

Ceylon Biscuits Committed To The Development Of Sri Lankan Society



It is a Company that has achieved phenomenal success, both in its corporate growth as well as in its fulfillment of social responsibility. Reflecting over the strides that Ceylon Biscuits has taken since its inception in 1968, Nandana Wickramage, Group Director/Head of Marketing and Sales, speaks to Ayesha Inoon of the Company’s commitment to the betterment of society in specific areas, through continuous support.

Ceylon Biscuits was initially founded to manufacture high-protein biscuits to supplement midday meals for school children under a joint programme between CARE International, USA and the Sri Lanka Government. The excess capacity from this led to the launch of the brand, Munchee. Over the years, a number of other innovative products were also introduced, such as Hawaiian Cookies, which were not previously available in Sri Lanka as well as generic products such as Marie Biscuits and Cream Crackers. Other products of Ceylon Biscuits includes Ritzbury – chocolates, Tiara – cakes, Lankasoy – soya meat products, Cecil – fruit based products, primarily for export and Samaposha – a nutritional supplement. These brands are the market leaders in their respective categories in Sri Lanka and Ceylon Biscuits is also the largest exporter of confectionary and snack products in the island. As such, the Company has always been well aware of its responsibilities towards caring for the country and its people.

Corporate Social Responsibility
The entire workforce of Ceylon Biscuits is actively involved and committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and enjoy seeing the positive outcomes of their efforts. There are several committees and sub-committees assigned to overlook the activities of the specific areas of CSR.

Education
“The future of a country lies in the hands of its children”, says Nandana. Ceylon Biscuits is primarily dedicated to supporting education, particularly of those children who have no parental support. A team identifies such children, those who may also be exceptionally gifted yet unable to pursue their education because of their current circumstances. This is done with the assistance of school principals, Grama Sevakas, and village priests. Titled Munchee Tikiri Shishyadara (student assistance),

this is also the largest continuing student education support programme carried out by a private sector organization in the country. The Munchee Tikiri Shishyadara programme is specifically geared towards preventing school dropouts. Many students often drop out of school at a young age due to financial constraints and sometimes take up jobs as domestic servants. Over 1,500 children have been supported under the Shishyadara programme. At the 2007 O/Level examinations over 10 of these children, who had been beneficiaries of the programme since they were in grade 5, obtained 10 ‘A’ grades, and expressed their ambitions to eventually study medicine or engineering. Ceylon Biscuits decided to continue to support these children, by funding all their educational expenses until they become professionals.

Several programmes have been conducted, that are especially targeted towards assisting children in rural areas who may not have opportunities similar to those in the city. Under the Munchee Tikiri Sishyathwa (Scholarship) programme, full day workshops are conducted every weekend, for a 1000 children each day, to equip them for the grade five scholarship examinations. Last year, over 53,000 children benefitted from this programme, with most of them performing very well in the examinations and a few even being among the top ten scorers in the country. Similar workshops are conducted on a smaller scale for Ordinary Level and Advanced Level students, with some 20,000 youngsters benefitting during the past year.

“As a company it gives us great joy to see the achievements of these children, who may have otherwise ended up as domestic servants, but who will now turn out to be doctors or engineers in a few years,” says Nandana Wickramage, adding that the support and inspiration of school children is something that any company should be looking towards.

Tiara, Ceylon Biscuits’ brand of cakes is also involved in teaching the school children the benefits of 5S, through a schools educational programme in association with the National Productivity Secretariat. Ritzbury Journey Day, an educational TV programme conducted by Ceylon Biscuits in line with school curriculum, teaches the children about the rich culture, fauna and flora and the traditional industries of Sri Lanka.

Arts and Culture

Another area that the Company is actively involved in is Arts and Culture. Although the programmes branded by the company are often seen as glamorous events, such as Munchee Samaga Ridee Reyak, and Munchee Samaga Ridma Tharanga, many underlying causes are supported thereby. The proceeds from Munchee

Samaga Ridee Reyak go towards a Health Insurance Scheme for film artists, which the company funds along with the Cine Star Foundation. While Munchee Samaga Ridma Tharanga is towards a similar scheme for music artists (singers, lyric writers and musicians), in collaboration with the Outstanding Song Creator's Association (OSCA).
Munchee Samaga Punchi Tharaka is a programme geared towards the Child Cinematic Art Education Fund. School children are given the opportunity to perform songs, dances or dramas and the fund supports those children who wish to further their education in this field. This programme is conducted in association with the National Film Corporation.

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Sports
Ceylon Biscuits is an ardent supporter of sports in the country. They revived the national sport of volleyball in a spectacular manner. The Company launched the National Volleyball Championship in 2005, with a world-record breaking participation of 2,763 teams from all over the country. It was the first time in the world that any sport tournament had the participation of such a large number of teams. Over 3,000 teams are expected to participate in the 2009 Championship.
The Company is also committed to building an Olympic champion for Sri Lanka, namely, young Shehan Ambepitiya, currently Asia's number one and the world's number seven fastest runner, whom they are supporting towards the goal of becoming an Olympic hero in 2011, along with his coach and Gateway International School which is supporting his education. Ceylon Biscuits does not use him as a brand ambassador to promote their product, but supports him with the aim that he will do our country proud at the next Olympics.
The Company is involved in all military sports meets as well. Thus doing their part for those who sacrifice their lives for the safety of our nation.

Corporate Philanthropy
Ceylon Biscuits is also an advocate of corporate philanthropy. In the case of any natural disaster in the country, such as drought, floods or landslides, Ceylon Biscuits is among the first to be on the scene with assistance. In the aftermath of the tsunami, the entire production of the factory was packaged and sent to the affected areas immediately, so that victims would not have to go hungry. The Company then undertook to build homes for over 35 families who had lost their own.

Upliftment of Farmers

The backbone of Sri Lanka has always been its agriculture, and there too Ceylon Biscuits plays its part by supporting over 16, 000 farmers with backward integration, financial and technical support. The farmers are guaranteed a price for their crop before harvest. The pre-agreed price is paid to them even if the market price is less at the time of selling, however if the market price is higher, then the current market price is paid, so that the farmers do not suffer a loss, and enjoy a certain amount of security. Both grain farmers and fruit farmers who contribute to the manufacture of Samaposha and Cecil products respectively, benefit from this programme.

Moreover, the Company believes in upgrading their lifestyle and promoting the dignity of the farming profession, to ensure that they have a respected place in society. Establishing farmer clubs, drinking water projects and Montessori classes in the farming community are among the projects driving towards this aim.

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Community Development

Building community relations is also among Ceylon Biscuits' objectives, with several of the staff involved in maintaining certain wards in the Homagama hospital. In Pannipitiya, opposite the factory premises of Ceylon Biscuits, they have established a Nana Madura, for the community, in which there is a library as well as an auditorium where public sessions and classes such as Business English for adults are conducted.

Mapiya Mehewara is a programme sponsored by Ceylon Biscuits for parenting education. Nanadana Wickramage stated that many parents lack adequate parenting skills to raise healthy and successful children. This programme is conducted with the participation of several professional resource personnel, such as MOHs, PHIs and doctors. Both mothers and fathers participate in this programme, sometimes along with their children. It guides them on how to bring up their children to be healthy and responsible citizens of the country.

Recognition for Ceylon Biscuits' Achievements

The Company has won many awards in recognition of both their achievements in

organizational growth as well as in CSR, with 23 awards won in the last three months alone. Among these are the Top Ten Corporate Citizen Award by the Chamber of Commerce, and the eight Slim Brand Excellence awards, four of which are Gold Awards – Export Brand of the Year, Product Brand of the Year, Brand of the Year, and significantly, the CSR Brand of the Year.

“CSR is something that shouldn’t be publicized”, admits Nandana – the cost of advertising itself could be used for further CSR activities. However, they hope they can inspire other organizations to follow their example, and to realize how much they too can contribute in many ways to the betterment of society.

Ceylon Biscuits is continuously looking for ways to improve in every aspect. Proud to be a multinational of local origin, the company today exports products to over 44 countries. A packet of Munchee biscuits can be found in almost any major supermarket in the world – a momentous achievement for a product from a third world country. As they continue to grow and achieve new heights as an organization, Ceylon Biscuits is also committed to continuously supporting Sri Lankan society in every possible way.

