"GIVING SOMETHING BACK"

Social Responsibility and South Asian Businesses in the United Kingdom: An Exploratory Study

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For the CENTRE FOR SOCIAL MARKETS

The Centre for Social Markets (CSM) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to making markets work for the triple bottom line - people, planet and profit. Through our offices in India and the United Kingdom, and an international network of partners and associates, CSM promotes responsible entrepreneurship, ethics and accountability worldwide. Founded in 2000, we are a values-based organisation committed to sustainable development and human rights.

CSM's work is divided into **five main work streams** focussing on business, investors, workers, consumers and governance respectively. Our primary **geographical focus** is on developing and transition countries, and our **key constituencies** are ethnic minority communities in industrialised countries, and domestic industry and stakeholders in developing countries.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report examines the issue of 'corporate social responsibility' in South Asian-owned businesses operating in the United Kingdom. The study was commissioned by the Centre for Social Markets, as part of its national mobilisation campaign: **British Asians: Building Leadership for Corporate Citizenship**, to focus attention on a long neglected group in the corporate social responsibility field: ethnic minority business. The study has been funded by the Department of Trade of Industry and Business Links Leicestershire.

- The study's terms of reference required geographical balance and case studies from England, Wales and Scotland are presented in the report. Qualitative interviews were undertaken with 32 South Asian business owners and social enterprises in a variety of locations, including, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bradford, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leicester, London and Manchester.

- There is no single, commonly accepted definition of the notion of corporate social responsibility. For the purposes of this report CSR is taken to be:

  ➤ a voluntary activity in excess of legal compliance

  ➤ concerned with the social and environmental as well as economic aspects of organisational behaviour

  ➤ rooted in ethical values

  ➤ central in shaping stakeholder relationships.

- Social responsibility is seen to be an important business issue within the sample firms, irrespective of firm size, age, sector, location, primary purpose or legal status.

- Views on the relationship between profits and corporate social responsibility ranged from those who regarded profits as pre-eminent and a prerequisite to socially responsible actions, to those who saw the two considerations as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

- Organisations generally believed that acting in a socially responsible manner could create value for the organisation.

- The vast majority of Asian businesses questioned engaged in some form(s) of socially responsible behaviour over and above the normal activities of creating wealth and employment and complying with regulatory requirements.

- The majority of this activity normally occurred at a local level and was often in response to requests for help and/or support by local charities, organisations or individuals. Some businesses also helped and sponsored charities and trusts overseas.

- The most popular forms of socially responsible behaviour were donations to local causes and charities (in both cash and kind), sponsorship of local events and organisations, support for local schools and colleges, environmental initiatives, ethical purchasing and staff-related activities. A number of individuals also devoted considerable amounts of time to fulfilling important roles in the local community, often at the expense of time spent in the business.

- CSR tended to be defined as "putting something back into the community" and was generally seen as a duty incumbent on those in a more favourable position in society to help those less well placed than themselves.

- Organisational and individual involvement in CSR was driven predominantly by the personal beliefs, attitudes and values of those owning and/or managing the respondent organisations, with religion and culture key influences in shaping behaviour. External factors do not appear to have played a significant role, other than with regard to environmental initiatives.

- While there was an acceptance that socially responsible behaviour could provide benefits for the organisation on both the demand and supply side, this was not a significant factor in encouraging organisational responses.

- Acting in a socially responsible manner was felt to have a positive effect on the workforce and to encourage staff loyalty and commitment. Much of the activity in this area reflected a paternalistic approach to employment relations.

- While firms frequently made reference to their social, ethical and environmental objectives in business documentation, there was little attempt to publicise formally the organisation's goals or achievements in the wider community.

- External awareness and recognition of a firm's socially responsible behaviour was predominantly gained through collaboration with other organisations, networking and normal forms of communication.

- Structural arrangements for dealing with issues of social responsibility tended to be loose and informal, with the majority of initiatives decided and implemented by owners and/or senior managers. Goal setting and performance reporting and monitoring were largely non-existent.

- Few organisations perceived significant barriers to further involvement in CSR, other than those traditionally associated with the size of the firm, namely time, resources and priorities.

- Opinions on how the government could encourage greater CSR were mixed. The general preference was for government to play an enabling and supporting role rather than to intervene to direct business behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

All organisations have an impact on society and the environment through their operations, products or services, and through their interactions with key stakeholder groups including employees, customers/clients, suppliers, investors and the local community. While traditional business models primarily emphasise the economic aspects of organisational activity (e.g. profitability and growth), more modern conceptions of organisational behaviour lay equal stress on social, ethical and environmental impacts as exemplified by the notion of 'corporate social responsibility'. It would be fair to say that while some business organisations remain to be convinced that social responsibility is compatible with value creation, a growing number accept that they can and should manage their social and environmental impacts in ways which benefit both the organisation and the wider society.

The burgeoning debate on this issue is usually anchored in large firms operating in the mainstream of corporate Britain. Very rarely has the concept of social responsibility focused on smaller firms, particularly those owned by ethnic minorities. This is despite the fact that members of the ethnic minority communities make up a significant part of the small firms sector, with 5 per cent of the national population accounting for about 9% of new business start-ups and 7% of the total business stock in the UK (Bank of England, 1999, p. 11).

This study has been commissioned by the Centre for Social Markets, as part of its national mobilisation campaign, **British Asians: Building Leadership for Corporate Citizenship**, to begin to address this gap.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

There is no single, commonly accepted definition of the notion of corporate social responsibility and the concept is often used interchangeably with other terms including corporate citizenship, corporate accountability, business ethics, corporate responsibility and sustainability. Moreover definitions vary in different cultural and national settings. In the United States, for example, CSR has traditionally been defined in more of a philanthropic way. Under the American model companies make profits and donate a certain share of these profits to charitable causes. Gaining organisational benefit from such donations is seen as tainting the act of giving. (www.mallenbaker.net/csr/CSRfiles/definition). By comparison the European model is much more focused on operating the core business in a way that is regarded as socially responsible, and which is complemented by investing in communities in ways that simultaneously yield business benefits.

According to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), corporate social responsibility is "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" ('Corporate Social Responsibility: Making Good Business Sense'). Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) suggests that the idea of corporate social responsibility relates to business decision-making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements and respect for people, communities and the environment, in a manner that meets or exceeds the ethical, legal, commercial and public expectations that society has of businesses (www.bsr.org). The European Commission's Green Paper on CSR similarly stresses the operational implications of the concept, describing it as a situation in which 'companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their daily business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders on a voluntary basis' (CEC: *Green Paper for Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility*: COM [2001] 366 fund, Brussels, p6).

Under these, and most other definitions, CSR is essentially about what organisations do, how they do it and the impact of their behaviour on the wider society. It focuses on a variety of issues ranging from actions in the workplace and marketplace to questions such as community investment, environmental impact, business ethics and human rights.

For the purposes of this report CSR is taken to be:

- a voluntary activity in excess of legal compliance

- concerned with the social and environmental as well as economic aspects of organisational behaviour

- rooted in ethical values

- central in shaping stakeholder relationships.

At an organisational level, each enterprise will have a unique response to CSR, according to factors such as its resources, core competencies, management preferences and stakeholder interests, as well as the broader historical, cultural and social environment in which it exists and operates. The examples discussed in this report illustrate this diversity of response.

Social Enterprise[1]

Behaving in a socially responsible way lies at the heart of the concept of social enterprise. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) defines social enterprise as 'a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders (DTI: 2002: p7). Organisations which reflect this definition include social firms, mutuals, cooperatives, fair trade organisations, community businesses and the trading arms of charities. They exist in a variety of legal forms (e.g. companies limited by guarantee or by shares, industrial and provident societies), can be found in most if not all sectors and may be incorporated or unincorporated bodies or registered charities. They tend to be associated with one or more of the following activities:

- providing social or environmental goods and services (e.g. childcare; recycling)

- trading to provide or to cross-subsidise social or environmental goods and services (e.g. trading arms of some charities)

- utilising processes or ways of working that have significant social benefits (e.g. social firms; cooperatives; fair trade organisations).

The Background to the Report

The last decade has seen an exponential growth in interest in the social, ethical and environmental performance of organisations. This development can be linked to a variety of social and markets factors. These include:

- increased demands from customers for products which have been produced responsibly

- growing stakeholder activism in the wake of a series of corporate scandals and environmental incidents

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[1] As part of the project brief, a small number of social enterprises were interviewed.

Centre for Social Markets

- pressures exerted along the supply chain, particularly by larger enterprises seeking to enhance their own credentials

- expectations of greater transparency and responsibility in business, aided by advances in communications and information technology

- growing investor pressure for more ethical investment decisions and responsible business practices.

Faced with such demands, the challenge for an ever increasing number of enterprises has not simply been to create value for the organisation's owners and shareholders, but to do so in a way which takes account of social, ethical and environmental imperatives in both society and the market place.

Studies conducted at both national and international level confirm the growing importance attached by the different stakeholder groups to more socially responsible business behaviour.

For example, the Millenium Poll on Corporate Social Responsibility (1999) revealed that the majority of citizens in the 23 countries surveyed wanted companies to go beyond their normal roles of making profits, creating employment, paying taxes and obeying laws, by undertaking activities which contributed to the achievement of broader social goals. Research by MORI in 1998 found that 17% of British adults had boycotted a company's product on ethical grounds, 19% had chosen a product/service because of a firm's ethical reputation and 28% had done both. More recently, it has been suggested that over 40% of the British public have selected one product over another because of its environmentally friendly packaging, formulation or advertising (MORI/Business in the Environment, 2001), while 44% of European consumers surveyed have indicated a willingness to pay more for environmentally responsible products or services (MORI/CSR Europe, 2000).

The emergence of CSR as a mainstream public issue has helped to place corporate attitudes and behaviour high on the political agenda and has encouraged a variety of developments at institutional and policy level within government. The UK government, for instance, appointed the world's first Minister for Corporate Social Responsibility in Spring 2000 and subsequently established a range of cross-departmental initiatives to promote more responsible business practices. Within the European Union, CSR has become central to the EU's goal of pursuing more sustainable forms of development and is seen as making an important contribution to achieving the Community's strategic aim of becoming (by 2010) the world's most dynamic and knowledge-based economy, capable of sustained economic growth alongside employment improvement and social cohesion.

Parallel developments have also occurred in the non-governmental sector with the growth in the number of not-for-profit organisations advocating more responsible corporate behaviour. Examples include Business in the Community (BITC), AccountAbility, SustainAbility, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF), and the Centre for Social Markets (CSM). Groups such as these have made a major contribution to the CSR debate and, along with government, have been instrumental in promoting the idea that social, ethical and environmental responsibility can create a "win-win" situation for both businesses and society in diverse constituencies.

As far as the private sector is concerned, much of this debate on the nature and benefits of CSR has been driven by the large multinational and global corporations and perhaps not surprisingly these organisations have tended to dominate academic surveys, case studies and CSR reporting regimes, such as the recent Corporate Responsibility Index

(2003) published by BITC. In contrast, the contribution of smaller firms or of ethnic minority communities and businesses to this emerging debate has remained limited and often uncertain. Little, if anything is known for example of the extent to which the notion of social and environmental responsibility has permeated the ethnic and diasporas communities such as those found in the UK. This has been the motivation behind the Centre for Social Market's development of its international programme on CSR and ethnic minority and diaspora communities, and specifically the launch of its mobilisation campaign **British Asians: Building Leadership for Corporate Citizenship** in 2001.

Asian firms and CSR

Prior to discussion of the research findings, it is necessary to examine some aspects of the extensive literature on Asian-owned enterprise to inform the study. Research on Asian firms and the behaviour of their owners suggests that there are various special considerations, which may have a bearing on entrepreneurs' attitudes towards CSR and their willingness and/or capacity to deliver. While there are strong grounds for arguing that Asian business owners are fundamentally similar to entrepreneurs of other origins (including indigenous whites) (Ram *et al* 2000), there are also certain exceptional characteristics shaping their business attitudes and behaviour. Such possibilities need to be addressed in order to make full sense of the research findings.

One issue with a close bearing here is raised by that school of thought which views the "typical" Asian firm as essentially a sweatshop operating on the basis of poverty wages and other forms of exploitation (Mitter 1986, Phizacklea 1990). In apparent confirmation, Ram *et al* (2001) have researched the ways in which many Asian employers in the restaurant and clothing manufacturing sectors evade the National Minimum Wage and utilise undocumented labour. Particularly in small retailing, there is also extensive use of uncosted unwaged family labour (Jones *et al* 1994). However it should be noted that such practices arise from the straitened circumstances in which many, perhaps a majority, of Asian entrepreneurs operate. Over-concentrated in low-profit, hyper-competitive sectors like corner shop retailing, many of these tiny family firms are highly precarious and marginal, with owners themselves compelled to work excessively long hours for the sake of sheer survival. *Self*-exploitation is as much a feature here as worker exploitation.

Whatever the causes, it is clear that such a working environment is hardly conducive even to an awareness of social responsibility, let alone the ability to deliver it. Understandably, the need to work 80 hours a week or more leaves little time or space for ethical considerations, since most business owners are unwilling to think beyond short-term survival. Even so, there is some basis for arguing that, wittingly or otherwise, such firms do make a social contribution, one that is unfortunately unsung and unacknowledged. In the first place, they do provide jobs for (mostly) members of their own ethnic communities, who through language problems, lack of qualifications or racism may be excluded from the mainstream labour market. In effect they provide an informal safety net for the economically vulnerable and in some instances they act as *de facto* apprenticeship schemes for future entrepreneurs. Even less acknowledged is their role as service providers for the local population at large. At a time of rising concern about the decline of local shops and services and the emergence of urban "food deserts", this is a contribution worthy of acknowledgement.

Even though these little enterprises are anything but "corporate" and in most cases are not directly motivated by lofty social ambitions, the fact remains that in many localities it is only the Asian shop or post office that stands as the last bastion of service provision for the poor and immobile, many of who are of course not Asian themselves. Moreover, it continues to make this social – and indeed environmental – contribution in the absence of any kind of official support, financial or otherwise.

Other strands of the Asian business literature offer a completely contrasting perspective on these questions. In particular, there is a school of thought which insists that Asian business is highly successful and boosted by a distinctive approach to enterprise derived from historically deep-rooted and powerful religious and cultural traditions (Basu 1999, Metcalf *et al* 1996, Werbner 1999). Within this cultural perspective there is a keen recognition of social responsibility. For instance, Werbner (1999) highlights a South Asian tradition of "gift-giving" and certainly it is undeniable that much money is poured back into the ethnic community by successful business owners. Mosques, temples and a whole range of cultural, recreational and youth facilities are reputed to be funded by the philanthropy of rich business leaders.

However, there is a tendency to overstate this line of argument. In the first place, high levels of success are likely to be confined to a very small elite minority of the Asian business community. As is inevitably the case, their sheer wealth renders them highly visible but the inconspicuous vast majority are small or micro-scale affairs whose preoccupation with survival renders them, as we have seen, non-contributors to any formally recognised corporate responsibility project. Next, we would argue that the high flyers themselves – for some of whom the label "corporate" is literally accurate - are not necessarily to be seen as acting from culturally exceptional motives. After all, in Britain a tradition of wealthy business owners donating funds for social and civic projects dates back to the Industrial Revolution and beyond, so it is hardly an Asian invention. Whether motivated by self-aggrandisement, religious conscience or a pure desire to simply do good, Asian corporate responsibility is arguably best seen as a distinctive version of a long-running universal theme.

Nevertheless, whatever the underlying motives, such contributions are to be viewed in a positive light. Unarguably, this ploughing-back of resources into the community acts as a major means of improving the quality of life for British Asians, a valuable means of social enrichment. Given that the numbers and wealth of successful Asian companies is likely to increase, the future looks potentially rosy for Asian CSR. Such optimism is further strengthened by recent research showing an increased Asian penetration of fast-growth, cutting edge sectors such as computer manufacture, business and IT consultancy and health care (Ram *et al* 2001).

Interestingly, this very success leads to a further analytical problem for researchers in this field. Many of these new, youthful and highly qualified entrepreneurs are British-born and in some cases regard themselves simply as entrepreneurs *per se* rather than Asian businesses. In some cases, the established logic of the connection between businesses owned by Asians and their ethnic community is overturned. Accordingly, we need to be prepared for corporate social responsibility to take new and as yet unspecified forms in an increasing number of firms owned by British-born Asians.

RESEARCH AIMS, FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

It was against this background that the Centre for Social Markets (CSM) commissioned the Small Business and Enterprise Research Group (SBERG) at De Montfort University, Leicester, to undertake research on Asian Businesses as part of its nationwide initiative, 'British Asians: Building Leadership for Corporate Citizenship'.

The main aim of the research was to examine how far the notion of corporate social responsibility had permeated the Asian business community within the UK in both an attitudinal and behavioural sense. In essence the study was designed to explore the underlying attitudes, beliefs and assumptions of Asian-owned or Asian-run organisations with regard to social, ethical and environmental issues and to investigate what actions had been undertaken by these enterprises in pursuit of a more socially responsible approach.

The research was designed to focus specifically on a number of key areas. These included:

- Understanding of and attitudes to CSR
- Actions taken in pursuit of a more socially responsible approach
- Drivers of socially responsible behaviour
- Perceptions of organisational benefit from CSR
- Structural arrangements for CSR
- Barriers to involvement in social, ethical and environmental issues.

In addition. the research sought to ascertain if organisations felt that government could play a role in stimulating more socially responsible behaviour in the business community.

Following consultations with CSM it was decided to focus the research on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and organisations within the British Asian business community. Numerically SMEs dominate the British economy, accounting for over 99% of all businesses and making very significant contributions to employment, wealth creation, investment, innovation and overseas trade. In the UK, Asian owned and run businesses tend to be predominantly small and medium sized as defined officially by employment levels (i.e. >250 employees). It was felt that by concentrating on this size component a much more accurate picture would be gained of the extent and nature of involvement with CSR and of the attitudinal environment within which any actions occurred. As with the indigenous business community, the expectation was that larger Asian organisations would already be playing a significant role with regard to corporate social responsibility and thus concentrating on SMEs had empirical justification.

Given the normally low response rates to postal and/or telephone surveys, it was decided -following consultation with CSM- to adopt a qualitative rather than quantitative approach based on a more detailed investigation of a limited number of organisations. The intention was not to provide a statistically valid analysis but to paint a meaningful picture of attitudes and behaviour within respondent organisations. In total 32 enterprises were examined in a number of cities in the UK, including, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bradford, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leicester, London and Manchester.

Locating appropriate firms for the present study was not a simple task. As noted earlier, there is little consensus on the meaning of CSR; and the extent to which it is being pursued in larger organisations is a matter of debate. Small enterprises are much less likely to have formally constituted policies and procedures than their large firm counterparts, particularly in this latest, and possibly faddish, manifestation of contemporary organisational trends. This compounds the perennial issue of securing research access into small firms, which is all the more challenging in the case of difficult to reach ethnic minority business. Many ethnic minority firms do not appear in business directories, and are often not to be found on the databases of local business support institutions.

For these reasons, the research team decided to identify suitable businesses by contacting influential Asians, Asian business groups in each of the cities, and Asian companies involved in CSM's national mobilisation efforts. These gatekeepers were asked to assist in locating firms that exhibited behaviours consistent with the approach to CSR noted earlier, namely: the adoption of policies that were beyond the legal minimum; concerned with social and/or environmental aspects of organisational behaviour, as well as commercial imperatives; and evidencing an ethical approach to business and other stakeholder relationships.

The interviews with Asian business owners comprised two elements. First, each respondent was asked to complete a structured questionnaire; the intention here was to secure basic information on the different elements of CSR identified in extant studies and

approaches. The second phase of the interviews with owners involved a more open-ended discussion on the form that social responsibility took in each firm. By splitting the information gathering process into two separate parts, it was possible to cross-check some of the information provided by the written questionnaire and to add significant value to the project. Whereas the survey examined general attitudes and perceptions to CSR and the actions undertaken by organisations, the interview phase focused on interpretations of the concept of social responsibility and on the drivers of and potential barriers to involvement in social, ethical and environmental issues. Respondents were also quizzed as to the role that government could play in encouraging firms to become more socially responsible. This division in the focus between the two phases of the research is reflected in the analysis set out below.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE SURVEY RESULTS

1. Profile of the respondent Organisations

The research surveyed 32 organisations, all of which had fewer than 250 full-time employees. The numbers employed ranged from 2 to 240 with the mean number of FTEs being 51. The breakdown of respondents by firm size is illustrated in Figure 1. Of the total number of organisations questioned, the chart shows that 8 were 'micro-businesses' (fewer than 10 employees) and a further 13 were 'small businesses' (with 10-49 employees). None of the respondents in the sample could be officially classified as a large business in employment terms.
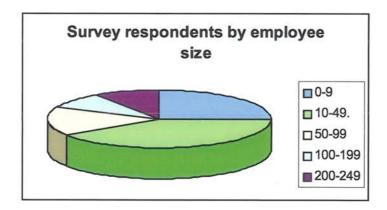

Figure 1: Survey respondents by employee size

The sample also covered businesses of varying ages from different sectors of the economy. The youngest organisation questioned was just two years old while the oldest had been operating for around forty years. The mean average age of the sample was 15 years. In sectoral terms both manufacturing and the service sector were represented, with respondents drawn from a range of industries including textiles, metal plating, hotels, catering, leisure and travel, transport, construction, IT/Communication, retailing, printing and health care. Given the predominance of private sector trading organisations, the vast majority of respondents were limited companies, most of which were limited by shares. The sample also included several partnerships and some organisations with stated and overt social goals. None of the latter would fully meet the DTI's definition of a 'social enterprise'.

As might be expected within the Asian business community, a majority (around two-thirds) of these organisations were family owned businesses.

2. Organisational Attitudes, Beliefs and Assumptions

a. Organisational priorities

When invited to list the organisation's primary goals, it is not surprising to find that most businesses questioned identified economic objectives as key priorities. Sustained growth and profitability were the issues most frequently mentioned in the completed questionnaires, together with providing a good product/service to customers and generally meeting the needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups. Some respondents also mentioned broader social aspirations for their organisations such as creating employment, serving the community, looking after their employees and acting with integrity and professionalism.

b. Attitudes to social, ethical and environmental issues

The overwhelming majority of organisations questioned stated that social, ethical and environmental issues were important to the enterprise, with around two-fifths claiming that such issues were 'very important' in organisational terms. When asked to describe to what extent their organisation was socially, ethically and environmentally responsible, a significant number of respondents claimed 'a great deal', irrespective of the size, age, sector, primary purpose or legal status of the enterprise. That said, many of those questioned were generally unable to identify the key issues of CSR which influenced the organisation's behaviour, although some reference was made to making a contribution to the community and to environmental concerns and actions. In effect, the initial evidence suggests that the idea of social responsibility tends to be seen in very general and unspecific terms within many Asian businesses, an issue explored in more detail during the interview phase of the project.

With regards to specific attitudes, the questionnaire results highlight that a majority of respondents believe that:

- profit is equally important to social, ethical and environmental responsibility

- the benefits of social responsibility either outweigh or are equal to the costs over time

- corporate social responsibility can create value for the organisation.

Taken together these initial attitudes and beliefs suggest that within these Asian businesses there is a positive orientation towards social responsibility and a recognition that it can help to create organisational advantage, albeit that many firms remain unclear as to what might constitute socially responsible behaviour.

To obtain a more detailed insight into underlying attitudes, beliefs and assumptions, respondents were subsequently invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of propositions. The summary data from the questionnaire are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Respondent attitudes, beliefs and assumptions

	Strongly agree/ tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree/ strongly disagree
Organisations should pay significant attention to their social, ethical and environmental responsibilities	27	3	0
My organisation pursues responsible business practices	30	0	0
Being socially, ethically and environmentally responsible is linked to organisational success	24	6	0
Employee performance improves in organisations which are socially, ethically and environmentally responsible	24	4	1
Social, ethical and environmental responsibility is more important than pursuing economic goals (e.g. profit/growth)	12	7	10
Organisations should integrate social, ethical and environmental responsibility into their core organisational strategies	25	3	1

	Strongly agree/ tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree/ strongly disagree
Organisations should become involved with community causes	29	1	0
Public attitudes to an organisation are influenced by its social, ethical and environmental behaviour	25	4	0
An organisation's customers (or clients) are influenced by its social, ethical and environmental behaviour	18	11	0
Social responsibility will become increasingly important to my organisation over the next 5 years	23	5	0

Note: N=32. Responses do not always tally as some respondents declined to answer some questions

What clearly emerges from Table 1 is a picture of strong support for socially responsible attitudes and actions and a recognition (when prompted) that CSR can have distinct organisational benefits, both in resource terms and in building stakeholder relationships. The one area where respondents held mixed views was with regard to the relative importance of social and economic goals, with the numbers fairly evenly split between those who thought CSR more important than profit, those who believed the opposite and those who felt neither one thing nor the other.

c. *Organisational Actions and Practices*

In addition to surveying attitudes, beliefs and assumptions, the questionnaire interrogated respondents on the types of socially responsible behaviour in which their organisations engaged and how this behaviour was reflected in internal systems, processes and procedures.

Table 2 shows the findings of the questionnaire with regard to the types of organisational involvement. The data suggest that respondents are active across a wide range of social, ethical and environmental areas, with donations to causes/local charities, sponsorship for local events, support for local schools and colleges, environmental initiatives, staff related issues and ethical purchasing particularly prominent. Information gained from the qualitative interviews supports this picture of substantial involvement in local causes, events and charities, with some organisations devoting considerable amounts of time and effort, in addition to donations in cash, goods and/or equipment.

Table 2: Organisational involvement in CSR

TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT	YES	NO
Donations to community causes	25	4
Donations to charities	26	3
Sponsorship of community events (e.g. sport)	21	6
Supporting the Arts	12	14
Work with local schools, colleges, universities	24	5
Supporting employee involvement with community causes	19	7
Supporting employer involvement with community causes	19	8
Lobbying for a particular cause	12	13
Cause-related marketing (e.g. products linked to charitable causes)	13	14
Encouraging skill development among employees	26	2
Investing in deprived areas	12	15

TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT	YES	NO
Engaging people traditionally excluded form the labour market (e.g. disabled, homeless)	10	15
Taking responsibility for the health and well-being of staff	27	1
Schemes to reduce environmental impact (e.g. recycling)	22	5
Monitoring environmental impact	11	13
Ethical purchasing	20	8
Ethical investment	16	10
Benchmarking social, ethical or environmental performance against other organisations	6	19
Sharing best practice on social, ethical or environmental responsibility with other organisations	8	16
Supplier diversity initiatives	10	14

Note: N=32. Totals do not always tally because of 'don't know' answers and/or because respondents sometimes declined to answer

The survey also shows that for a substantial number of organisations there is an attempt to reflect social, ethical and environmental objectives in mission statements, vision documents, business plans and policy papers; discussion of issues of corporate social responsibility is also common at Board level. Very few firms, however, have a specific committee or other body dealing specifically with CSR, choosing instead to designate an individual within the organisation to deal with the various areas of social, ethical and environmental concern.

The evidence suggests that such concerns are integrated to some degree into the organisation's daily activities and in management training programmes, with a few firms indicating that they had adopted guidelines concerning policies and/or practices on CSR. That said, only around one fifth of organisations appear to have set specific targets or goals regarding social, ethical and environmental performance and very few appear to make use of performance indicators in these areas or produce reports on the firm's socially responsible behaviour.

This reluctance to publicise the firm's socially responsible behaviour in a formal manner needs to be set in the context of each organisation's network of relationships.

As far as external involvement is concerned, around half appear to collaborate with other organisations on social, ethical and/or environmental issues and a majority consult to a certain extent with external bodies or stakeholders in these areas. This being the case, it seems reasonable to suggest that the involvement of individual Asian organisations in social, ethical and environmental matters does not go unrecognised in the local community.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE INTERVIEW RESULTS

As previously indicated the interviews provided an opportunity to add value to the information derived from the questionnaires and to explore in more detail some key areas associated with the idea of corporate social responsibility. As will be evident from the analysis below, some important findings have emerged from this phase of the project.

1. The importance of social responsibility

The interview phase of the project provided confirmatory evidence that behaving in a socially responsible way was an important consideration for the majority of respondent organisations. Given the nature of the sample, it is not surprising to find that this positive orientation towards CSR was tempered by a significant degree of pragmatism. A number

of interviewees remarked that socially responsible behaviour tended to become more important once the organisation had achieved its commercial and economic goals and that the latter might be seen as the springboard from which action in the wider community could be launched. As one respondent put it:

"At this stage it is not the number one priority but it will come to a stage when it will become number one... You can start to think about social responsibility; profit is very important, without that you cannot be socially responsible."
(Scottish Hotel and Property Company)

This idea of linear progression from commercial success to more socially responsible behaviour was not shared by all respondents. For some, economic and social goals were seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing. One observer noted that:

"social responsibility was part of doing business."
(Graphic Design Business, Manchester)

This view was echoed by another respondent who argued that changes in the business environment had made CSR equally important to a firm's commercial objectives and that in order to prosper organisations

"... needed to be seen to be doing CSR."
(Property company, Doncaster)

2. The meaning of corporate social responsibility

The questionnaire had not sought to offer a definition of CSR, although it was possible from the data to gain an understanding of how respondents implicitly understood the concept. In the interview phase participants were asked directly for their views as to the meaning of the term.

The evidence shows that for the majority of organisations questioned CSR was essentially about:

"... putting something back into the community."
(Leisure Group, Scotland)

in which the organisation existed and operated. One interviewee noted that being socially responsible meant:

"... giving back to the community – doing something to better where you live."
(Financial services company, Wales)

Another, that it was concerned with:

"... responsibility to your fellow human beings and to the people who are around you; to your employees and to see what you can put back in to help people progress ...."
(Scottish Coach Operator)

This idea that CSR had both an internal and an external aspect emerged in a number of the interviews. One interviewee spoke of social responsibility as having both an 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' side:

"The intrinsic side is about your employees, customers, investors and yourselves .... On the extrinsic side we are trying to set up a fund by ourselves, our business should support the charity."
(Scottish Hotel and Property Company)

In a similar vein another observed that being socially responsible was about the way you do business as an employer, supplier and, more broadly, as a member of the local community.

Whether defined narrowly as action in the community or more broadly as responsibility towards a variety of internal and external stakeholders, CSR was seen by the vast majority of interviewees as a form of moral duty towards others, the 'drivers' of which are discussed below. As the survey data indicates and the interviews confirm, the manifestations of this notion of duty take a wide variety of forms including charitable work (in the UK and overseas), donations to local organisations in both cash and kind, support for employees, service in the community and schemes to improve environmental performance.

3. Drivers of CSR

A key finding to emerge from the interviews is that this idea of duty was rooted in the personal attitudes and values of the individual(s) directing the organisations that were questioned. For a significant number of interviewees, this key internal driver was based on religious belief. The following quotations are typical examples of the responses by participants when invited to explain why they acted in socially responsible way:

"I think that everyone has got an ethical and moralistic duty to their community. There's more to life than making money; call it a religious and spiritualistic urge. I think it comes into the person who is at the top."
(Hotel and Property Company, Scotland)

"At the end of the day you have got to give something to get something back; if you make a mistake you pay for the penalty."
(Communications Company, Wales)

"In my faith it is a responsibility to others rather than yourself. You have to see people under you; we are the lucky ones, so we have to contribute to people who have not got what we have go."
(Financial Services Company, Wales)

Contrary to our earlier suggestion that Asian enterprise might best be seen as part of a universal theme, the above quotes point to a distinctive ethnic difference. Though there is no direct evidence from the present survey, it is unlikely that religious faith would nowadays be widely cited by non-Asian British firms as a motivation for CSR. Among some of the Asian case study firms, however, religious motives evidently have a high priority.

For one company owner based in Wales, there is a commitment to "do something to better where you live", a goal which stems specifically from the respondent's religious beliefs. Religious values also underpin the Scottish hotelier's substantial donations to local charities and causes and it may be that such faith-based commitments could prove stronger and deeper than more secular rationalisations, given that deities are not normally open to negotiation .

Against this, several previous studies have suggested that the sheer exigencies of the market place make it necessary for beliefs and values to be adapted to the need for commercial survival (Ram and Jones 1998, Ram *et al* 2000). It is also the case that other respondents in the case study sample tended to rationalise their CSR efforts without any direct reference to religious or ethno-cultural values. "Doing your duty to the community and workers" is one rather striking explanation, presented as a straightforward matter of secular morality.

Given that many of the enterprises in the sample were small and that a significant proportion were owner-managed, then it is not unreasonable to argue that the views expressed by senior managers in the respondent organisations reflected the position of the firm itself. That said, it needs to be recognised that it was not possible (nor required) in this project to examine how far the idea of CSR had been diffused to other individuals within the respondent organisations or to establish the extent to which it represented an 'institutionalist' *modus operandii.*

As far as external influences were concerned, these appear to have had only very limited impact in shaping organisational attitudes and behaviour regarding social, ethical and environmental issues. Thus, whilst a few observers claimed that government legislation and regulation had had some influence in areas such as waste disposal and packaging, most respondents felt little, if any, pressure from the regulatory environment other than compliance. Equally, there appears to have been neither significant supply chain influences nor other stakeholder demands from customers, investors or community groups. This relative lack of external drivers can be explained in part by the size of the enterprises in the sample.

4. Perceptions of benefit

The survey data had revealed that respondents saw CSR as conferring benefits on the organisation both on the demand and supply side. The interviews provided an opportunity to examine this perception in more detail and to seek concrete evidence of organisational gain. It should be stressed that commercial benefits (e.g. increased revenue and/or profits) was not a pre-requisite to socially responsible behaviour, rather it was a potential and often intangible outcome of a firm's actions. As one respondent put it:

"…it is all about perceptions in the market place. Much of business is word of mouth."
(Graphic Design Business, Manchester)

As far as the demand side was concerned, views as to the benefits of CSR were mixed. While some respondents felt that there was little, if any, bottom line impact from socially responsible behaviour, others talked about gaining access to markets and/or increased sales through improved public relations and enhanced company image. In general it would be fair to say that as far as the latter position was concerned, perceptions of organisational gain often tended to be impressionistic and relatively vague and were probably more aspirational than realistic. To quote one respondent:

"It won't affect the bottom line positively or negatively…I don't think that it's a benefit that is quantifiable."
(Scottish Coach Operator)

In this instance, Asian entrepreneurs appear to be acting like other business owners. Compliance with CSR is seen here in entirely secular, non-ethnic terms as a means of burnishing the firm's image in the hope of long-term commercial gain. There is of course no necessary contradiction here, since a variety of motivational strands can be interwoven together in every individual case, all serving to reinforce one another in the direction of CSR. In any case, the benefits of enhanced image are generally seen in vague unquantifiable terms.

Taking a more detailed firm by firm perspective, we find that the case study respondents display wide variations in motivation. In some cases, CSR compliance is seen in consistently non-materialistic terms, as with the respondent who sees his goal of promoting "racial and religious harmony" as an end in itself and does not necessarily expect any economic or financial returns from it. More typically, however, company owners make reference to the way in which practices like charitable donations, support for community projects, ethical purchasing and environmental sustainability act to "raise

the firm's profile". In one case, the respondent claims to benefit from enhanced staff loyalty and ease of recruitment (See below).

With regard to supply side benefits, attitudes and perceptions tended to be far more significant to interviewees. Many respondents spoke of the positive impact on staff of engaging in socially responsible actions, with regular references made to the increased health and happiness of the workforce resulting from different forms of employer support. This idea that the organisation gained a better, more satisfied and more loyal workforce as a result of its socially responsible behaviour was a recurrent theme in the interviews.

"In our business our employees are everything, the reason that we are here is because of our employees. So we are going back now and retraining them and looking after them more and more. There definitely is social responsibility."
(Hotel and property Company, Scotland)

"My staff are very loyal, they have been working for me for a very long time. They could have gone to work somewhere else for a lot of money but they work for me because of that social responsibility."
(Financial Services Company, Wales)

"We are very fortunate, many of our staff have been with us for well over two decades. They don't want to go anywhere else and that's because we are flexible in terms of giving leave at short notice, and various other helpful sorts of initiatives that we have been involved with in terms of allowing them to have small loans from us from time to time with no or low interest."
(Furniture and Property Business, Wales)

When asked to elaborate on how the idea of social responsibility related to the treatment of staff, a significant number spoke of help in various forms. Examples included payment of funeral expenses, help in cash or kind with wedding ceremonies, time off for family problems without a reduction in pay, cheap or zero interest loans, help with educational expenses and so on. Many employers when questioned demonstrated a paternalistic attitude to their staff that went well beyond mere compliance with employment regulations.

As indicated above, there was a recognition that the organisation could gain benefits from such an approach both in terms of staff response and from the positive image of the enterprise created in the local community, Actions, however, do not appear to have been overtly instrumental in this regard; rather they seem to reflect the religious imperatives and/or cultural values of those managing the various enterprises that participated in the project.

5. Organising for CSR

Analysis of the survey data had indicated that there was little attempt by the respondent organisations to engage in socially responsible behaviour in a formal and structured manner. This was confirmed by the case interviews. CSR, as practised in the sample enterprises tended to be largely *ad hoc*, informal and often reactive, although many businesses had built up regular patterns of support for various charities, local causes and organisations (e.g. sports clubs) and some individuals had committed specific amounts of time to significant roles in the local community.

This informality was reflected in internal structures for managing social, ethical and environmental responsibility. The vast majority of initiatives on CSR came from the top of the organisation and were often implemented on an individual basis by senior managers, with little, if any, recourse to other employees. If any discussion took place, this tended to be at board level (or with partners) and there were very few attempts to create a formal

structure through which to manage CSR decisions, other than those associated with accreditation to the various external standards (e.g. IIP, ISO14001).

With regard to performance measurement and reporting, the picture was essentially the same. Organisations invariably set no specific goals or targets for social, ethical or environmental performance and had no performance indicators for measuring outcomes. As for reporting on the organisation's CSR activities, this was done largely on an informal, word of mouth basis both internally and externally via the various organisational networks. No audit existed of corporate social responsibility within the respondent enterprises.

Given the size of the sample organisations and the stated predispositions of interviewees, none of these findings is surprising. Involvement in socially responsible behaviour is largely driven by the personal, religious, cultural and philanthropic values and beliefs of owners and senior managers and is accordingly often uncoordinated and unplanned. At the moment, it is questionable how far organisations would benefit from a more formal and structured approach.

6. Barriers to involvement in social, ethical and environmental initiatives

The interviews revealed that the primary barriers to involvement in CSR were those traditionally associated with the size of the organisation, namely time, resources and business priorities. For those involved in formal community roles, the commitment of personal time and expense was often substantial, with little, if any, tangible return for the organisation. For more recently established enterprises, business survival and growth understandably were the key organisational goals.

7. The role of government in encouraging socially responsible behaviour

When prompted, most respondents expressed the view that government could be instrumental to some degree in encouraging socially responsible behaviour in organisations, although the answers tended to be rather generalised and often vague. Suggestions included:

- tax relief for donations
- matched government funding
- schemes to educate and raise awareness of CSR issues
- more information on environmental grants.

In general, the expressed preference seemed to be for government to play the role of 'supporter' and 'enabler' rather than 'director' of corporate social responsibility.

CONCLUSIONS

The research has revealed that social responsibility is regarded as an important business issue within the British Asian business community, irrespective of the size, age, sector, primary purpose or location of the enterprise. Virtually all the organisations questioned demonstrated a positive commitment to socially responsible behaviour, engaged in a variety of socially responsible actions and did so irrespective of any benefits that such actions might bring to the organisation. Much of this activity tended to occur within the local community and regularly included donations to local causes and charities, support for local organisations and educational establishments, employee-focused forms of assistance and some initiatives to improve the environmental performance of the organisation. Some individuals were also active in fulfilling important community roles and in supporting charities and good causes outside the UK.

The evidence suggests that CSR is seen predominantly as a 'social' imperative, with ethical and environmental considerations much less evident among the sample organisations. In general the view expressed by respondents was that CSR was concerned with 'giving something back to the local community' by supporting local individuals, causes and organisations seeking different forms of assistance.

Substantial emphasis was also placed on helping employees to solve their personal and emotional problems whether through time off without penalty, help with expenses incurred at weddings or funerals or loans of property or cash to overcome temporary difficulties. A large part of the activity in this latter area reflected a paternalistic and morally based approach by employers to the well-being and happiness of their staff. Such an approach had the concomitant effect of engendering employee loyalty and commitment, thereby creating value for the organisation in the longer term.

While there was recognition that behaving in a socially responsible manner could provide both demand and supply side benefits, this was not a significant factor in encouraging organisational responses. Organisational and individual involvement in social, ethical or environmental initiatives appears to have been driven predominantly by the personal attitudes, values and beliefs of the individuals owning and/or managing the sample organisations. These attitudinal pre-dispositions were shaped in turn by religious, cultural and/or moral influences within the individual's environment.

External factors do not appear to have played an important role in the decision by organisations to act in a socially responsible manner, other than with regard to environmental issues where regulatory requirements were instrumental in encouraging compliance. This apparent lack or relative absence of pressure from the business environment can be linked to the size of the organisations questioned and/or to the nature of the business in which they are currently engaged.

There is little, if any, evidence to suggest that firms sought to capitalise on their actions by formally publicising their CSR goals and achievements in the wider community, although some recognition of their contribution undoubtedly occurred through collaborative activity, networking and normal patterns of communication. The picture that emerges is of a relatively low-key approach by organisations in this area, with most firms quietly and unobtrusively engaged in socially responsible forms of behaviour irrespective of organisational gain.

Structural arrangements for dealing with CSR tend to be equally loose and informal, with the majority of initiatives decided and implemented by owners and/or senior managers on an individual and *ad hoc* basis. While many organisations made reference to their social, ethical and environmental objectives in business documentation, none had a formal committee to discuss and oversee CSR activities and goal setting and performance reporting and monitoring were largely non-existent, other than with regard to environmental compliance. Once again, the size structure of the sample appears to have been a critical influence in shaping organisational approaches.

As far as barriers to further involvement in CSR were concerned, most organisations perceived few obstacles other than those traditionally associated with being a small enterprise, namely business priorities, lack of time and resources. Nor was there any substantial indication that government could or should play a significant role in encouraging socially responsible behaviour within the business community. Whilst some respondents made reference to possible financial incentives and improved information or greater publicity, firms on the whole indicated a preference for private decision and action in this arena, with government providing an enabling and supporting role rather than directing business behaviour.

Areas for further research

As a small-scale study, the present research has sought principally to shed some light on a theme – CSR- that has been neglected in the context of Asian firms in the UK. A number of insights have emerged, but there are issues that merit further attention from future research initiatives. First, a more critical examination of the actual meaning of CSR in the context of individual firms is warranted. As noted in the earlier section on definitions, there is no consensus on the actual meaning of CSR. Indeed, some commentators have observed that the CSR debate is characterised more by attempts to massage corporate egos, than a genuine sign of organisations operating more ethically (Roberts, 2003). There needs to be a careful assessment of mere image and substance in corporate claims to social responsibility.

For example, as Roberts (2003: 249) notes, there are at least four different forms of CSR: the conditions under which CSR is squeezed out by the dominance of financial pressures; the embrace of CSR as a form of public relations, effectively allowing the business to continue as usual; the adoption within the firm of new forms of measurement and incentives to motivate increased attention to the ethical, social environmental impacts; and finally CSR as a dialogue across the corporate boundary with those most vulnerable to the effects of corporate conduct. The task of differentiating between these approaches requires more intensive methods of investigation, incorporating a broader range of actors inside (and outside) the enterprise.

Second, in a related vein, what it means to be a 'socially responsible' employer could be usefully explored in the kind of firms reported on here. Many respondents regarded their approach to employees as a key exemplar of social responsibility. Previous studies of employment relations in Asian firms have painted a picture of exploitation, as well informal trade-offs (Ram, 1994; Ram et al., 2001). However, unlike the present study, previous research has tended to concentrate upon 'low-skill, low-wage' Asian firms operating in harshly competitive market environments. It would be interesting to examine the extent to which employment relations in 'socially responsible' firms are qualitatively different from the situation noted in existing studies.

Finally, the role that 'socially responsible' firms might be able to play in integrating other Asian businesses more closely into formal business support networks is worthy of further consideration. Many of the respondents in the present study were linked to formal business support agencies, acted as informal mentors to other existing and aspiring business owners, and appeared to enjoy influential positions in the local co-ethnic community. The low take-up of enterprise support by ethnic minority businesses is widely noted (Ram and Smallbone, 2001).

There is currently much debate on the effectiveness or otherwise of existing mechanisms of support for ethnic minority firms. If the experiences of these respondents are typical, there may be an opportunity here for the wider business support community to work with such entrepreneurs to strengthen their links with Asian firms. The next phase of CSM's work on ethnic minority business and corporate social responsibility will include closer collaboration with business support agencies, and other stakeholders, with a view to strengthening such links and benefiting both businesses and society.

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CSM's work is divided into **five main work streams** focussing on business, investors, workers, consumers and governance respectively. Our primary **geographical focus** is on developing and transition countries, and our **key constituencies** are ethnic minority communities in industrialised countries, and domestic industry and stakeholders in developing countries.

Our primary activities include the following:

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