

# CHAPTER-15

## **CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY: FOCUS ONTO CORPORATE INITIATIVES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Corporate responsibility has emerged as a critical aspect of contemporary business practices, with a growing focus on initiatives supporting gender diversity and equality in the workforce. This abstract explores corporate efforts focused on enhancing the presence of women in the workplace. It examines various approaches and initiatives adopted by organizations to advance gender parity, support the empowerment of women, and cultivate inclusive work atmospheres. Through an examination of literature and case studies, this abstract underscores the significance of corporate responsibility in addressing gender disparities, enhancing diversity, and fortifying organizational performance. Key themes include mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, leadership development, pay equity, and community engagement. By prioritizing initiatives that support women in the workforce, corporations not only exhibit their dedication to corporate responsibility but also contribute to forging more equitable and sustainable societies.*

**Keywords:** *Corporate responsibility, women in the workforce, gender diversity, gender equality, corporate initiatives, inclusive workplace.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior."- Mahatma Gandhi*

In the last twenty years, India has witnessed a transformation in cultural expectations, enabling women to attain high-ranking positions within the corporate sector, whereas traditionally men have dominated leadership roles in society. Social expectations in India have changed, with men being expected to provide for their families and women to take care of the home. Finding a balance between a woman's obligations to her family and her career can be extremely difficult in India due to the tremendous expectations placed on women. When considered by a male member of the species, the responsibilities placed upon women are numerous and, to be honest, beyond comprehension. Women are taught to prioritize their family's needs over their own from an early age. A girl's mind has been indoctrinated with the idea that she must put everyone else's interests ahead of her own, including her spouse, the family, and the extended family.

Over time, significant shifts have occurred, yet there hasn't been notable progress in altering men's attitudes. A professional woman has stress and overload since she is required to do two roles. Many women in India, like those in Western nations, struggle to strike a work-life balance and are working to do so. Maternity leave

in India is now paid for and lasts for six months instead of the previous three months. Although they are currently confined to larger organisations and major cities, companies that operate child care centers are growing in popularity. In addition to growing as a company, today's childcare facility is also helping working women. Leading to a consistent rise in the proportion of female workers in the workforce, and this prototype will continue to be beneficial going forward. In recent decades, a significant number of women have started to assume managerial roles.

## **2. MEANING AND CONCEPT OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY**

A corporation's ethics determine its operations and how it conducts its business to ensure its long-term viability. This notion is frequently known as corporate responsibility, corporate social responsibility, or business sustainability. If a company damages the very systems upon which it relies, it will ultimately face challenges in sustaining its operations, highlighting the close connection between these two aspects. Realizing how an organization's actions affect the economy, society, and environment in addition to its own workforce is the first step in practicing corporate responsibility. Capital is not the only factor in creating value. The global economic crisis and several ethical corporate disasters related to the environment and other areas are largely attributable to the conventional shareholder value approach to business and its tendency toward short-termism. A company dedicated to optimizing the benefits of its activities for every one of its members.

**The four primary categories of corporate responsibility initiatives are as follows:**

- **Workplace:** How should workers in the value chain be cared for in the most effective way?
- **Market Place:** What effect do the company's goods and services have? Do they abide by all rules on corporate taxes, fair trade, and anti-bribery?
- **Environmental Impact Mitigation:** How can we diminish or amplify the effect on the environment?
- **Community:** What constructive contributions can the organization make to society?

### **3. CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND THE INITIATIVE BY THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT**

The United Nations Global Compact initiative is a pivotal force in propelling corporate responsibility forward, especially within the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda revolves around ten pivotal themes encompassing human rights, labor standards, environmental stewardship, and the fight against corruption. It champions seventeen Sustainable Development Goals spanning across various aspects of societal well-being, environmental preservation, economic prosperity, peace, and global cooperation. Encouraging global participation, it calls upon all nations to engage in a unified effort. By integrating the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact into their operational strategies, policies, and procedures, businesses not only meet their inherent obligations to society and the planet but also lay the groundwork for sustained success in the long term (Compact, U. G. 2015).

**The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact can be summarized as follows:**

- i. Businesses should uphold and respect internationally recognized human rights.
- ii. Businesses must ensure they are not involved in any form of human rights violations.
- iii. Uphold the right to freedom of association and recognize collective bargaining rights.
- iv. Eradicate all forms of forced or compulsory labor.
- v. Work towards the complete elimination of child labor.
- vi. Eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation.
- vii. Embrace a precautionary approach to environmental challenges.
- viii. Take proactive steps to promote environmental responsibility.
- ix. Support the development and adoption of eco-friendly technologies.
- x. Combat corruption in all its manifestations, including bribery and extortion.

Gender-focused corporate responsibility evolution has been observed within the extended context of United Nations Development Programmes, encompassing both the Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals introduced in 2015. The primary focus of these development goals

has been addressing gender disparity in its various facets, including policy and program implementation, eradication of detrimental practices, enhancement of political engagement, ensuring equitable remuneration and employment opportunities, and facilitating access to education. Different nations have adopted their individual strategies to achieve these objectives.

#### **4. INITIATIVES BY CORPORATES TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN WORKFORCE**

Supporting women in the workforce is not just a matter of morality; it's also a strategic decision. Businesses that put gender equality first and actively assist women gain more respect, enhanced team cohesion, and engaged workers. Businesses can promote a workplace that encourages diversity and equality, enabling women to achieve their maximum capabilities through the implementation of initiatives focused on gender inclusivity. By doing this, companies set themselves up for long-term success in a corporate environment that is always changing while simultaneously advancing gender equality (Ahmed, W., & Jameel, A. 2018). Businesses have the potential to foster a fair and impartial workplace for every employee by implementing the following practice:

- Women make up a large percentage of the managers in the listed corporations.
- Female employees have lower attrition rates;
- Women are eligible for special return ship policies;
- It's imperative for workplaces to adopt a strict stance against sexual harassment;
- Female employees can gain advantages from flexible scheduling, partial reimbursement, and remote work options;
- Mothers should be eligible for paid leave in addition to conventional maternity leave for new mothers; and
- Extra benefits, such as supporting infertility treatment for their female employees.

Although it's positive to see an increase in female participation in the workforce, they still encounter obstacles hindering their advancement within companies. These hurdles include inadequate policies for working parents and insufficient professional growth prospects tailored to female employees' needs. Nevertheless, some corporations are acknowledging these challenges and actively striving to create a more conducive environment for women to thrive professionally.

While not everyone is fully supportive, numerous prominent companies recognize the importance of empowering women and are actively pursuing initiatives to advance gender equality in the workplace.

**i. Info Edge**

Info Edge is among India's leading internet companies and is committed to providing equal opportunities for all. Recognizing the potential benefits of gender-diverse teams in enhancing consumer connections, the company is prioritizing gender inclusion and fostering a welcoming environment for all individuals. This is likely why the overall gender diversity ratio of women to men is 41% to 59% (Raj, M. 2010).

**Here are some initiatives undertaken by Info Edge to promote gender equality in the workplace:**

- New mothers are granted 26 weeks of paid maternity leave, while women opting for adoption or surrogacy receive 12 weeks.
- Provide a well-supervised childcare facility for staff.
- Extended health insurance that includes infertility treatment coverage.
- Provide POSH training and other advantages to promote a safe and creative environment for all employees.

**ii. Pepsico**

PepsiCo stands as a prominent global beverage manufacturer, recognized for its strong commitment to gender inclusivity. As of 2022, 44% of managers are women globally, and men and women are paid within 1% of each other in the 72 countries that represent 99% of their salaried population, 33% of their Board of Directors are women, 25% of their Senior Executives are women; 40% women as Executives. Pepsico was named in the top 50 list of best India's Best Workplaces for Women in 2023 (Shara, K. 2018).

**Followings are some ways Pepsico is dealing with the issue of gender equality:**

- Enhancing workplace safety by sensitizing to all genders.
- Enlisting women to champion gender parity in professional environments.
- Offering support for female employees to concentrate on their tasks uninterrupted.

- Generating fresh avenues for women to advance in their careers within the workforce.
- Cultivating a workplace environment that embraces diversity and ensures inclusivity.

### **iii. Nestle**

The Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index (GEI), which listed Nestle on its list for the fifth year in a row in 2023, considered it to be among the best companies that promote gender parity. Currently, 46.4% of management positions are occupied by women. Furthermore, Nestle has moved forward in cultivating a varied and welcoming workforce by launching a fresh parental leave perk accessible to all staff, irrespective of gender, under its gender-neutral Global Parental Support Policy. Demonstrating dedication to advancing gender equality and empowering women in the workplace, market, and community, Nestlé, a supporter of the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), has extended its involvement in this endeavor to include the Nespresso brand (Alon, I., Jaffe, E., Prange, C., & Vianelli, D. 2020).

Nestle takes several measures to promote gender equality within its workforce. It boasts one of the highest percentages of female staff among FMCG companies. This demonstrates that the company's specific initiatives to hire and retain women employees are paying off, and that gender diversity is really integrated into the business (Laven, A., & Pyburn, R. 2015).

#### **Following are some initiatives launched by Nestle to encourage gender diversity:**

- Sensitization training for hiring supervisors.
- Conduct market research to identify safe regions and determine travel entitlements.
- Programs to raise awareness about unconscious prejudice and gender sensitization.
- Before and after childbirth benefits encompass priority parking, ergonomic seating, and a special travel allowance for both the mother and child.
- A 26-week paid maternity leave with accompanying benefits is provided.
- Safe and secluded breastfeeding rooms.
- Providing dairy farming training for women to boost employment opportunities at the grassroots level.

- Launched the "Attract-Retain-Develop" concept to promote inclusivity and diversity in talent.

#### **iv. Zomato**

The startup is leading the way in promoting inclusivity and diversity within India's startup scene, distinguishing itself as an employer that values equality and is mindful of all genders, thereby championing workplace gender equality (Dattani, K. 2023).

**Here are a few of Zomato's efforts aimed at advancing gender inclusivity and diversity:**

- Zomato aims to promote cognitive diversity by having 50% of its directors be women.
- Women and transgender employees can now take up to 10 menstrual absences per year.
- Parents via birth, surrogacy, or adoption have equal parental leave policies.
- Ensure women are employed at all levels, from delivery partners to board members.

By the end of 2022, the aim was to increase the proportion of female delivery drivers from 0.5% to 10%. Currently, their target is to attain a 20% presence of women in their warehouse operations by 2024.

#### **v. TCS**

TCS ranks among the leading companies featured on the Bloomberg Financial Services Gender-Equality Index, demonstrating its commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse work environment. TCS is an equal opportunity employer who encourages gender diversity. With 44% of female managers at the entry level, 30% in middle management, and 13% in senior leadership, the corporation is concentrating on becoming a more inclusive workplace. The organization believes that workplace diversity and inclusion can drive success, and it operates under the simple motto 'Inclusion without exception'. To address this, TCS established the Network of Outstanding Women (TCS-NOW) platform, which provides a secure area for women to interact, create, learn, seek professional and personal assistance, and resolve any workplace issues. Initiatives like as TCS NOW promote an egalitarian and creative workplace, increasing professional inventiveness and influencing people to change their behavior and mental processes (Noronha, E., et. al 2022).

**vi. Tech Mahindra**

Tech Mahindra continues to uphold its position as an employer that values gender equality, implementing various initiatives to foster equal opportunities in the workplace. Acknowledged by the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index for three consecutive years, the company's dedication to promoting diversity and inclusivity has proven beneficial, contributing to its overall value and expansion (Tech, H. C. L., & Mahindra, T. 2015).

**vii. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories**

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories stands out as a leading advocate for gender inclusivity in India, actively promoting initiatives to recruit and empower women in the workforce. Through their dedication to fostering gender equality, the company has experienced a significant rise in female staff, increasing from 778 in 2015 to 2,349 presently.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Reddy's adopted bold social goals as part of its Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) agenda in 2022 to contribute to a fairer and more socially inclusive world through diversity, equity, and inclusion measures - at least 35% women in senior leadership by 2030; gender parity across the organization by 2035; 3% of the workforce to be people with disabilities by 2030; and 100% living wages for on-premise extended workforce by 2025 (Alam, A., et. al. 2018).

**Following are some initiatives and projects that have led to Dr. Reddy's laboratories becoming a gender-diverse company:**

- Intentional recruitment of women in sales and manufacturing, comprising 60% of the personnel across all positions.
- SHE (Special Hospital Executives) is a women-only medical sales team concept.
- Women in traditionally male-dominated roles, including as R&D, engineering, and warehouse management.
- 'Career Comeback for Women' is a forum for employing women who are taking career vacations.
- Improved pregnancy support at work through counseling and buddy mothers, resulting in fewer maternity resignations.
- Provide female-driven pick-up and drop-off cabs.

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<sup>10</sup> Bureau, E. N. (2023, February 9). *Dr Reddy's Laboratories announces major recognitions in gender equality and sustainability*. Express Pharma. <https://www.expresspharma.in/dr-reddys-laboratories-announces-major-recognitions-in-gender-equality-and-sustainability/>

## 5. CONCLUSION

The myriad challenges confronted by female workers in Indian workplaces necessitate immediate attention. Despite significant strides towards gender equality and women's empowerment, numerous barriers persist, hindering women from realizing their full potential and actively participating in career choices. These challenges stem from entrenched social norms, cultural biases, and institutional obstacles that curtail opportunities and hinder career progression. Limited access to skill development and career advancement further obstructs women's success. Biased performance evaluations, scant mentorship opportunities, and gender disparities in education and job training exacerbate these challenges. It is essential for corporations, policymakers, and society as a whole to take concerted action. Stringent laws prohibiting harassment, violence, and discrimination against women must be enacted and rigorously enforced.

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