UNIT 13 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CSR DEPARTMENT

Structure

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the formation and functioning of the CSR Department
- Explain the roles and responsibilities of the Board
- Discuss the tax issues in CSR
- Differentiate between internal & external CSR and Make & Buy decisions
- Discuss CSR Reporting

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, CSR programs need to go beyond 'doing good'. The most successful CSR initiatives tell a company's story, implement customer feedback, position a company as a leader on social issues, and determine how community investment will be spent. However, to accomplish this, CSR programs first need to be strategically aligned with a company's business model. If corporate citizenship efforts do not demonstrate value to customers, employees, and shareholders, as well as the community, they're less likely to be successful and serve a long-term purpose.

Companies to which Section 135 of the Company's Act, 2013 is applicable, are required to constitute a CSR Committee in order to undertake and monitor CSR activities. In this unit you will learn about the functioning of the CSR Department and the roles and responsibilities of different functionaries therein.

13.2 FORMATION OF CSR DEPARTMENT AND CSR COMMITTEE

Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 requires that "Every company having net worth of rupees five hundred crore or more, or turnover of rupees one thousand crore or more or a net profit of rupees five crore or more during the immediately preceding financial year shall constitute a Corporate Social Responsibility Committee of the Board consisting of three or more directors, out of which at least one director shall be an independent director." (Companies Act, 2013). In the case of a listed company the CSR committee of the board should consist of a minimum of three or more directors out of which at least one director must be an independent director, while in the case of an unlisted company it is not compulsory to have an independent director. Here, a listed company is one which has offered its share for trading in stock exchange whereas an unlisted company is one that has not offered its share for trading in a stock exchange. Who can be the independent directors is defined under Section 149 (6) of the Companies Act. The independent director is a non-executive director with requisite qualification and experience, and does not have pecuniary relationship with the company, etc.   In the case of a foreign company, the committee shall comprise of at least two persons of which one person shall be a person resident in India authorized to accept on behalf of the foreign company – the services of notices and other documents. Also, the other person shall be nominated by the foreign company.It also requires that the board's report should disclose the composition of CSR Committee.

The CSR Committee is responsible for the following:

- Formulating and recommending to the board, a corporate social responsibility policy which shall indicate the projects/activities to be undertaken by the Company in areas or subject, as specified in Schedule VII.
- Recommending the amount of expenditure to be incurred on CSR projects/activities undertaken.
- Instituting a transparent monitoring mechanism for implementation of CSR projects/activities undertaken by the company.
- Reviewing performance of the Company in the areas of CSR.
- Submitting an annual report of CSR projects/activities to the board.
- Monitoring CSR Policy from time to time.

13.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD

Section 2 (10) of the Companies Act, 2013 defines the Board of Directors or Board as the collective body of the directors of the company. It oversees how the management serves and protects the long-term interests of all the stakeholders of the Company.

The Board of Directors of every company on which CSR is applicable shall:

- Disclose the composition of the CSR Committee in Board Report.
- After taking into account the recommendations made by the CSR Committee, approve the CSR Policy for the company and disclose contents of such Policy in its report and also place it on the company's website, if any, in such manner as may be prescribed.
- Ensure that the activities as are included in the CSR Policy of the company are undertaken by the company.
- Ensure that the activities included by a company in its CSR Policy fall within the purview of the activities included in Schedule VII. These activities are specified in Schedule VII as the activities which may be included by companies in their Corporate Social Responsibility Policies. These activities are related to:

  (i) eradicating extreme hunger and poverty

  (ii) promotion of education

  (iii) promoting gender equality and empowering women

  (iv) ensuring environmental sustainability

  (v) protection of national heritage, art and culture

  (vi) measures for the benefit of armed forces veterans, war widows and their dependents

  (vii) training to promote rural sports, nationally recognized sports, Paralympic sports and Olympic sports

  (viii) social business projects such as contribution to Prime Minister's National Relief Fund or any other fund set up by the Central or the State Government for socio-economic development and relief and funds for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes, minorities and women and such other matters as may be prescribed.

  (ix) Contribution to incubators funded by Central Government or State Government or any agency

  (x) Contributions to public funded Universities and other eminent institutions mentioned in the schedule.

  (xi) Rural development projects.

  (xii) Slum area development.

  In Schedule VII, after item (xii) and the entries relating thereto the Central Government made the following amendment (addition) on 30th May, 2020 namely:

  (xiii) disaster management, including relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

Activity 1

Visit a CSR Department of any company near your residence and find the various CSR programmes being implemented by them. Which programmes correspond to items in Schedule VII.

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Responsibilities of the Board

The board strives to build sustainable value for shareholders whilst protecting the assets and reputation of the company. Its functions include:

- approving CSR strategies, budgets, plans and corporate policies
- assessing performance against business plans to monitor both the performance of management as well as the continuing suitability of business strategies
- ensuring that the Company operates an appropriate corporate governance structure, in particular ensuring that CSR acts legally and responsibly on all matters and that the highest ethical standards are maintained.

Some examples of companies and their efforts for CSR are as follows:

1. TATA GROUP

   The Tata Group conglomerate in India carries out different CSR projects, a large portion of which are network improvement and poverty alleviation programs. Through self-help gatherings, it is engaged in women's empowerment activities, income generation, country network development, and other social welfare programs. In the field of education, the Tata Group provides scholarships and endowments for numerous establishments.

   The gathering likewise engages in healthcare projects, for example, assistance of youngster education, vaccination and creation of awareness of AIDS. Other areas include economic empowerment through agriculture programs, environment protection, giving game scholarships, and infrastructure development, for example, healing centers, research centers, educational establishments, sports academy, and social centers.

2. ULTRATECH CEMENT

   Ultratech Cement, India's biggest cement organization is involved in social work across over 407 villages in the nation planning to create supportability and self-reliance. Its CSR activities center around healthcare and family welfare programs, education, infrastructure, environment, social welfare, and sustainable livelihood. The organization has organized medical camps, vaccination programmes, school enrollment, ranch drives, water conservation programs, and natural cultivating programmes.

3. MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA

Indian automobile manufacturer Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) established the K. C. Mahindra Education Trust in 1954, followed by Mahindra Foundation in 1969 with the purpose of advancing education. The organization essentially focuses on education projects to help economically and socially disadvantaged communities. CSR programmes invest in scholarships and awards, livelihood preparing, healthcare for remote areas, water conservation, and disaster relief programmes. M&M runs projects, for example, "Nanhi Kali" concentrating on young female education, Mahindra Pride Schools for modern preparing, and Lifeline Express for healthcare services in remote areas.

4. ITC GROUP

ITC Group, a conglomerate with business interests crosswise over hotels, FMCG, agriculture, IT, and bundling sectors has been concentrating on creating sustainable livelihood and environment protection programmes. The organization has been able to generate sustainable livelihood opportunities for six million people through its CSR activities. Their e-Choupal programme, which plans to connect country farmers through the internet for getting agriculture items, covers 40,000 villages and over four million farmers. Its social and ranch forestry programme helps farmers in converting wasteland to pulpwood estates. Social empowerment programmes through smaller scale enterprises or credits have created sustainable livelihoods for over 40,000 rural women.

5. PROCTER AND GAMBLE INDIA LIMITED

P&G (Procter and Gamble) had initiated a social development and education program in India called "Shiksha" which aimed at advancing the education among children in rural areas at affordable expenses. P&G started contributing a fixed sum from the sale of its items to the children education finance for country areas. Till date, it has spent more than Rs. 24 Crores on Shiksha programme and the sum is increasing every year to benefit the poor children and promote school education among them.

6. DABUR INDIA

While seeking after their business strategy of presenting items that give our consumers health and wellness, Dabur operates in a manner that continues to generate an attractive return for shareholders, and also minimizes their effect on the environment.

The four center areas of Dabur India towards CSR are as per the following:

A- Eradicating hunger, poverty and malnutrition: Arrangement of nourishment, sustenance supplement, clothes etc. for poor people, children and other deprived sections of the society. Arrangement of shelter for homeless, and advancing sanitation, making available safe drinking water.

B- Promoting Health care including Preventive Health care through awareness programmes, health check-ups, arrangement of medicine and treatment facilities, giving pre-natal & post-natal healthcare facilities, prevention of female foeticide through awareness creation, program for preventing diseases and building insusceptibility.

C- Ensuring environmental sustainability and ecological balance through: Estate drives in schools, villages, their assembling units and offices/business premises and other areas in general, reviving endangered plants, advancing agro-forestry, Protection of verdure and fauna, Adoption of wastelands to cultivate plants; Promoting biodiversity etc.

D- Employment and livelihood enhancing vocational skills and projects counting beautician, mehndi application, bee keeping, nourishment processing and preservation, vermi-treating the soil and other Life Skill Training and livelihood enhancement projects.

7. HINDUSTAN UNILEVER LIMITED (HUL)

HUL is constantly working on the improvement of society in India through its CSR activities. HUL has framed various policy measures to achieve its sustainability goals as a part of CSR.

HUL's Environment policy includes:

- Ensuring safety of its items and operations for the environment by utilizing norms of environmental safety, which are scientifically sustainable and generally acceptable.
- Develop, introduce and keep up environmental management systems over the organization to meet the organization principles and also statutory requirements for environment.
- Verify compliance with these principles through regular reviewing.
- Assess environmental effect of every one of its activities and set consistent improvement objectives and targets and review these periodically to ensure that these are being met at the individual unit and corporate level.
- Reduce waste, conserve energy and explore opportunities for reuse and recycle.

Activity 2

Write any three functions of the board.

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13.4 TAX ISSUES IN CSR

The Income Tax Act, 1961 (IT Act) allows various business expenses to be claimed as deductions while computing taxable income under the heading, 'profit and gains of business or profession'. Section 37 of the IT Act is a residuary provision on deductions. It permits any business expenditure to be availed as deduction, provided the expense:

(a) cannot be claimed as deduction under Sections 30 to 36,

(b) is of revenue nature, and

(c) has been expended wholly and exclusively for the purposes of business or profession, i.e., is not of personal nature.

The last point requires that the expenditure can be justified on the ground of commercial expediency. This implies that it need not have any direct and immediate relation with business operations; instead, it is sufficient if the expenditure indirectly ensures the smooth conduct of business operations. Further, the term commercial expediency does not necessitate that the expenditure be incurred to earn profits so long as the expenditure has relation with business operations.

If the abovementioned three pre-conditions are satisfied, expenditure can be claimed as deduction under Section 37 even when it has been incurred voluntarily by a business instead of being required to be incurred under some statute or contract. Such expenditure can be claimed as deduction even when benefits arising positively affect not only the concerned business but also the general members of community. This is why in various cases social expenditure incurred by businesses, for instance for installing traffic light in a public lane, has been categorized as the expenditure incurred 'wholly and exclusively' for the purposes of business and has been allowed as a deduction under Section 37.

Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 requires a company having net worth, turnover or net profits above a certain threshold over a certain period of time to constitute a corporate social responsibility (CSR) committee. The CSR committee has the mandate to draft the company's CSR policy whereby at least 2% of the company's average net profits are expended on any activity specified under Schedule VII of the Companies Act.

Since, prior to the enactment of Section 135, certain kinds of CSR expenditure were permitted to be claimed as deduction under Section 37, ambiguity arose whether all the CSR expenses incurred under Section 135 could also be claimed as deductions under Section 37 once they meet all the above-mentioned three pre-conditions. Foreseeing the prospective loss in its revenues if Section 135 expenditure is claimed as deduction under Section 37, the Government added Explanation II to Section 37 through its Finance Act, 2014 which became effective from April, 2015. Under the Explanation, an expenditure incurred by an assessee's business on CSR activities in accordance with Section 135 cannot be claimed as deduction under Section 37 because such expenditure is not deemed to be an expenditure incurred by the assessee for the purposes of the business or profession. Interestingly, it has been claimed that the Explanation is merely clarificatory in its nature.

The memorandum to the Explanation states that it is merely clarificatory because CSR expenditure incurred under Section 135 is an application of and not charge against profits. This argument arises due to the existence of provisions such as Rule 4(1) under the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility) Rules, 2014 ("CSR Rules"). Rule 4(1) clarifies that for the purposes of Section 135, CSR expenditure shall not include an expenditure incurred on activities undertaken in the normal course of company's business. Further, as stated earlier, an item of expenditure which is not incurred for the purpose of business operations and thereby cannot be justified on the grounds of 'commercial expediency' cannot be considered as a charge on profits and cannot thereby be allowed as deduction under Section 37 of the IT Act. Therefore, on a conjoint reading of Section 37 and Rule 4(1) of the CSR Rules, it has been reasoned that Explanation II is only clarificatory in its nature. This is because expenditure which is not hit by Rule 4(1) will be a CSR expenditure and it could anyway not have been claimed as deduction under Section 37 as it would not have been an expenditure on account of commercial expediency.

However, there is much disagreement on this point. This is because, according to logic and under law, a business activity can fall within company's objects clause of its Memorandum of Association ("MoA"), yet it can be outside its 'normal' course of business in the sense the term as has been used under Rule 4(1) of the CSR Rules, 2014. This is because objects clause is given very wide interpretation under company law jurisprudence. Any activity, including charitable activity, may fall within company's objects provided it somehow contributes to the company's main business. Nevertheless, such activity may still be outside the preview of the 'normal' or routine course of company's business. This is because a transaction falls under the 'normal' course of business only if it pertains to the usual operations of the business and is carried out as a matter of ordinary business custom or practice.

For example, expenditure incurred by a company towards renovation of primary schools in its neighborhood to muster the support of the local community there can qualify as an expense on that activity of the company which falls within its object clause. This is because such an activity ultimately helps the company in fulfilling the main objects stated in its MoA. Therefore, such type of expenditure can be justified on the ground of commercial expediency according to Section 37 and can be claimed as deduction. On the other hand, this expenditure on renovation of a school may not still be expenditure incurred in the business's 'normal' course of operations according to Rule 4(1) and is thereby not disqualified from being CSR expenditure in terms of Section 135. Therefore, it would be an incorrect proposition that due to Rule 4(1), as a matter of universality, the CSR expenditure incurred in terms of Section 135 would always be expenditure that cannot be justified on the ground of commercial expediency under Section 37.

Therefore, for such instances of CSR expenses which are not hit by Rule 4(1) and could otherwise have been claimed as deduction under Section 37 because they could be justified on the ground of commercial expediency, Explanation II is not merely clarificatory in nature. Hence, an outright exclusion of all kind of CSR expenditure incurred under Section 135 from the ambit of Section 37 deductions involves the creation of a completely new exception in itself.

This clash between CSR and the deduction under Section 37 of the IT Act has led to a lot of confusions and different interpretation of law. The normal rule is that if any expenditure on public welfare is connected or related with the carrying on of business, it is eligible for deduction under the said Section. But in certain cases, those activities which are done as a part of social initiative were also allowed. So, the burden of proof for proving that expenditure comes under the purview of Section 37 of the IT Act lies with the assessee.

Apart from the Section 37 of the IT act, deductions for CSR expenditure can also be claimed under Sections 30 to 36 and 80G of the IT Act. This paves way for differential tax treatments for different activities permissible as CSR and if the companies involve in CSR on their own,it is not entitled to any deductions. Only if it acts through an intermediate, it is allowed for deduction. For example, CSR expenditure through Section 80G (NGO), it will get 50% tax benefit, expenditure through institutions registered under Sections 35CCA (Rural Development), 35CCB (Conserving Natural Resources) of the IT Act or through Prime Minister's relief fund (National and drought) will get 100% tax benefit and if it is through Section 35, it may get 125% to 175% of tax benefit.

So, the main issue here is that, those companies which are motivated towards CSR by reason of tax benefit will reduce the choice of CSR activities i.e., companies start to concentrate only on those activities which gives maximum tax benefit. In short, tax deductions for CSR expenditure can be claimed only through Sections 30 to 36 and 80G of the IT Act.

Summarizing, if the CSR activities are closer to the company's core mission, agency problems and transaction costs can be mitigated by leveraging on organizational knowledge and internal monitoring systems. Conversely, if the CSR initiatives have less centrality to the company's core mission, then the application of governance forms involving a partial or a total outsourcing of these initiatives may be more likely, because of a potential lack of organizational knowledge and/or the inadequacy of internal control systems. Hence, resource availability, transaction costs, and firm capabilities may represent interconnected aspects underlying more or less extensive collaborative governance modes for CSR projects.

13.5 MAKE AND BUY DECISIONS

The make-or-buy decision is the act of making a strategic choice between producing an item internally (in-house) or buying it externally (from an outside supplier). The buy side of the decision also is referred to as outsourcing. In the context of CSR, 'make' means internalization of CSR i.e., all CSR activities will be done by the company on its own while 'buy' means all CSR activities of the company will be done by some outside agency.

The organization of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives deals with a 'make' or 'buy' trade-off among in-house solutions instead of a partial (collaboration) or total (outsourcing) externalization of such activities. From an organizational point of view, it can be seen as a tradeoff between leveraging on internal resources and resorting to the market. As known, for efficiency, companies should internalize those activities they are able to perform better than the market, leaving out of their organizational boundaries the initiatives that require resources not available or too costly to build internally. Therefore, the internalization of CSR projects can be an option consistent with the target of optimal resources allocation as it can mitigate the inefficiency caused by transaction and agency costs.

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Activity 3

Visit a CSR Department of any company near your residence and write about how they arrive at the make or buy decisions for CSR activities.

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13.6 ANNUAL REPORTING ON CSR

Role of CSR Committee in Annual Reporting

"The new Act requires that the board of the company shall, after taking into account the recommendations made by the CSR committee, approve the CSR policy for the company and disclose its contents in their report and also publish the details on the company's official website, if any, in such manner as may be prescribed. If the company fails to spend the prescribed amount, the board, in its report, shall specify the reasons.

The other reporting requirement mandated by the Government of India, including CSR is by SEBI which issued a circular on August 13, 2012, mandating the top 100 listed companies to report their ESG initiatives. These are to be reported in the form of a BRR as a part of the annual report. SEBI has provided a template for filing the BRR. Business responsibility reporting is in line with the NVG published by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in July 2011. Provisions have also been made in the listing agreement to incorporate the submission of BRR by the relevant companies. The listing agreement also provides the format of the BRR. The BRR requires companies to report their performance on the nine NVG principles. Other listed companies have also been encouraged by SEBI to voluntarily disclose information on their ESG performance in the BRR format."(PWC, 2013)

FORMAT FOR THE ANNUAL REPORT ON CSR ACTIVITIES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE BOARD'S REPORT

1. A brief outline of the company's CSR policy, including overview of projects or programmes proposed to be undertaken and a reference to the web-link to the CSR policy and projects or programmes.
2. The Composition of the CSR Committee.
3. Average net profit of the company for last three financial years
4. Prescribed CSR Expenditure (two per cent ofthe amount as in item 3 above)
5. Details of CSR spent during the financial year.
   (a) Total amount to be spent for the financial year;
   (b) Amount unspent, if any;
   (c) Manner in which the amount spent during the financial year is detailed below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
S. No.	CSR project or activity identified	Sector in which the project is covered	Projects or programmes 1. Local area or other 2. Specify the state and district where projects or programmes were undertaken	Amount outlay (budget) project or programme wise	Amount spent on the projects and programmes Sub Heads: 1. Direct expenditure on projects and programmes 2. Overheads	Cumulative expenditure upto the reporting period	Amount Spent: Direct or through implementing agency

	Total						

Give details of the implementing agency

6. In case the company has failed to spend the two per cent of the average net profit of the last three financial years or any part thereof, the company shall provide the reasons for not spending the amount in its Board report.

7. A responsibility statement of the CSR Committee that the implementation and monitoring of CSR Policy, is in compliance with CSR objectives and Policy of the company.

Sd/, (Chief Executive Officer or Managing Director or Director)	Sd/- (Chairman CSR Committee)	Sd/- (Person specified under clause (d) of sub-section (1) of section 380 of the Act) (wherever applicable)

13.7 SUMMARY

In this unit you have read about the formation of a CSR Department, its various functions and its role in maintaining compliance protocol. You have also read about the roles and responsibilities of the Board which includes approving CSR policy, to ensure that the activities mentioned in the CSR policy fall within the purview of the activities included in Schedule VII and also to ensure that the activities mentioned in the CSR policy are undertaken by the company. You also read about the meaning of make and buy decisions and annual reporting on CSR.

13.8 KEYWORDS

Board of Directors - Section 2 (10) of the Companies Act, 2013 defined that “Board of Directors” or “Board”, in relation to a company, means the collective body of the directors of the company.

External and Internal CSR- External CSR means efforts directed towards external shareholders and Internal CSR means efforts directed towards employees.

Make and Buy in relation to CSR - The make-or-buy decision is the act of making a strategic choice between producing an item internally (in-house) or buying it externally (from an outside supplier).

National Voluntary Guidelines (NVGs): The NVGs are an aspirational and comprehensive guideline to encourage responsible business behaviour in India. The NVGs, a set of 9 principles, cover a broad array of social, economic, environmental and governance issues and developmental priorities.

Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives: ESG focuses to approach and address issues fitting into the categories of environment, social, and governance.

13.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write any three responsibilities of a CSR committee.
2. What are the details of the CSR spent that have to be included in the Board's report?
3. What is the difference between 'make' and 'buy' decisions?
4. How has the CSR spending pertaining to COVID-19 been inculcated in the Act?
5. Who is the competent authority to approve the CSR policy?

13.10 REFERENCES AND SELECTED READINGS

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