

“Unplugging Potential and Impact of CSR & Development Sector Funding in North East India”

First North East CSR Forum (NECSRF) 2022 Concludes at TISS Guwahati

The subject of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a critical component of the development narrative in North East India, post the law on CSR was enacted and passed in 2013-2014. With less than 4% of CSR spending in the region, with Assam receiving the highest, the need for a more focused CSR and donor's attention and approach is an utmost necessity. This along with the existing CSR focus, good practices, impacts, results and priorities are emerging programmatic, policy and research needs towards sustainable CSR scale and interventions in the region.

In this regard, the 1st North East CSR Forum (NECSRF) 2022 was held on October 28, 2022, hosted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Guwahati, and jointly organised by the Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD), TISS Guwahati, and the North East Development Foundation. With the main theme, ***“Unplugging Potential and Impact of CSR & Development Sector Funding in North East India”***, the NECSRF 2022 organised 7 technical sessions on various sub-themes - Addressing Issues and Challenges in enhancing donors’ and funders’ investment in the North Eastern States; Emergency and Crisis Management & Response: Role of CSRs, Donors and Philanthropies in North East; Need-based, impactful ideas and projects, innovation and process-oriented eligible implementing agencies for funders and donors in North East; and Need for a policy or institutional support to augment and encourage development funding and investment in NER. There were 3 dedicated sessions on CSRs/donors’ good practices, projects and case studies. CSR project presentations were made by - ONGC Foundation, OIL CSR, NEDFi CSR, IndiGoReach (InterGlobe Aviation Ltd; ICICI Foundation, UNDP, and others.



NECSRF 2022 was graced by key CSR experts and practitioners - Prof. S Siva Raju, Head, Centre of CSR Excellence, TISS Mumbai; Mr Sachin Sachdeva, Director, India, Paul Hamlyn Foundation; Dr Monica Banerjee, Head, InterGlobe

Foundation; Dr Sukumal Deb, Deputy CEO, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (NER); Mr Raju Sharma, Director, IndiGoReach; Mr Manoj Das, Former Director IIE



and NERAMAC; Ritupon Bora, Foundation for Social Transformation; Dr Jayanta Choudhury, Head, Department of Rural Development, Tripura University; Dr Rajdeep Singha, Chairperson, Centre for Labour Studies and Social Protection, TISS Guwahati; Dr Shivani Chouhan Baurah, TISS Guwahati, and others.

Dr Syed S. Kazi, Convenor of NECSRF, emphasized the importance of a meeting of this nature, especially in a landscape where there is a paucity of funds, and of data on basic facts and figures as with northeast India in the case of CSR activities. Northeast India receives less than 4% in CSR spending. A report recently published by the Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD) and the North East Development Foundation (NEDF) showed that since the pandemic, CSR spending in NER has diminished. Much of the CSR spending in NER is in the education and health sector, but this should not mean that other pertinent areas like equality for the disabled, rural development, gender equality and women empowerment, protection of heritage and art, sports, etc. should be overlooked. He also posited that since the donor

agency's engagement with a community cannot be for an infinite period of time, there should be a focus on developing the local organizations and communities as a social enterprise so that they may be sustainable and carry forward the legacy. Further, it may be in everyone's interest to develop local individuals professionally so that they may carry out the implementation of change and intervention in a professional manner. He concludes by pointing out that already the region may be 10-15 years behind in indicators of development, stymied further by lack of intervention, but the emerging issues such as cybercrime on one hand and digital exclusion on the other should not be overlooked.

Dr Rajdeep Singha, Co-Convenor of NECSRF and Assistant Professor, Centre for Labour Studies & Social Protection, TISS Guwahati drew attention to the fact that often there are several similar projects and activities underway but they exist in silos with one organization not knowing about the other working in the same domain. He spoke about the importance of creating a space like NECSRF to share CSR practices, experiences of organizations, and research-related papers to build a robust ecosystem to advance development.

Prof Kalpana Sarathy, Deputy Director, TISS Guwahati mentioned the importance of courses like Labour Studies and Social Protection, and Peace and Conflict Studies offered in TISS that have newly emerged due to the growing concern of labour exploitation and international and national conflict, and are offered in TISS Guwahati campus with particular focus on the needs of the region.

Sachin Sachdeva, Director-India, Paul Hamlyn Foundation spoke about the importance of taking note of the particular context of a site chosen for intervention by development sector organizations. There is a need to shift focus from solution-based to working on participatory processes

which help arrive at solutions that are more long-lasting. More than sustainability there is a need to talk about continuity of engagement because it takes time for an initiative to make an impact. According to **Prof. S. Siva Raju, Chairperson of TISS Centre of Excellence in CSR, Mumbai**, there has been a major improvement in the last decade of CSR, but there is still a big gap in CSR activities and funding in the NER. **Dr. Monica Banerjee, Head, InterGlobe Foundation** stressed that North East India needs more CSR funding, as it is currently very underfunded. There is a need to take a step forward and go beyond the 2 per cent of profit philanthropy that most organizations indulge in. There is an earnest need to devise a new CSR approach with innovative solutions that goes beyond 1-year projects up to 3 to 5 years. According to **Raju Sharma, Director-CSR, IndiGo**, while it is a fact that the NER gets 5 percent CSR funding, there is an opportunity for the pool of 95% funds to compete for. One needs to know to learn to measure outcomes and that we can do by unplugging the potential of the NER and building our own capacity. *“Northeast is not difficult, it is different”*, said Mr Raju Sharma. There is a need to learn how to work in the Northeast and it is our responsibility to do so. The media also has a role to play in it tapping into the potential of the NER.

The culmination of NECSRF 2022 identified, recognised and felicitated **4 winners and 4 Special Mentions of the CSR Award 2022**. The winning projects were - *Swargadew Siu-ka-Pha Multi-speciality Hospital* at Rajabari, Sivasagar, Assam, by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) Foundation; *Restoration & Regeneration of Forests, in the Tamenglong & Noney Districts of Manipur*, by the IndiGoReach (InterGlobe Aviation Ltd); *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*



sustainable investments and initiatives of the Oil India Limited (OIL) and; ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth for its *Fishery Development Project in Manipur*.

The CSR Special Mention projects were - Project Kheojia Assam, by the SankalpTaru Foundation; Tata AIG CSR Northeast Scholarships Project, by Avanti Fellows; Assam State Initiative - Livelihood, by the Centre for Microfinance & Livelihood (CML) - Tata Trusts; and Kitchen Garden Promotion among the vulnerable Mothers in Manipur by Child Rights & You (CRY).

There were 2 final winners for CSR Case Studies - “Enabling Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case Study on Women Weavers of Sivasagar, Assam,” by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) Foundation; and “Resilience Building of Communities Around Guwahati Airport: A CSR initiative by Airport Authority of India (AAI), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Office of Kamrup, (Assam).

The **2 Special Mentions recognised under this category** were - “*A presentation on CSR Approach of NEDFi: A Case Study on NEDFi Haat,*” by the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi); and *Mental Illness Treatment Alliance (MITA)* by the Action North East Trust (ANT).

