CSR INTERVIEWS

We are guided by vision of Caring for Life and benefitted 2.4 million people: Mohini Daljeet Singh, CEO, Max India Foundation

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By Rusen Kumar / India CSR News Network

NEW DELHI: Passionate Social soul and an educationist Mohini Daljeet started social service journey by volunteering with Mother Teresa's (Sisters of Charity) Home *Prem Niwas*, in Lucknow. She joined Max India in 2007 and formed social service wing Max India Foundation for the Max India Group of Companies. In her leadership Foundation offers quality healthcare services to the community who socially and economically weak.

Max India Foundation works on the model of engaging Max employees in CSR and has over 404 NGO partners working in 682 locations across the country. It is a manifestation of the Group philosophy of Sevabhav touching over 2.4 million lives with compassion and care. An army daughter and army wife, as President AWWA Western Command she also works for the welfare of army families.

In an interview with **Rusen Kumar**, Editor, India CSR; *Mohini Daljeet Singh, CEO, Max India Foundation* (MIF) shares her vision, experience and views on various issues. She realized that the biggest challenge in healthcare is lack of awareness and illiteracy. *Edited excerpt:*

Tell us about Max India Foundation journey and its business philosophy?

Our Max Group Founder and Chairman Emeritus Mr. Analjit Singh, had a very long term vision to serve the community where we do business. In his words, "the wheel of a business cannot develop faster than the development of the society". Max India Foundation was formed as a trust in January 2002 with the objective of serving the needy.

Max Group being in the *Business of Life*, there has been a conscious effort to make a difference in the lives of the less privileged through its CSR initiatives. Max India Foundation has given this priority and effected positive change in the quality of life of the underserved in keeping with the Group philosophy of 'Sevabhav'.

When we decided to give back to the society, keeping inclusive growth in mind, we decided to anchor on our strength which is healthcare. Today we have reached out to more than 2.4 million beneficiaries through 404 NGO partners covering 682 locations across the country.

When did you start your journey at Max India?

Initially, when the Trust deed for Max India Foundation was drafted, there was no dedicated person taking care of the Foundation.

I was asked by Mr. Analjit Singh to take charge of MIF in 2007 from where there has been no looking back. The MIF strategy was drafted and we formally launched Max India Foundation with a new look in January 2008.

In the last eight years, the Foundation has grown by leaps and bounds in terms of operations. We have a small team of nine people now and I am proud of what we have achieved so far.

Kindly give some insight on Max India's CSR?

Max India Foundation works to provide quality healthcare to the underprivileged and provide holistic and focussed healthcare for the wellbeing of underserved communities. It facilitates awareness of health related issues and works for an eco-friendly environment. This is done by engaging Max Group employees and partnering with reputed NGOs in the execution of projects. This achieves a strong spirit of bonding between employees within a company and between the different companies of the group.

Guided by its vision of 'Caring for Life' the Foundation has benefitted over 2.4 million people in 680 locations from the underserved communities across the country in partnership with more than 400 NGOs. This is done

through holding pan India immunization camps, health and cancer screening camps, health centres and artificial limbs and polio callipers camps along with facilitating high end surgeries and treatment. Cancer has been a focus area due to the alarming increase in incidence and inability of the underserved to afford the treatment and challenges.

MIF works on every aspect of health, from spreading awareness, screening, advocating early diagnosis to supporting treatment. The Foundation is also proactive on preventive health through immunization and screening of children.

Other than that, two village clusters in Uttarakhand – Dhakrani and Chandrothi, have been adopted by Max India Foundation in 2015 for intervention on the issue of health, sanitation and waste management. The objective is to improve the lives of the villagers through model villages.

What is the implementing method of CSR at Max India Foundation?

Max India Foundation works as the implementing agency for all Max Group companies.

Max India Foundation executes projects with the help of NGOs as well as employee engagement. We also provide training support to volunteers to carry out and support in CSR activities. The Foundation works with the Group companies to create a comprehensive Employee Volunteering programme and ensure greater participation of employees in CSR activities.

Our Healthcare covers pan-India immunization, surgeries and treatments, health camps, medicinal support, health awareness, cancer awareness and treatment, environmental awareness and protection, support for artificial limbs and polio callipers and other disability. Under the village adoption project, we focus on the areas of health, health-education, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene in order to improve the quality of life of the community.

What are the key CSR projects?

Max India Foundation has been at the forefront of providing holistic health care to the underprivileged through a gamut of curative, preventive as well as promotive interventions. Immunisation camps to protect children against seven life-threatening diseases. Max India Foundation has immunized 59,617 children through 1000 camps pan India. A total of 1,21,416 shots MMR, Typhoid, Hepatitis B and DT.

Multi-speciality health check-up camps for the underprivileged in various semi-urban and rural locations where there is no access to specialized medical treatment. 270,663 patients have been treated through 1102 camps across India so far. Besides this, MIF has provided medicines and Max Hospital doctors have served at the Lifeline Express treating 85,426 patients till date.

Facilitating surgery and treatment for the needy Max India Foundation has supported 5,127 high-end surgeries for the under-privileged. These surgeries include a large number of pediatric cardiac surgeries, brain tumor surgeries, reconstructive surgeries, neuro surgeries, orthopedic surgeries, cataract surgeries, oncology care and renal transplant. Palliative care for cancer patients and support to treat childhood cancers.

Setting up permanent **Health Centres** where there is no facility available. These provide free consultation and medicine. Nearly, 2,32,939 patients have so far been treated at the MIF health centres which are located in Railmajra, Punjab; Jamghat Day care centre, Delhi; Ukhimath, Mussoorie and Purukul Health Centre, Uttarakhand and with Chinmaya Mission at Ashram Chowk in Delhi. MIF also supports India Foundation health clinic, St. Judes and CanSupport Health Centre.

Spreading health awareness through talks, films, counselling sessions and specific events. Providing free artificial limbs and polio callipers at camps and specialised institutions. Over 4,708 people have benefitted.

Village Adoption Project – Two village clusters in Uttarakhand – Dhakrani and Chandrothi, have been adopted by Max India Foundation for intervention on the issue of health, sanitation and waste management. The objective is to improve the lives of the villagers through model villages.

Capacity Building Training on Health including training to Traditional Birth Attendants, General Duty Attendants for hospitals and First Aid in schools. More than 14,082 Community Health Workers trained.

Relief support during disaster, MIF has extended whole hearted medicinal support whenever required including the recent Nepal earthquake and Chennai floods. The support has been essentially in the form of medicines and medical supplies, health checkups by qualified team of doctors, etc.

There is a strong correlation between health and environment. Realizing the significance of same, MIF has been leading environment and health awareness campaigns so that the quality of life can be enhanced for all.

The focus area of Max India Foundation is to provide quality healthcare to the underprivileged. Do you have competitive advantage of your CSR for your business?

Max Group is a multi – business conglomerate, focused on people, service oriented and unique social sector areas centered around the theme of life, with Life as our focus.

We protect life through Max Life Insurance Co Ltd and Care for Life through Max Healthcare. Our Business units deal in caring and protecting lives of people. With 13 hospitals in Delhi-NCR, Punjab and Uttarakhand, 2300 world-class doctors, Max Healthcare is one of the leading chain of hospitals in India.

With this in house strength, it makes a natural choice for Max India Foundation to focus on healthcare for the underprivileged. We are able to provide quality healthcare in all aspects, unlike most Corporate CSR wings.

What is your CSR budget strength?

The CSR budget for all Max Group is around Rs. 12 Crores.

Do you have practice to publish CSR Report?

The annual report published by Max Group every year features the Business Responsibility Review that contains a report of all work done by Max India Foundation.

Do you see any challenges at community level to implement CSR projects?

The biggest challenge in healthcare is lack of awareness and illiteracy. At times, during our immunization camps, we face resistance from the parents of children. Many a times the parents do not send their children for the complete dose of immunization. In the village adoption program, local party politics often hampers the overall benefit. The key to a successful health project is awareness and education, and we are constantly working on that to ensure a 360 degree impact.

Does CSR require a paradigm shift in India?

Making CSR legally mandatory for companies in India under section 135 of Companies Act, 1935 has been the biggest change in the field of CSR. The idea behind the law is to inculcate social conscience amongst the corporates and not just aim for revenue building. We are seeing a lot of contribution in the nation building from the corporate world which is the most welcome change. This needs to be expanded to the Individual Social Responsibility platform.

Since you have been in this industry for so long, how have you seen the CSR scene in India change through the last decade?

CSR is actually ingrained in the Indian culture as an age-old tradition as we are taught the values of life since childhood in the form of 'Daan' and 'Seva'. Many companies have been doing CSR out of choice even before the law asked them to. In the last decade, we have seen a huge shift in the maturity with which CSR is being handled by companies.

From mere philanthropy towards a cause, companies are now building CSR strategies which are sustainable and go with the business strategy. While ten years back, CSR was only part of the job of one person who handled HR or Communication. In today's scenario, lot of companies are investing in full time resources to handle their CSR profiles.

While there is still lot to be done but the change is taking place for the good and there is a definite shift to the better.

How would you define corporate social responsibility (CSR) at Max India?

Max Group being in the 'Business of Life', there has been a conscious effort to make a difference in the lives of the less privileged through its CSR initiatives. Max India Foundation has given this priority and effected positive change in the quality of life of the underserved in keeping with the Group philosophy of 'Sevabhav'. The impact of MIF initiatives is clear and defined.

Efforts related to CSR can be observed at many large and medium-sized companies in India. According to you, why has this become such a focal issue for the business?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become integral to the businesses. For companies committed to CSR it creates a long term overall reputation – which cannot be gained through mere advertising or PR. The ground work done by the so called corporate citizen – for the betterment of its communities has a much greater impact than any branding exercise.

What are the areas you see in which companies, particularly in health must assume responsibility?

India is ranked at 130th position among the 188 countries as per the Human Development Index 2015. The poor ranking highlights the gap on various development indicators like population, education, health, life expectancy, gender development index, gross national income. The underprivileged not only have to deal with escalating costs of healthcare services but also, with unavailability of competent medical professionals, equipment, infrastructure and medicines and inaccessibility to clinics from remote locations.

India is witnessing significant growth on key development parameters which is a good sign for the health particularly of the underprivileged. The national agenda places high priority to investment in social sectors such as education and health. Thus, there are a host of opportunities for the corporate sector to push forward the agenda of health in India.

How do you assess the CSR performance of Max India?

MIF does a quarterly impact assessment and takes corrective measures whenever required. The CSR committee also reviews the projects on a quarterly basis. It is a little difficult to assess and talk about your own performance, but I can say with confidence that whatever we have done and achieved within our limited resources has been extremely gratifying and highly appreciated by all stakeholders. The numbers speak for themselves and our long term partnership with hundreds of NGOs is testimony to our credibility.

According to you, how does a good CSR strategy affect groups of stakeholders like community, customers and employees?

Stakeholder engagement has a direct impact on the organisation's success or failure. A good CSR strategy should be aimed at corporate stakeholder engagement and to build relationships with stakeholders to better understand their perspectives and concerns on key issues and to integrate those perspectives and concerns into the company's CSR strategy.

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About Author: Rusen Kumar, founder, India CSR is globally renowned journalist writing on CSR issues. He can reached at rusenk@indiacsr.in

Twitter Handle: @INDIACSR

Twitter Handle: @maxindiafndn

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