

## Summary Paper on Virtual Dialog

### Aligning CSR and Sustainability strategies to respond to COVID in the rural setup

**Date of the event:** 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020

#### PANELISTS

**Mr. Vinod Pande**

Advisor CSR, PTC Financial Services Ltd.  
(former MD and CEO of SBI Foundation)

**Mr. Vijay Singh**

Head CSR, PI Industries Ltd.  
(former CEO of Sahara Welfare Foundation).

**Ms. Anjali Makhija**

Chief Operating Officer, S M Sehgal Foundation

**Ms. Aarti Mohan**

Co-founder, Sattva Consulting

#### MODERATOR

**Shrutee Ganguly**

Principal CSR Advisory,  
Sattva Consulting

#### Summary of Key recommendations

- Skill training for migrants (50% of total workforce of India) in IT, Finance has huge potential for migrant workforces to create their opportunities of livelihoods and boost rural economy
- CSRs and Corporates have an opportunity to establish their relationship with the communities and setting up value chains to catalyse the growth of the businesses.
- As Nation builders, the government, corporates, PSUs and CSOs should move from 'Relief' to 'Rebuild' in this COVID and post-COVID world. Sattva has been enabling such players to re-design their strategies to create a last mile impact.
- CSRs such as Pi Industries and PFS are building the pathway to strengthen the rural markets through strategic interventions in agriculture and allied areas
- Agriculture and Good rural governance are the key pillars in order to develop rural economy and SMSF has been investing in this space across India

#### Discussion

In India, majority of the population resides in rural areas, with agriculture and its allied sectors being the largest livelihood provider. The sector employs more than 50% of the total workforce and contributes almost 17% to the country's GDP. Amid the COVID pandemic, agriculture has emerged as a key essential sector of the country, contributing towards the overall food security of the nation. With the lockdown and the resultant economic slowdown, there is also reverse migration taking place, where a large proportion of 418.5 million labour force (2017-18 Survey) and daily wagers have returned to their villages. Given the uncertainty of the situation, it is still

not clear whether they will return. With this background, the panellists agreed that coming together to build rural resilience is crucial in driving overall growth and development of the country.

Given that technology and digital integration is the future, **Mr Vinod Pande (Advisor CSR, PTC Financial Services Ltd)** suggested that CSR programs should start focussing on IT skills training for returning migrants and other skilling opportunities not just for employment but also for entrepreneurship development. The CSR activities for a business like PFS are strategically aligned to address the triple bottom line; to empower the farmers, make space for returning migrants and strengthen the agriculture sector at the same time. He further suggested integrating food, nutritional and financial stability in the country. The current situation presents an opportunity for banks and businesses to move to the rural areas where there is lower risk of effect, should a lockdown happen again. This will help spread the risk from urban to rural markets for demand, production and supply. This is also a time for thinking towards policy reforms in pricing, market access and sustainable agriculture production for preparedness towards such situations.

For a grassroots organisation like S M Sehgal Foundation, community interface is the main focus. **Ms Anjali Makhija (Chief Operating Officer, S M Sehgal Foundation)** mentioned that the lockdown period actually provided them an opportunity to be 'future ready' by building capacities of frontline workers and preparing the team on continuing the work in accordance with the guidelines and social distancing norms. According to Ms. Makhija, it is important to work on integrated programs with rural communities which would include agriculture and allied activities, WASH activities, and inclusion of digital awareness in education programs, among others. S M Sehgal Foundation has a strong Good Rural Governance program that works with communities and village level institutions to build their capacities to empower them to be involved in the development of their village. There is a need to implement programs which are sustainable and have long-term impact, and will help build the capacities of the rural communities in preparedness for such situations.

**Mr Vijay Singh (Head CSR, PI Industries Ltd.)** shared an example of a CSR project that has helped build the rural economy by introducing farmers to better practices and technology. PI has been promoting the direct seeded rice technology, which has resulted in reducing drudgery in agriculture by 50%, saving input cost of cultivation, and 30-40% reduction in GHG emissions. This is an example of a holistic CSR program able to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits.

**Ms. Aarti Mohan (Co-founder Sattva Consulting)** stitched together the views of all panelists, highlighting the critical need of collaboration during this time, especially as funding is limited. She emphasised that the efforts of the Government, Corporates, PSU and Civil Society Organizations should complement each other, bringing a variety of skill set together to tackle the issue at hand. Ms. Mohan further stressed on the importance of collectivizing the rural workforce, encouraging rural entrepreneurship and innovation, recognizing and formalizing COVID-specific livelihoods and bringing into mainstream digital technology for rural communities.

Given that COVID is here to stay for a while, the panellists agreed that going forward, it is important that organisations, both business and grassroots are able to strategize and partner towards preparedness and readiness for such issues in future.

### About S M Sehgal Foundation

S M Sehgal Foundation is a 21-year-old public charitable trust that designs and implements development interventions to address needs of rural communities of India in the critical areas of water security, food security and good governance. In partnership with corporates, PSUs, philanthropists, and the government, the foundation team works with rural communities to create sustainable programs for managing water resources, increasing agricultural productivity, and strengthening rural governance. As an emerging knowledge leader on rural development issues in India, the foundation team also engages in participatory research, impact assessment, interactive dialogue, and community media to take informed actions and achieve sustainable results. The team's emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment is driven by the realization that human rights are central to developing every person's potential. [visit us at: [www.smsfoundation.org](http://www.smsfoundation.org)]

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### About Sattva

**Sattva** is a social impact consulting, advisory, research and solutions organization. Sattva works closely at the intersection of business and impact, with multiple stakeholders including **foundations, non-profits, social enterprises, corporations and the social investing ecosystem** focusing on scalable solutions for sustainability and achieving social impact goals effectively and maximizing the social return on their investment. Sattva has worked extensively in India, Africa and South Asia and engages with leading organisations across the globe through services in strategic advisory, program management, CSR advisory, research, knowledge, assessments, and co-creation of sustainable models. Sattva has offices in Bangalore, Mumbai and Gurgaon. [visit us at: [www.sattva.co.in](http://www.sattva.co.in)]

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