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## EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND DRIVING CHANGE - "SOCIAL INNOVATION" AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Social Innovation is an idea that works for the public good. It recognises the challenges but look at the opportunity for that are sustainable. Social innovation focuses on solutions. India is a diverse country with various problems and challenges. We need social innovation in order to face such challenges. Social Innovations come from three levels – Individual, organization or group and government level. Consider, for example, the idea of Grameen Model by Mohammad Yunus, which created tremendous impact on women. It provided both social and economic protection on a larger scale. At the same time some social innovation initiatives started by the students at university level to provide solar power to remote village and initiated income generation programmes for Dalit villages in Visakhapatnam district created sustainable solutions for major social challenges. On the other side, there are social innovations for environmental protections. Hence, the results of social innovations are all around us.*

### Introduction

In order understand Social Innovation, we need to understand what 'Innovation' means and what constitutes it. Innovation is a new idea, device or process, when applied, generates a better or alternative solution. Novelty and improvement are two criteria for innovation. Although innovation need not necessarily be new, but it should be new to the user, context or application (Phills, Kriss & Miller, 2008). Social innovation is any novel idea that is implemented for bringing an effective, efficient, and sustainable solution for a problem or challenge. . It is public in nature rather than private. For instance, Microfinance provides small loans, micro insurance, and other financial products, and generates small savings for the poor who lack access to conventional financial system. However, the challenge that microfinance addresses is Poverty. The idea of providing small loans without any collateral is an innovative idea which provides sustainable solution for the social problem i.e. Poverty. A social innovation can be production process, technology, product, but it can also be a principle, an idea, law, social movement or combination of all.

Bruno Latour defines Social Innovation as "Innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social." This definition differentiates with Business innovation. Business innovation is necessarily implemented for the profit maximisation, where as social innovation concentrates on providing sustainable solutions for the



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challenge. Social Innovation can be defined by The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe” (TEPSIE, 2012), as follows:

“Social innovations are new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”

TEPSIE definition is considered to be inclusive and wider. The report focuses on the process of social change and transformation of society. Geoff Mulgan identified certain fields for social innovations. They are: raising life expectancy, growing diversities of countries and cities, happiness, difficult transition to adulthood, stark inequalities. Mulgan concentrates on the aspects of health and standard of living. Other fields of Social Innovation include climate change, environment-related issues, social problems like caste issue, child marriage etc. delivery of public services. There are no boundaries for social innovations, any issues or challenges or problems that are related to society can be addressed by social innovation. Hence social innovation is universal in nature of applicability. Nicholls and Murdock in their research on social innovation, focused on ‘systems and processes of change in social relations’ in one side and ‘innovation in the conceptualisation, design and production of goods and services that address social and environmental needs and market failures on the other’

Timo Hamalainen and Risto Heiskala outline five types of innovation: Technological, Economic, Regulative, Normative and Cultural Innovations. The authors go on to say that “social innovations are changes in the cultural, normative or regulative structures [or classes] of the society which enhance its collective power resources and improve its economic and social performance”.

### **Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation**

Social innovations and Social Entrepreneurship are interlinked in one hand, yet viewed as independent entities on the other. Hence it attracted attention from policy makers, academics, practitioners and others. Both are used for to tackle the social problems. Social Innovation is an idea and a process for the social change, where as social entrepreneurship is a business model which aims at providing better solutions. Social entrepreneurship can be defined as following:

Social entrepreneurship can be defined as entrepreneurship that aims to provide innovative solutions to unsolved social problems. Therefore it often goes hand in hand with social innovation processes, aimed at improving people’s lives by promoting social changes (OECD, 2010).

OECD definition looks at the common connection between the social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship creates “social



value” but it also includes a profit motive. Whereas social innovation at certain levels do not include profit motives. For example, few Government-initiated innovative programs may not have underlying profit motives, but they definitely focus on the benefit aspect of the beneficiaries.

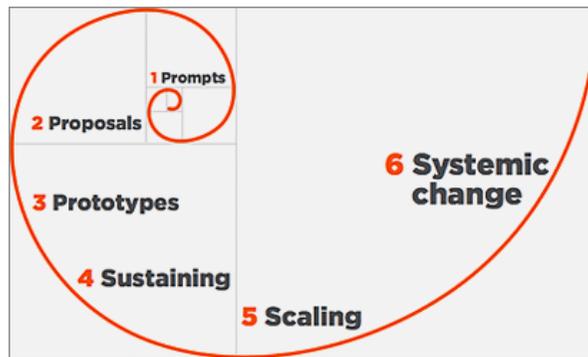
“Social innovation seeks new answers to social problems by: identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities; identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce.(OECD LEED, 2010).

Social Entrepreneurs are creative entrepreneurs, possessed by their vision; they apply their determination to build institutions and fields of work. They engage people across society, mobilize resources and will not rest before they have reached their goal. Social Entrepreneurs are driven by a vision of social impact: unlike business entrepreneur, their motivation is not personal recognition or financial success. Social innovation concentrates on creating social value and consists of an innovative idea. Implementation of an innovative idea needs dedication and accelerated efforts for success.

### **Case Study 1:- Grameen Model by Mohammad Yunus: Social Innovation or Social Entrepreneurship?**

Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank that he created in 1983 were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. Grameen Bank’s main activity involves on granting loans to poor people in Bangladesh. Leaving aside the social implications of this activity, the most striking feature of this bank is its unusually high reported repayment rate, 98%, compared to that achieved in the US banking sector, 96%. Although this repayment rate may be due to different accounting and reporting standards, the actual repayment rate of microfinance institutions, 92% is relatively high when compared to the rate of 75% in other lending institutions in Bangladesh. Yunus’s innovative idea is granting small loans to the poor women without any collateral. This Social Innovation aims at eliminating poverty in Bangladesh, which was subsequently followed by other developing countries as an effective tool for women empowerment and eradication of poverty. This model becomes a business model for many Micro Finance Institutions (MFI) and Grameen Bank itself is a business model itself. In such background it is very difficult to keep Grameen Model in the domain of social entrepreneurship as the idea is new and innovative that has social transformation as an objective.

Sandra M. Bates proposes a simple three stage process for social innovation: Investigation, Innovation and Implementation. But widely acceptable model which shows the Social Innovation Process is adopted from the book “The Open Book for Social Innovation”.



Source:- Open Book for Social Innovation, The Young Foundation.

The six stages are:

1. Prompts – which highlight the need for social innovation
2. Proposals – where ideas are developed
3. Prototyping –where ideas get tested in practice
4. Sustaining –when the idea becomes an everyday practice
5. Scaling – growing and spreading social innovations
6. Systemic change – involves re-designing and introducing entire systems and will usually involve all sectors over time

There is no hard rule that every step must be followed. Some Innovations may skip one or more stages. Prompts stage analysis the need for social innovation and what are the challenges that prompted social innovation. In the next stage i.e. Proposals stage the idea gets a concrete shape by considering various aspects. Ideas are implemented and tested based on various dimensions and create the best model for implementation. Promotion and expansion take place in Scaling stage. Continuous evaluation and changes based on feedback are done at last stage i.e. systemic change.

### **Case Study 2:- Implementation of Solar Project in Anuku Tribal Village in Visakhaptnam District, A.P. by the Students, an NGO and local Government officials**

A group of students studying in the GITAM Institute of Management come up with the idea to provide solar power to a remote tribal village. They collected funds through various programmes like approaching corporate, collecting entry fees by conducting youth fest and other fund raising activities. They approached an NGO for the logistic and technical support. Formed various teams and coordinated activities. Step one of the social innovation process i.e., Prompts in this social innovation is the lack of electricity facilities for the tribal village. Providing sustainable energy for the village was the best proposal for the implementation of social innovation. It constitutes the second step. Prototyping is not possible in this model as there is only one village. This step may incur more expense. In the next step, students implemented the project in the village by giving small training



programme for the tribes. This Social Innovation is a unique because of the process of organising the project by the students with collaborations and bringing social and economic impact in the tribal village.

Three main challenges that are faced in implementing Social Innovation are: Financial constraints, Promotion and Technical problems. Finance plays important role in implementing the Social Innovation in a sustained manner. Promoting a Social Innovation project requires a set of strategies. Accepting such innovative idea or process requires proper promotion about the importance to the target beneficiaries. Technical problems include legal aspects, intellectual property rights, technological issues etc.

### Social Innovations at grassroots levels in India

Social Innovations in India are initiated at various levels: Individual, Corporate, NGO's, Government and Multi Stakeholder partnership. Some of the Social Innovation projects undertaken at various levels are discussed in the following table.

**Table No. 1: Social Innovations in India**

Project Name	Initiated by	Description
COREPDS (Centralised Online Real-time Electronic PDS)	Government (Govt.of Chhattisgarh)	COREPDS empowers the beneficiary by offering a right to choose FPS of his/her liking. Beneficiaries in COREPDS have been allowed to take their ration from any FPS by authenticating themselves by any one of the multiple instruments
e-Mamta	Government (Government of Gujarat)	The Government of Gujarat developed an application for tracking mothers and children through unique identification number that enables grassroots workers to communicate with residents who are in need of services and through SMS alerts, they alert the beneficiaries for the due health services.
UVwater Disinfection Device	Individual (Ashok Gadgil and Vikas Guard)	UV water disinfection device offers a cost-effective, Easy-to-use solution for water purification. The low maintenance system can be implemented in even the most remote areas of the world.
Gas-powered iron	Individual (K.Linga Brahman, A.P)	Gas enabled iron box invented at grass roots level
DataHalli BPO	Corporate (JSW)	Empowerment of rural women. BPO centre consists of all women employees working on domestic and international projects.
Jaipur Rugs	Corporate	Utilizing ICT for the promotions of crafts
GIM-SIFE	Multi Stakeholders (Students, NGO and Government)	Implementing Solar project in tribal village of Visakhapatnam District along with other income generation projects.

Source: - 1) NASSCOM Social Innovation Forum

2) Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, IIT Madras



Impact analysis of the Social Innovation can be studied based on its reach to the people. Some innovations are confined to the village and some to a particular section of the society and some will have the universal nature. For example, Grameen Model initiated by the Muhamad Yunus has a universal nature to address the poverty problem. Jaipur Rugs project impacted the artisans in the state of Rajasthan. Government Social Innovation projects will be impacting the targeted groups with wide applicability. DataHalli project targets the women group for their empowerment.

Impact Analysis of a Social Innovation can be studied from the perspective of social and economic impact. A Social Innovation project will have a set of social and economic impact which in turn transforms the society by creating a social value. Some of the social and economic impact of Social Innovations in India can be studied with a broader framework which is mentioned below.

**Table 2: Framework for Analysing Socio-Economic impact of Social Innovation**

Social Impact	Economic Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational</li> <li>• Health Security</li> <li>• Gender Equality</li> <li>• Social Justice</li> <li>• Social Empowerment</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Equality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Security</li> <li>• Better Livelihoods</li> <li>• Reduced income disparity</li> <li>• Greater oppurtunities</li> <li>• Susatainable Development</li> <li>• Reduced costs</li> <li>• Wider chocies</li> </ul>

### Accelerating Social Innovation in the country

Social Innovative idea will sustain when there is sustainability in the implementation. Sustainable implementation needs continuous efforts, financial viability, manpower, awareness, marketing, and promotion of an idea, feedback, changes according to needs, and the interchange of ideas. Role of government and private sector play important role in making such innovative idea to reach wider section of the population. Some forums like Nasscom Social Innovation Forum and IIT-Madras Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship are providing space for displaying social innovation but are not actively involved in promoting such ideas. We need forums for implementation and encouragement. For financial viability, Social Innovation Fund is needed. Such funds may be equity or debt or combination of both. From Government side, Social Innovation must be promoted through various schemes and projects. Like Indian Inclusive Innovation Fund for MSME sector should include social innovation. At the village level, social innovations must be promoted by the state governments. In order to encourage social innovations that have high impact and reach, there is a need for Public Private



Partnership model. Some innovations may not have much commercial potential at all, but be open to social diffusion. Such innovations should be encouraged through Government agencies. As a part of the Corporate Social Responsibility corporate can take up such activities. National Innovation Fund encourages such innovations at grassroots levels through Grassroots Technologies Innovations Acquisition Fund (GTIAF). NIF acquires the rights to such technologies, which are then licensed at low or no cost to small scale innovations. We need such funds for promoting small scale social innovations which may confine to a part of the geographical area or a part of the process.

Social Innovation at grassroots level has created tremendous impact in the lives of the people. What we need is a proper promotion of innovations to other areas. The role of Government agencies and corporates in promotion of Social Innovations is crucial for effective and efficient implementation.

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