school as well as improvement in menstrual hygiene.

Our *Sanitary Napkin* initiative was widely covered in the local news and media. Chhattisgarh Government approached us and appreciated the initiative. The Department of Women and Child Development, Chhattisgarh Government, took our napkin project as the role model and decided to implement the same in all government schools and government girls' hostel. Now the Department of women and children development have initiated the process of installing vending machine in government schools. Subsequently, based on the positive response of this project, the company has further implemented this at other plant locations in Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat.

Many business and corporate groups are doing CSR through Trust and Foundations while you are doing it directly through your company. Please inform us on this.

As I already explained that caring for people and being a socially responsible corporate citizen are core organizational values which drive JK Lakshmi Cement Business strategy & CSR. Our company takes this as a moral responsibility to build a better society through focusing on various community level development issues. Achieving this objective is of paramount significance and issues like whether through Trust, Foundation and Company are a part of operational choice and strategy. The company has developed enough in-house experience and professional expertise to successfully design and implement CSR projects. However, we have earlier partnered with NGOs for the implementation of our CSR projects and in future also we would be open to it.

What are the key challenges that you face while carrying out the CSR activities in the community. How do you resolve them?

Mobilizing the support and building the relationship with local community remains a key challenge for the successful implementation of the CSR projects. However, after sustained meetings with stakeholders and community leaders and systematic hard work, the CSR team has been successful in winning the trust and support around all plant locations.

Some of our plants are located at remote rural locations and others are in semi-urban area. Accordingly the communities we work with and their development issues do vary as per the local context. Targeting of needy people and prioritization of local development issues towards whom we can channelize our efforts and resources, becomes a challenge. Similarly community expectations are always very high and its management require continuous communication with various stakeholders.

How is the top leadership in your company involved in the CSR management in your organization?

The Mission statement of the company unequivocally state to be a *socially responsible corporate citizen*. The social commitment that emanates from this mission statement has been an integral part of the JKLC business since beginning, and therefore, the top management leadership support and guidance has been at the core of JKLC CSR program planning, management and governance.

At the corporate level, the Company's Board of Directors has constituted a CSR Committee in compliance of the CSR law. The CSR committee which consists of Directors and Independent Director of the company recommends *CSR Programme and budget* during every financial year to the Board for final approval. Through this process *Annual CSR Programme and Budget* is finalized for each of the Company plants. At the JKLC plant, monthly interaction and review meetings are conducted at the level of *Chief of Project/Plant Head* where not only the progress of various CSR activities are discussed and reviewed but also challenges faced in implementation of CSR agenda and strategies, formulated to overcome these challenges.

The company has a *quarterly reporting protocol* for the purpose of CSR progress review at the corporate level. Every quarter plant CSR team send the quarterly progress report to the *Head-*

CSRbased in corporate office which then is submitted to the CSR Committee for the review and direction.

What are your future plans for CSR?

For us the most important thing is to bring transformative changes in the lives of the needy and marginalized people around our plant locations. Based on our experience, our focus in the near future would be on skill development and livelihoods including employability. The biggest challenge in today's context is making our villagers self-sufficient and self-reliant. It is, however, needless to mention that our efforts in the areas of health, education, and water & sanitation shall also continue.

In short, what we are aiming is smiling faces of our stakeholders in and around our Plant locations.

***Disclaimer:** The views expressed by the interviewee in this feature are entirely her own and does not necessarily reflect the views of India CSR Network and its Editor.*