The Role of Thai Library Association and CSR Management via Libraries and Knowledge Services

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is known as a policy of self-regulatory mechanism that companies implement to confirm that their business has been run in compliance with laws, ethics, and social standards, not causing any hazards to the community. In some aspects, CSR can be defined as activities that business companies manage for the better quality of life of people in the community.

The concept of CSR has been welcome in Thailand by many business companies. CSR is viewed as an essential factor for the companies to improve brand image and reputation. This also include libraries and the parties concerned in library profession such as Thai Library Association (TLA) of which executive board members have set a policy on CSR and implemented continuously each year throughout the country with purposes of bringing better standard of reading into the Thai society, enhancing knowledge in the library profession and paraprofessional library staff, and last but not least, helping the setting up of a library system or improving library services in terms of resource arrangement and service development.

The methods used in this study comprise document review and interviews of the parties concerned. The duration for this empirical study is during 2011 - 2017. An initial observation reveals that key CSR issues managed by TLA to serve each purpose can be categorised as follows:

1) Bringing better standard of reading into the Thai society – book donation for schools or community in need.

2) Enhancing knowledge in the library profession and paraprofessional library staff – knowledge management project and training of librarians and paraprofessional library staff.
3) Helping the setting up of a library system or improving library services in terms of resource management and service development – voluntary work for the setting up of libraries in some specific places such as Buddhist monasteries, law library in prisons, remote schools, etc.

Most of CSR projects of TLA have been conducted in collaboration with other organisations which act as a funding agency allocating the budgets for activities while executive board members of TLA, most of which are librarians and library staff, act as a coordinator matching the funds and the needs of schools, or the places where libraries have been demanded to be set up or improved.

It is anticipated that CSR activities performed by TLA would be such interesting cases that other libraries or library professional organisations in the ASEAN countries can study or further apply in their domestic environments.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, CSR of library, Thai Library Association

1. INTRODUCTION

The term “CSR” or “corporate social responsibility” has been practised for long by librarians in many libraries worldwide as we may know that one of the roles of libraries is to support their communities. CSR has long been proposed at the beginning including only a few of stakeholders of a company, but has been extended to cover more and more stakeholders due to the corporate governance to balance the interests of many groups of stakeholders of accompany that might include shareholders, management, customers, suppliers, financiers, government and the community. The concept of running a business only to earn profits is not currently acceptable, but the practice of social responsibility is also needed, for example, through ethical behaviour, legal standards, and environmental awareness. According to many large organisations or companies, CSR can be defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Communities, 2002). It is obvious that CSR has recently become an important consideration for executives of most organisations, not only the business sector, but also the public sector such as the government agencies including libraries, which viewed CSR as generating benefits for all related parties concerned.

Focusing on CSR performed by libraries, examples of activities can be shown in various categories. For instance, in India, the CSR activities were shown under these following scopes (Venkatappalah et al., 2011):

- CSR for the good governance and boosting the better quality of life of people;
- CSR for sustainability of library services;
- CSR for social inclusive development with respect of reading literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy;
- CSR for promoting knowledge management of the community.
The British library (BL) presented the CSR Report 2010/2011 (British Library 2011), indicating the CSR activities undertaken by the British Library, which included three aspects, namely, environmental, social, and economic issues. In each aspect, the projects were initiated and carried out to serve the aim, for instance, behaving ethically for the environmental issue – to develop and introduce socially beneficial products and services and to conduct environmental and protection activities. CSR in the social aspect included the improvement of the quality of life for BL workforce, families, and local communities through activities in employee engagement, community and wellbeing activities; and last, but not least, the economic issue focused on code of ethics and standards of business practice, such as collaboration with the Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) concerning promoting innovation, monitoring CO2 emissions/waste reduction/packaging, environmental conservation through the ISO 14001 system. The CSR projects under these three umbrellas were, for example: the automatic powering down of PCs at the end of the working day, the replacement of bottled water by filtered tap water, the promotion and subsidy of the KeepCup® to reduce spend on disposables, the purchase of a new more environmentally friendly car for the Library’s Transport team, the reduction of travel and subsistence via the use of video conference.

These projects were collected to give as examples concerning CSR activities performed by libraries. However, it seemed that there was a lack of information on CSR activities conducted by Library Associations in those countries. In this paper, therefore, CSR activities of the Thai Library Association (TLA) were presented in order to generate ideas how CSR projects were initiated, what results those projects gave, and also their impacts on the library community.

2. A POLICY AND ACTIVITIES ON CSR OF THE THAI LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

TLA has been established since 1954 or six decades with the missions to strengthen unity and encourage assistance among libraries, to promote education and technical skills for the growth of libraries both countrywide, to share professional knowledge and experience with other library associations locally and internationally, to protect the welfare and the status of library personnel, to give consultation on an establishment and development of a library, and to earn income from supplying library materials and facilities to any library upon request.

Wattananusit (2013) described the history of TLA since its establishment until now, for 60 years of the development. This could give a big picture of TLA’s missions related to the practice of CSR.

In the first decade, TLA focused its activities on promotion of library establishment, education of librarianship and library studies, and publications such as children books, TLA Bulletin, library work manuals. Interesting activities in the first decades also comprised standards of professional librarians, professional code of ethics for librarians, cooperation with other libraries and organisations abroad, establishment of professional groups of librarians from different types of libraries, projects on school library development, and library week exhibition.

TLA stepped on the second decade with an overwhelming event when librarians and library members countrywide were granted an audience with HM King Bhumibhol Adulyadej and TLA was also accepted into the royal patronage of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. The large projects held in this phase were an initiation of a National Book Fair and a launch of professional code of ethics for librarians which could be divided into 5 sections: to users, to profession, to colleagues, to institutions, and to the society.

The third decade brought a great change to TLA due to the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICT), which were integrated with the study of library studies. In this decade, TLA hosted the organization of the 4th Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians – CONSAL IV) for the first time. In the fourth decade, TLA focused its mission on production of technical publications for the course of library science such as glossary and terms, library standards and manuals, library usage, information service system, etc.
CONSAL IX was hosted for one more time by TLA in collaboration with the National Library of Thailand.

The fifth decade marked three new projects undertaken by TLA, the presentation of outstanding librarian awards, the host of 65th International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – IFLA Conference and Council Meeting, and lifelong learning and professional training on library science, for instance, cataloging and indexing, book conservation and repair, etc.

In the sixth decade, the library standards were revised in 2006 together with the library standard and indicators for school launched in 2009. TLA focused its activities to prepare for joining the ASEAN Economic Community. Important activities in this decade included publications of TLA Research Journal, Library and Library Professional Development: knowledge management project, SET Awards for those dedicated to the society (in cooperation with the Stock Exchange of Thailand), the development of “Phrom Panya” Library, Restoration of school libraries in the central region after heavy flood in 2011, promotion of reading, and the TLA Annual Conference.

The review of TLA’s missions in each decade showed that most TLA’s activities focused on serving the best to people and the society in terms of reading promotion for the better quality of life through intellectual as well as moral enhancements. When the term “CSR” has been introduced in the business sector, TLA executive board members viewed it important to match TLA’s activities with the concept of CSR as TLA has long been providing services to the community and the Thai society since its first establishment. Based on activities under the scope of CSR, the key policy of TLA indicating CSR aspects could be classified into three purposes as follows:

1. Promoting reading and literacy in the Thai society at all levels.

   This could be obviously seen from continuous attempts to organize events and exhibition for promoting reading, such as National Library Week, Annual Conference on Reading Promotion, for example, A Decade of National Reading Agenda: Create Reading Thai Society, Reading for the Development, etc. Another activity was book donation for schools or communities in need. TLA acted as a coordinator asking for sponsorship of books, magazines, and other kinds of media, e.g. CDs, VCDs, from other organisations, especially from publishers and business companies, then delivering to the schools and communities. The Special Libraries Group, one of the library groups under TLA, regularly conducted an activity of book donation to different libraries in the remote areas of Thailand and the places in need, for example, libraries of schools in Prachuab Khiri Khan, a library at Khao Yai National Park (the library services were provided both for staff of Forestry Department and visitors), book corners in Women Prison Khlong Prem, Bangkok, and at Saen Tor Community, Bang Khun Thian, the district at the border of Bangkok adjacent to the sea.

2. Enhancing knowledge in the library profession and paraprofessional library staff.

   TLA under financial sponsorship of SET organised a project on “Library and Librarian Professional: Knowledge Management “, with an aim to manage the knowledge in library and professional librarians. The project covered the publications of six manuals concerning all knowledge and skills necessary for those who work in libraries. The six books published were under these following scopes: library management and operation, technical services in library, library services and activities, automated library technologies, Best practices of library work, and history of the Thai Library Association. Apart from capturing tacit knowledge from librarians or personnel keen on library profession, these six books were used as a material for training librarians and paraprofessional library staff. So far, three training courses have been held free of charge to those interested for more than 600 persons.
3. Helping the setting up of a library system or improving library services in terms of resource arrangement and service development. TLA Board Members organised into a group based on voluntary basis to conduct activities in setting up a library system ready for providing standard services to users. The voluntary work was carried out in collaboration with both the public and private sectors. Under this project, many libraries were set up countrywide, for instance:

**Library for prisoners**

One of the outstanding projects was the establishment of Wisdom Innovative Library of Bang Khwang Central Prison. The project was graciously initiated by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in 2003 giving assistance to the Department of Correction to develop 60 libraries, also known as “Wisdom Innovative Library”, financially funded by SET with an objective to improve the quality of prisoners and prepare them before returning to the community. A TLA voluntary group set up the libraries covering the improvement of location, landscape design, and acquisition of library resources and facilities under the concept of 3 Good Factors which were materials, environments, and librarians. The library for prisoners was developed up to standards having a good management system and effective services via automated library software. Library resources in the prison libraries included royal literary books, textbooks, legal books, computer books and audio visual resources. A training course on book repair and preservation was also provided to prisoners in order to develop their knowledge and skills.

Activities for prisoners through library services consisted of reading promotion, training on library usage, production of hand-made books and boxes, and the usage of automated library software. Evaluation of satisfaction and needs of users were also conducted to obtain data for further improvement.

**Library for school children**

TLA joined hands with the Ministry of Education to improve libraries in many schools. Other than improving location and landscape, exhibitions and reading promotion activities were organised with good cooperation from teachers and the parties concerned such as governors, education officers in the province, librarians in schools and from the public libraries. Training courses were provided to teacher librarians.

**Library for Thai-Muslims in the southern 3 provinces**

TLA worked together with the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand (NCSWT) and the Thai-Muslim Women Association of Thailand to conduct the project on reading promotion for Thai Muslims in the south of Thailand. From a survey in three provinces (Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat), it was found out that Most Thai Muslims were interest in kinds of books such as Islamic religious books, hygiene, sports, orchard plantation, cooking, biography of famous people, tales and short stories, and children books. TLA supplied books and reading materials as users needed and held training courses on Reading Thai for local teachers who taught Thai.

**Library for community**

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between TLA and SET with an aim to develop a library for the community near the place where TLA was located. The library, so called “Serm Panya” or Intellect Boosting, located in the building of TLA was open and provided services to the community nearby since 2005.

**Library restoration project**

Due to heavy flood in 2011, TLA gave help through the restoration project in order to bring the good conditions and environments of school libraries back to normal. Library facilities and furniture were supplied to 10 libraries, such as tables and chairs, shelves, computers, library software and reading materials. There were training courses for teachers in some schools.
3. RECENT AND FUTURE CSR ACTIVITIES BY TLA

During previous 3 years, TLA focused its CSR activities on the knowledge management project with an aim to enhance librarians’ knowledge and skills under the concept of knowledge sharing and lessons learned. Training courses and discussion forums were open publicly either by TLA directly or by other library groups under TLA, for instance, Special Libraries Group, Librarians of Higher Educational Institutes Group. The training courses and topics for discussion could enhance knowledge of librarians and library staff while updating them with new trends of development related to library and information services. Moreover, new databases useful for community lifelong learning were recently developed, such as a list of libraries in Thailand, a network prototype of living libraries in each region, a knowledge management project on Buddhism and national heritage in Nan province.

Another key CSR project which should be recorded in this article was the MOU signing between TLA and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) on the World Book Capital 2013 to promote reading throughout the country via 80 networking agencies. An event on Bangkok Read for Life was undertaken as a driving force for Bangkok to be a strong focal point in reading, especially reading among youth. For example, one interesting activity performed by the Knowledge Centre (KLC), Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (TISTR) was “Ten Science Books You Should Read”, which was presented in KLC website targeting to the youth and researchers.

According to the interviews of TLA Board Members, TLA expected to practise CSR activities more on the issues of knowledge management for librarians and library staff so as to harnessing library personnel towards the changing environments of the ASEAN Community. Boosting of networks among TLA and other organisations was also viewed as important, especially in fund raising and technical cooperation.

4. CONCLUSION

Given the fact that CSR activities have been long performing by TLA, it was emphasized by TLA Board Members that these kinds of activities needed to be continuously conducted. TLA deemed it necessary for an organisation such as Library Association to be responsible for national development in all aspects, socially and economically. It could be seen that TLA responded to the social development from the single point in providing assistance to one specific place, extensively to the whole system of library development inclusive of personnel, library resources, professional standards, and code of ethics for librarians. All of these activities are for the social benefits for all.

REFERENCES


