

# Community Welfare Activities During Covid 19 Pandemic Through CSR Programs- Initiatives Taken up by Sugar Sector in India

Munish Kumar<sup>1</sup> and Apekshita Solomon<sup>2</sup>

1. C.S.Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur- 208 002, (U.P.) India

2. Society for Sugar Research & Promotion, New Delhi

## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted all aspects of human life as well as on the capacity and functioning of health systems. The essential health services especially in the rural areas of the country were deranged as frontline healthcare workers were diverted to pandemic mitigation activities, creating a void in services for vulnerable groups including support for needy women, and children. In India, NGOs, SHGs stepped in to help fill the gap. Sugar companies in a big way supported the government initiatives of community welfare programs through CSR. These community welfare initiatives have generated a positive impact through promoting education, health, family welfare, women and child education and a clean environment.

## Introduction

In recent years the covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruptions and, the situation in India was quite alarming, causing widespread shock, anger, and grief across. The covid-19 pandemic started with the abrupt announcement of a nationwide lockdown from 25 March 2020, creating uncertainties related to livelihoods and food security for vulnerable groups especially labours, women and children. The pandemic severely impacted on the capacity of health systems to continue to deliver essential health services especially in the rural areas of the country. Frontline healthcare workers were diverted to pandemic mitigation activities, creating a void in services for vulnerable groups including support for needy women, and children. In India, NGOs, SHGs stepped in to help fill the gap. India has the largest number, network, and outreach of SHGs globally. The central and state governments, along with non-governmental organizations, galvanized 7 million SHGs into action, engaging over 75 million households spread across over 6,500 blocks to complement government response to covid-19. During this time, Indian Sugar industry which has a vast network of over 750 sugar mills in the country played a pivotal role and wholeheartedly supported the government of India program on different aspects of COVID-19 management in the country to take informed decisions on issues ranging from (i) medical emergency planning, (ii) availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine facility, disease surveillance and testing, (iii) ensuring availability of essential medical equipment, (iv) augmenting human resource and capacity building, (v) supply chain and logistics management, (vi) coordination with private sector, (vii) economic and welfare measures, (viii) information, communications and public awareness, (ix) technology and data management, (x) public grievance and (xi) strategic issues related to lockdown. Although, the economic uncertainty and partial paralysis caused by the COVID-19 crisis in India also impacted supply chains for a number of agricultural products and industries, including the Indian sugar industry. The entire value chain management of the Indian sugar industry, viz., sugarcane, sugar, molasses, ethanol and their subsequent marketing and export, was disrupted from the Covid-19 pandemic (Anon. 2020).

## Indian Sugar Industry

The Indian sugar industry is a significant player in the national economy, contributing about 1.1 % of national GDP and employing over 12 million people. The sugar industry is predominantly rural based and workers are employed in sugar mills, distilleries, cogeneration plants, Jaggery units and numerous pulp, paper and chemical making plants. Sugar industry has the onus to ensure the health, safety and welfare of this mammoth workforce which is largely

responsible for the annual production of sugarcane ( 400 million tons), 35 million tons of white sugar, 6-8 million tons of open pan sugar (*jaggery and khandsari*) ethanol and a range of bio-based products. After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the sugar industry started facing a social and economic crisis which has adversely impacted all stakeholders (Solomon et al. 2020; Bhatt, 2020). This calamity led all the sugar mills to collectively work together to remain steadfast in the challenging time of Covid-19 lockdown, protection of the health and safety of all their employees became their topmost priority (Solomon et al. 2020).

In India, according to the Section 135 of the Companies Act , Corporates should spent 2% of their average net profits of three years on CSR. All sugar companies in India are contributing in this mandatory social welfare program generating a positive impact through promoting education, health, family welfare and roads, drinking water and clean environment. However, after the large scale devastation caused by the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India announced that companies could use CSR funds for creating health infrastructure for Covid-19 care. This included establishment of medical oxygen and storage plants, manufacturing and supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators, cylinders and other medical equipment for countering Covid-19. CSR funds were allowed to set up makeshift hospitals and temporary Covid-19 care Centers. A study conducted by Solomon et al ( 2019) reported that a company, Seksaria Biswan Sugar Factory, India spends around US\$40-50,000 per year towards CSR for various community welfare programs, generating a positive impact through promoting education, health, family welfare and a clean environment. The company has opened a school equipped with library and computer facilities, a skills-development program for women, scholarships for girls and a recreation room for students and employees. A hospital in the mill premises organizes weekly health camps with free check-ups.

During COVID-19 pandemic, the protection of health and safety of field staff & laborers, factory employees, cane farmers and their families who are mostly located in rural areas became topmost priority for the sugar companies. Various initiatives taken under CSR by the sugar companies to protect their employees and local communities during pandemic period are briefly discussed in this paper, as they were instrumental in sustaining sugarcane and sugar production in the country.

### **Methodology**

This paper highlights some of the CSR initiatives adopted by sugar companies in India during the COVID-19 pandemic to help local rural communities to rescue them from the after affects of pandemic viz., health, nutrition, homelessness and unemployment. The study is based on the on-line interviews, published reports of sugar companies and discussion with the stakeholders and visits to sugarcane farming families.

### **Initiatives by Sugar Industry during Covid-19 Pandemic**

The response to changing CSR landscape was demonstrated not only by companies of Indian origin, but even by foreign corporations that have mobilized support and initiated targeted campaigns to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. While the Government's PM CARES Fund has witnessed enormous support from corporate, some sugar companies have also contributed by individual programmes and relief efforts. A large number of sugar mills have also partnered with local authorities of respective state governments to donate medicines, equipments and food packets and scale other initiatives to cater to the needs of their workers and local communities. Some important initiatives are mentioned below.

#### **1. Improving Community Health Resources**

The Indian sugar sector, initiated relief efforts by providing medical products and services for healthcare workers and vulnerable communities in their area, keeping in mind the urgent need, and ensuring the safety of the people involved. In this regard, CSR initiatives have immensely supplemented frontline health workers through supplying hygiene kits, medicines and supporting the establishment of temporary quarantine facilities. A prominent sugar company in north India, Dalmia Bharat Sugar Industries Limited (DBSIL) distributed more than 14,000 N95 masks to their frontline workers and more than 20 awareness rallies were conducted, highlighting the importance of hand washing and wearing masks, covering nearly 3,000 villagers. More than 4,000 families were provided with dry rations and 11,000 bottles of hand sanitizers were distributed to the Police, Health Department staff and other Government departments. Thermal screening and hand sanitization were made mandatory at all entry points to

sugar mill premises for employees, contract workers, vendors and all others who enter the mill area. COVID-19 Testing facilities/RT-PCR were arranged in coordination with Government Health Department to assist employees who need COVID-19 tests at sugar factory or nearby Public Health Centers. Sugar mills also set up a special COVID Helpline during lock down period.

A progressive sugar mill in north India (Haryana), Saraswati Sugar Mills Ltd. (SSM), Yamunanagar (10,000 TCD) which is one of the largest sugar mills of the country made elaborate arrangements to protect its employees. The mill has played a crucial role during pandemic by extending the required support to District Administration and Health Authorities to contain COVID-19 pandemic during 2019-20 & 2021-22 ( Table 1).

Table 1. CSR initiatives taken by Saraswati Sugar Mills Ltd. during Covid-19 pandemic

S.No	Item	Beneficiary agency
1.	Installation of Oxygen Concentrator ( 15 Nos)	Civil Hospital, Yamunanagar
2	Cardiac Monitor ( 5. Nos)	Civil Hospital, Yamunanagar
3	Oxygen Flow Meters (50 Nos)	Civil Hospital, Yamunanagar
4	Distribution of Paracetamol Tablets (15,0000 Nos)	District Health Authorities
5	Syringes for Covid-19 vaccination	District Health Authorities
6	Face Masks distribution	District Health Authorities
	Multi Para Monitors	District Hospital & ESI Hospita, Yamunanagr
7	Covid-19 awareness campaign & vaccination camps (15)	Yamunanagar District/ Command area of SSM.

In addition, SSM had also provided food packets to the poor people and migrant laborers from the nearby states, face masks, sanitizers, hand wash solution to the farmers. The SSM management has spent 0.5 million USD for providing Covid-19 relief facilities to the District Administration during pandemic period.

**2. Organizing Community Health Awareness Programs:** . Sugar mills conducted community awareness programs to ensure that their field laborers, staff and families not only have adequate infrastructure for hand washing, but are also equipped with the knowledge of the health and safety benefits of this simple but life-saving action. In many places, mills have made efforts in sanitizing public places, villages , factory area, and online medical consultation for their staff and their families. Special CSR teams were constituted by mill to enforce social distancing in cane yards, distribute masks in mill area, villages and motivated the employees and villagers to wear masks. To ensure the safety of workers at the sugar factories, regular sanitization of processing area and mill yards was carried out. Some important initiatives and programs undertaken by sugar mills and associated companies during Covid-19 pandemic are shown Table 2

Table 2. Community welfare initiatives under CSR by some prominent sugar and associated companies during Covid-19 pandemic

S.No.	Name of Sugar Mill	Community welfare initiatives during Covid-19 Pandemic
1.	Dwarikesh Sugar Industries Limited (DSIL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Company organized programmes in 23 villages among 519 community members over the significance of use of face masks, social distancing and regular hand washing.</li> <li>The Company distributed 500 food kits at the worst juncture of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>DSIL distributed several thousand masks in the presence of the Health Department.</li> <li>The Company increased its CSR engagements through funding and supply of oxygenators to counter the pandemic.</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.bseindia.com/bseplus/AnnualReport">https://www.bseindia.com/bseplus/AnnualReport</a></p>

		<a href="#">/532610/73032532610.pdf</a>
2.	Balrampur Mills, Chini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strictly enforced social distancing</li> <li>• Promoted regular hand washing and sanitization.</li> <li>• Advocated the use of appropriate masks and safety goggles for those working in bagasse and ash yards to counter the easy dispersal of material.</li> <li>• Organized free medical camps in all units, supervised by specialists from reputed hospitals.</li> <li>• Education support till graduation to the children of blue-collar workers deceased due to COVID-19. Monthly monetary support to the spouses of blue-collar workers deceased due to COVID-19, for three years.</li> <li>• Sanitized offices and buildings, the Company moderated / eliminated hazards in the areas engaged in sugar packing, fly ash generation, bagasse leakage and high noise.</li> <li>• The effectiveness of the Company's engagement was established through periodic health checks and regular attendance. Maintained a hygienic changing room.</li> <li>• Maintained canteens to serve hygienic food.</li> <li>• Dispensaries with medical staff provided first-aid and preliminary medication for employees and contractors.</li> <li>• Provided ambulance facilities during lockdown.</li> <li>• Instituted a Mediclaim Policy to cover employees and their families from expenses related to disease, illness and accidents.</li> <li>• Advocated the use of appropriate personal protection equipment.</li> <li>• Conducted a periodic health checks for employees.</li> <li>• Introduced daily thermal scanning at the gate for employees before entering the premises. Instituted training and awareness programmes</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://chini.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/7e173531-4027-4e39-a7fb-cf7a1ca7bc5e.pdf">https://chini.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/7e173531-4027-4e39-a7fb-cf7a1ca7bc5e.pdf</a></p>
3.	Dalmia Bharat Industries Ltd/ Dalmia Bharat Foundation(DBF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dalmia Bharat Foundation (DBF) has organised more than 100 awareness, prevention and relief campaigns on COVID-19 covering 22,500 villagers.</li> <li>• Distributed more than 1.25 lakh face masks made with the help of SHG members &amp; DIKSHA trainees.</li> <li>• Dry Ration was provided to more than 5,000 families.</li> <li>• More than 11,000 bottles of hand sanitizers, Personal Protective equipment and gloves were provided to front-line workers.</li> <li>• Distribution of 50,000 N-95 masks under Breathe safe is underway for front-line workers.</li> <li>• A quarantine center was set up by DBF operational for 60 days at the Model School, Rajgangpur with a total capacity of over 200 beds</li> <li>• Over 20,000 households were disinfected during the lockdown</li> <li>• Provided 20,000 food packets to the on-field Government Officials during the lockdown.</li> <li>• DBF worked with local Health Departments to create awareness about the Indian Government's Largest Vaccination Drive.</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.dalmiabharat.com/wp-content/themes/dalmia-bharat-group/custom-sustainability/Annual-Report-2020-2021.pdf">https://www.dalmiabharat.com/wp-content/themes/dalmia-bharat-group/custom-sustainability/Annual-Report-2020-2021.pdf</a></p>
4.	Godavari Bio-refineries Ltd.	<p>During the Covid-19, the Company has worked closely with the following departments to assist the fight against the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearby <i>panchayats</i> (Village )</li> <li>• Police stations</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government hospitals</li> <li>• Government schools</li> <li>• Education Dept. for 10th grade exam</li> <li>• Arranged for RT-PCR test / random tests for vendors, labours and community and employees, to isolate Covid+ve patients so as to avoid spread of disease.</li> <li>• Facilitated company ambulance for shifting affected patients</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://godavaribiorefineries.com/csr">https://godavaribiorefineries.com/csr</a></p>
5.	United Phosphorus Limited (UPL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPL donated nearly USD 10 million to fight the pandemic</li> <li>• Supplied USD 3.3 million worth of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to external stakeholders</li> <li>• Disinfected 700+ villages through our sprayers</li> <li>• Disinfected public areas with 5.3 million litres of sanitizing solution</li> <li>• Provided 15,000 food packets and water bottles to frontline soldiers and migrating community</li> <li>• Swift innovation to convert nitrogen plants to oxygen plants and transferring them next to hospitals making them oxygen reliant.</li> <li>• UPL was the first in India to convert its nitrogen plants to oxygen plants. 5 hospitals in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and New Delhi achieved self- sufficiency in oxygen.</li> <li>• 100+ industry players, government and private institutions trained, through knowledge sharing forums / webinars on conversion of nitrogen PSA plant to oxygen plant.</li> <li>• UPL distributed more than 15,000 Covid medicine kits in Uttar Pradesh under the prescription of Department of Health for asymptomatic and mild symptomatic patients which were advised for home isolation.</li> <li>• UPL provided jumbo oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators and ventilators to Gujarat and Maharashtra. 4 new oxygen plants were ordered which would take care of 1600+ beds in the near future.</li> <li>• Company set up Covid-19 centers at Jhagadia, Netrang, Ankleshwar and Mandva catering to 300 beds, including oxygen Supply.</li> <li>• UPL deployed modern spraying machines through its Adarsh Farm Services wing in rural and urban areas of Haryana, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan to disinfect and sanitize public areas to contain the spread of Covid-19.</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="#">UPL_CSR_Annual Report2020-21</a></p>
6.	Aditya Birla Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided 5,000 jumbo cylinders PAN India</li> <li>• 36 oxygen Pressure Swing Adsorption plants. These plants produce a litre of oxygen every 60 seconds and are integral to meet the oxygen shortage.</li> <li>• 2000 oxygen concentrators, based on the Hub &amp; Spoke model have been instituted in the major state's capitals, which then pan out to the smaller towns.</li> <li>• Liquid oxygen plants are on stream across the nation at their plant sites.</li> <li>• Arrangements were made to import cryogenic tanks.</li> <li>• Specially designed 40 mobile cardiac ambulances are in service all over the country.</li> <li>• More than 500 beds were earmarked across locations. Proactive engagements with local communities, and other stakeholders, is an ongoing activity.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than a million triple layer surgical masks have been distributed, along with tens of thousands of personal protective equipment's.</li> <li>• Hundreds of ventilators have also been given by the Group.</li> <li>• To reinforce COVID prevention messages, such as using mask, social distancing, and sanitizing, are unending</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://ficci.in/sector/report/20588/COVID-19_Intervention.pdf.pdf">https://ficci.in/sector/report/20588/COVID-19_Intervention.pdf.pdf</a></p>
--	--	---

**3. Production of Hand Sanitizer:** The national lockdown on March 25th due to Covid-19 caused a sudden spike in demand for hand sanitizers. India's hand sanitizer production capacity went up by a staggering 1,000 times to 3.0 million liters per day from an annual production of mere 1.0 million liters, as sugar mills and ethanol distilleries with the help of Central and Provincial governments rose to the occasion to meet the challenge posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the leading sugar mills producing sanitizers include Balrampur Chini Mills Ltd, Bajaj Hindustan Sugar Ltd, DCM Shriram Ltd, Dalmia Bharat Sugar Mills Ltd, Simbhaoli Sugars Ltd, KM Sugar Ltd, Awadh Sugar and Uttam Sugar Mills Ltd.

**4. Medical Oxygen for Public Health Clinics:** Sugar mills in the country came forward to manufacture medical oxygen to help meet the growing demand in the state and the country which according to Western India Sugar Mills Association (WISMA), was a major social initiative. In the state of Uttar Pradesh (north India), 120 sugar mills supported the government by setting up oxygen generators to meet its shortage for treating patients infected with the corona virus. The 80 oxygen plants were set up from CSR funds (Fig.1). These oxygen generators capture the atmospheric oxygen and convert it into medical grade oxygen through high pressure and supply it directly to the pipelines of the Community Health Centers (CHC).

**5. Community food distribution program:** Many sugar companies have stepped in along with the government to feed the needy by providing relief packages to take care of food security measures for the poor. Continuing the efforts to offer relief measures under CSR and SDG 1,2, 11,16 and 17- the daily wagers, migrant laborers and below poverty line (BPL) families in the villages were benefited from the concerted efforts of the sugar companies across geographies in the country. The canteens of the Dalmia Bharat factories across India prepared food for local distribution in their area. A large number of food packets were supplied to the local municipalities and police to be distributed among the needy and homeless near all the plant locations.

**6. Community Water, Sanitation and hygiene:** Sugar sector in India has responded enthusiastically to the Government's call-to-action aligned with SDG 16, 17 on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues. The companies have made efforts in sanitizing public places and installed RO drinking water facilities. DBSIL program was implemented in 1000 villages which were declared Open Defecation Free. 18 individual sanitary latrines were constructed, benefiting 90 villagers. DBF through CSR set up 2 community-owned RO Plants in Kolhapur having the potential to cater to 3,200 households of 2 villages.

**7. Digital training to students:** The DBSIL Company partnered HP India to commission internet equipped buses and labs to impart digital literacy among youth. The HP World on Wheels provided assisted learning on computers and academic subjects to students. The use of educational digital programs in alignment of SDG 9, have been a common trend in these companies through use of applications including Google Hangout, Zoom & WhatsApp.

**8. Community Covid-19 Care Centre & Vaccination camps:** In order to ensure that all the employees and the local communities receive timely medical care during the pandemic, special Covid-19 Care centers were established. DBSIL converted their Kolhapur and Sangli factories into isolation wards to deal with the pandemic situation. These centers were equipped with Oxygen Concentrators & Cylinders, Nursing staff, ICU kits and medication. Sugar mills also helped in establishing vaccination camps for their workers and local farmers.

**9.Rapid Response Teams:** Rapid response teams were constituted by some sugar mills, which took care of emergency hospitalization, oxygen supplies, ambulance, medical supplies, food and other necessities of COVID-19 affected employees and their families.

Sugar sector was an unsung change maker who was silently shouldering the responsibilities of fighting the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in India. The sugar factories around the rural areas have been addressing pressing development issues, despite limited resources, difficult geographies, and limited workers. The community directed CSR initiatives by sugar mills have created an immense influence on winning over the trust and confidence of their workers, rural communities of their area and also helped in improving the business sustainability and performance of sugar manufacturing units.

### References

Anon (2020). Covid-19 Impact on the Indian Sugar Industry. <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/>

Solomon,S., Rao,G.P and Swapna, M. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Sugar Industry. *Sugar Tech*.22(4). 547-551.

Solomon S, Rao G P, Swapna M, Kumar A, Singhal RC. (2019). Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and their impact on sugar-mill performance: A case study of the Seksaria Biswan Sugar Factory, India. *Proceedings of the International Society of Sugar Cane Technologists*. 30:377–383

