

**CSR Today s closely knit with NGO and SHG activities. But NGOs are bounden to corporates in terms of patronage and financial support. Here, we look at some strikingly good work by NGOs and how corporates help them make it happen.**

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There is the other side of CSR. The side that is far away from profits, return on investments and accruing depreciation benefits. To get that side of the story we met with several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which form the linchpin of CSR network, its activities and outreach. Often, self-help group workers on the field told us, NGOs work as the bulwark against interests that try to subvert the system. Though NGOs have themselves been found wanting in several instances of vested interests, we spoke to some of the most accredited NGOs in Mumbai to hear about their mission, activities, outreach, problems and issues and expectations from the corporate sector.

Aseema and Kherwadi Social Welfare Association work with street children and destitute youth. If the times are a changing for the CSR sector,



Kishor Kher, President and trustee of Kherwadi Social Welfare Association explains it vividly: "Indian economy will be the world's largest in 30 years. The assumption of this growth is that 50 percent of India's population under the age of 25 will contribute significantly to this growth. While this latent asset exists, it can only be productively utilised with a strategic plan." So, he continues, Yuva Parivartan (his NGO) undertook the task eight years ago to provide livelihood training and placement to underprivileged youth and to make them participate in economic growth.

Aseema on the other hand, is a non-governmental organization, which incidentally was celebrating its tenth anniversary on the day this reporter met up with Dilbur Parakh, chairperson of the organization. The original idea of setting up the NGO, according to Ms. Parakh, was to protect and promote the human rights of underprivileged children. Over the years, Aseema has exceeded that objective. "Our belief is that education is the right of every child. We see education as a means towards growth and empowerment. We see it as an instrument of change and we recognize the urgency with which quality education must be made available to all."

From the time of its inception Aseema strove to provide high quality, relevant education to Mumbai's destitute children, living on the streets or in slums. After ten years, Aseema has, to give an example, over 600 children enrolled in a municipal school in Bandra in western suburbs of Mumbai, which it has adopted after getting corporate support.



Aseema established a Montessori Centre for street children, a first of its kind in India, in August 2000 for providing "a firm educational foundation to prepare the children for mainstream school". A balwadi was also set up on Montessori lines. According to Ms. Parakh, the centre consists of junior and senior classes for children ages 3 ½ to 5 ½ years. A balvikas centre was set up in 2006 for children aged 5 ½ to 6 ½ years as a preparatory class for children entering Std. I.

Aseema recently took charge of the pre-primary section of a BMC school in Khar-Danda, again in suburban Mumbai. This school is part of 84 new English medium schools that the Mumbai municipal Corporation intends to start under the Mumbai Public School Project in 2007. The BMC had sought help from NGOs to run these schools.

In 2001, Aseema adopted the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School in Bandra. This provided Aseema with the opportunity of working together with the municipal corporation to provide quality education to underprivileged children at the time of adoption just about 100 children were studying in the school, says Ms. Parakh.

Prior to Aseema's involvement, the school building and its toilets and drainage system were in a state of disrepair. The blackboards were not usable. There were only two BMC teachers in a school to look after seven classes with its varied divisions. Since the take-over by Aseema the school has been completely revamped "to create an atmosphere that is vibrant, appealing, fun, relaxed, inspiring and safe." The school was given a face-lift and the children played a wonderful role in brightening up the school with mural work. Their artwork has been prominently displayed in the corridors and the renovated drinking water are has tiles that have been painted by the children. The repaired and renovated drainage system and toilets have also greatly helped in instilling good habits and hygiene, Ms. Parakh adds.

More importantly, as part of revamping the academic programme class teachers have been placed in each grade along with teachers for art, yoga,



sports and judo. The school is equipped with additional facilities to enhance the educational experience of our children, such as an audio-visual and computer room, a library, a counselling centre and visual and performing arts studio. "Aseema's Pali-Chimbai Municipal School is now regarded as a model o education for BMC schools and can be used as a paradigm for future initiatives," Ms. Parakh says.

Aseema also runs a support centre every evening at a reputed private school St. Joseph's Convent. "All Aseema's children who are in mainstream schools, come regularly to this centre. Classes are held from 4pm to 6.15 pm everyday. Here the children receive help with their homework and also learn art, yoga, music and judo.

“The support centre has become a safe and enjoyable place for these children to spend their evenings constructively. They are engaged in productive activities and receive help with their academic work. This helps enhance their all round development and ensures that they do not drop out of school.”

The NGO produced a 30-minute animated film called Raju and I. this film focuses on awareness on child rights with a special emphasis on the right to education. Ms. Parakh explains that it motivates every viewer to do their bit in protecting childhood. Raju and I won several international awards and in 2005, it won the National Award for the Best Animation Film.

A somewhat unique programme at Aseema is the transforming of some of the art of the children into marketable products. An art teacher conducts weekly classes and draws out the artistic ability of the children. The best art finds expression on high quality products – greeting cards, gift envelopes, coasters, bookends, etc. this has helped raise money needed to run its educational activities, says Ms. Parakh, while adding that the sale of such products has only contributed five per cent to the organizations revenue. “It has also helped enhance the children's self esteem as they enjoy seeing their artwork being appreciated and bought.”

At far away Jambhwadi in Igatpuri, Aseema has set up an Aanganwadi which has teacher training programmes, teaching aids and educational material. It also manages to contribute school uniforms, a nutritious mid-day meal which helps bring children to school and keeps drop-out rates low.



In future, Ms. Parakh says, Aseema intends to set up an education centre for tribal children in Igatpuri in Maharashtra. A 14-acre plot has been purchased at the remote village of Awalkheda in Igatpuri. “We are keen on starting this project at the earliest so more children can benefit from it.”

When asked what NGOs expect from the corporate sector, Ms. Parakh listed out issues. For one, the cards and stationery products made by street children in her NGO need corporate patronage. “During festivals if the corporates have a policy to buy gift items from NGOs like us it will go a long way in bridging the financial gap of the NGOs and help them meet their ends.” In the ultimate analysis, a self-help group leader told us, the corporates also gain huge goodwill from such measures.

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