Interview of Pearl Tiwari
CSR Head - Ambuja Cement Foundation

Q: Briefly describe your roles and responsibilities at Ambuja Cement Foundation?

A: With sustainability being the core of Ambuja’s operations, CSR is an important subset of our Company’s sustainability strategy which is achieved through the Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF).

ACF first started operations in 1993 with one location at Kodinar (Gujarat) and today has reached out to 22 locations across India, devising strategies and driving operations to achieve ACF’s mission: “Engage, involve and enable communities to realize their potential”.

I have been associated with ACF since 2000 and work closely with the Company to ensure our vision is realized through the strategies we build for engaging our stakeholders. We constantly review the strategy of ACF’s thrust areas and build partnerships with the aim to magnify impact by using limited resources.

Ms Pearl Tiwari (Currently serving as President (CSR & Sustainability) in Ambuja Cements Limited) has been associated with the development sector in India for more than 30 years. She graduated from the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, where she also served as a faculty member for two years. Ms Tiwari joined Ambuja in year 2000 and ever since has been at the helm of nurturing the Ambuja Cement Foundation that has expanded from a small team to 450 development professionals it now boasts of today, with a pan-India presence active in 21 locations across 11 states. A large part of her past 15 years has been spent in steering the CSR initiatives to make it an integral part of the Company’s strategy. This work has borne fruit as evident from the evolved process to plan and implement CSR, fulfilling aspirations of the community and other stakeholders.

With a robust team of 430
professionals, ACF is working in six core areas – water resource management, agro-based livelihoods, skill training, health, women empowerment and education.

Q For how many years have you been in the CSR domain? Before CSR, were you working in any other professional domain, if so, please describe?

A With over 30 years of total experience, I have been working in the CSR domain for about 16 years. Before that, I worked in the development sector for 15 years where I handled varied jobs and roles. In my early profession, I worked on various issues related to inclusive development including rural and urban development. I started my career as a development professional, by working in the field of disability for the first decade. Subsequently, I joined academics and worked in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences as the faculty for the MA programme in Family and Child Welfare. Later I led an NGO, MeJol, actively working with large numbers of children and involved on issues of child rights.

Q How has the CSR & sustainability program evolved at your company?

A I take pride to be associated with Ambuja which is one of the few companies involved in direct community engagement and development long before CSR came as concept.

The Founders at Ambuja Cement always believed in working towards community’s growth, so that the community prospers at the same pace as the Company progresses. While community participation was the core strategy from the very beginning in all the developmental endeavours, the initial projects were ad-hoc and mostly based on community’s demand. Gradually, we started adopting strategic approach and adopted goal oriented projects based on specific needs of the communities, also ensuring their engagement and ownership as stakeholders.

Currently, Ambuja Cement has an integrated approach for CSR with streamlined processes and high focus on measuring impact. By closely working with the stakeholders ACF is striving to amplify impact on the ground with the use of limited resources.

It’s been a great experience being part of the organization that has grown from one location to 22 locations, with a handful of people to about 430 development professionals and a budget of a few lakhs to more than a hundred crores.

Q Can you share a recent accomplishment you are especially proud of in your CSR & Sustainability role?

A Way back in 1993, ACF started working with surrounding community in one location - Kodinar. With consistent efforts over a period, today the Foundation has spread its wings in 22 locations and 11 states and has earned trust and respect from its stakeholders. While all the ACF projects have created positive impact on ground, the water resource management programme has particularly made me extremely proud.

Water Resource Management, ACF’s first project, was started in an endeavour to give back more natural resources to the community than the Company takes for its operations. I feel extremely proud that the team has succeeded in achieving that goal by making Ambuja Cement four times water positive company.

I am glad to share that the recent Social Returns on Investment (SROI) study revealed that in Kodinar (ACF’s first project location), each rupee invested has yielded 13 times higher social return.

Q If you had the power to make one major change at your company or in your industry, what would it be?

A I believe that in order to see greater and long-term impact, different CSR groups and companies need collaborate and pool in their resources to magnify outreach and impact on ground.

Q Describe your perfect day.

A My perfect day is undoubtedly in the field interacting and directly engaging with my team and with the stakeholders, conducting assessments and engaging with plant workers for working on issues relevant to them.