

Did Not Let Turbulent Times Affect CSR: GVK Reddy

By Raksha Shetty in Leader Speak



THE EMRI '108' ambulance service has been one of the most successful and impactful social initiatives undertaken in the country since its inception in 2005. Adopted by the GVK group from Satyam, and today present across 15 states and two UTs on a public-private partnership model, the service has transported more than 25 million patients to medical facilities. GVK Founder and CMD Dr GVK Reddy spoke to *The CSR Journal's Raksha Shetty* about the group's legacy in philanthropy and plans to expand its EMRI service. Excerpts from the interview:

The GVK group has had a rich culture of philanthropy, one that you have always been personally involved in. What has been your driving philosophy behind this aspect of your business?

We have always endeavoured to contribute to the nation's growth by building world-class infrastructure projects while also being equally sensitive over the issue of social development. I have always believed in giving back to the society. Social responsibility is not about supporting a few visible causes but having an overall sustained growth and a holistic development of the society. We have undertaken various projects to uplift the living conditions and raise the general standard of living of the deprived sections of our society. I feel proud that we are associated with GVK EMRI that is catering to over 750 million people across 15 states and two UTs saving lakhs of lives.

Our social initiatives are very close to my heart. I welcome the CSR legalisation as it'd bring a lot of companies towards social work and evolve responsible business leaders.

GVK EMRI has been the flagship CSR programme of the company and one of the biggest such in the country. Are there plans to further expand its reach?

Being responsible business leaders, we have always endeavoured to be the best in every project we undertake. The same holds true for our social initiatives as well. At GVK, we have always laid a lot of

emphasis on social development and sustainability. We would never compromise with the service and quality offered. GVK EMRI's efficient and speedy response mechanism has today made it the world's largest integrated emergency response service. It has saved over one million lives till date. In that regard, we would continue to focus on GVK EMRI and expand our services across the remaining states of India.

Will GVK be grouping previously unstructured philanthropic activity under a CSR umbrella, in light of the new CSR provisions? And is it a challenge to do so?

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GVK implements its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives through GVK Foundation. This is the social activity wing of the GVK and runs many development programs on a national level like providing emergency response services, housing for under-privileged people, education, health and hygiene, community-based programs, empowerment and entrepreneurship development, arts, music, sports and a number of other socio-economic activities. GVK EMRI, too, has over 37000 employees positioned as communication officers, dispatch officers, emergency medical technicians, pilots and support staff. We are constantly collaborating with state governments to enhance the emergency response mechanism across the states that we operate in.

What do you believe is the value of CSR for a company's bottomline, apart from the obvious benefit to the social sector? I ask this question because it is one many companies are grappling with today as they try to create some connect between CSR and profitability.

I believe that a good business is more than the bottom line. Our leadership stature goes much beyond business success in terms of numbers and figures. It is crucial to consider the effects of business on people, society, culture and the environment. Our business looks at holistic approach that sees people, the planet and profitability as equal pillars in a corporate mission. We strongly advocate the school of thought where companies see their responsibilities beyond building profits in this new age.

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The Tatas and Birlas have been built reputations around philanthropy over generations, and have garnered enormous public goodwill and trust because of it. In comparison, what would you like your legacy for GVK to be?

GVK is really grateful that its various social initiatives, especially the GVK EMRI, are helping transforming the healthcare scenario of the country. GVK EMRI's effective service during the golden hour has developed the bond of trust with the citizens of the states that we operate in. GVK EMRI provides its services absolutely free and thus doesn't contribute to GVK's bottomline. At GVK, we have always laid

huge emphasis on social development and sustainability and would continue to do so. Rather than approaching it as an additional activity, we see it in-built in our initiatives.

What is your perspective on the new CSR legislation?

GVK has been actively involved in CSR activities for a long time now. Even in turbulent financial times, we have not let it affect our endeavour towards societal upliftment. Our social initiatives are very close to my heart. I welcome the CSR legalisation as it'd bring in a lot of companies towards social work and evolve responsible business leaders who would work towards holistic development. It is only together that we can make a difference and help contribute towards the nation's growth and development.

The pessimistic view is that our corporate culture is prone to finding the easy way out – one way is a quick and painless chequebook charity, rather than doing a real needs-based assessment of the community it is targeting. Now that implementation is actually underway, what is your advice to companies in approaching it?



“We have launched different kinds of ambulances to access difficult terrains... boat ambulances for riverine and flood-prone areas as well as Doli-Palki ambulances for hilly areas,” says Reddy

The companies can only sustain their social initiatives in the long run by giving it their heart and soul. When you have decided to take up something, give it your best. Take, for instance, GVK EMRI, wherein we concentrated on one social initiative. We have launched different kinds of ambulances to access difficult terrains. We have boat ambulances for riverine and flood-prone areas as well as Doli-Palki ambulances for hilly areas. Specially-equipped mother and child ambulances have been launched to transport expectant mothers to hospital and back home after delivery. This has also helped reduce Maternal Mortality Rates by around 15% in states where our services have been operational. The companies can innovate further by creating jobs through backward integration. For instance, the stationaries for the company can be manufactured by the underprivileged people, who in turn may get rewarded for contributing towards company's profits.