



Workshop on

# Grassroots Innovation Movement

February 8, 2014

A **Workshop Grassroots Innovation Movement** was held in New Delhi on 8th February 2014 that brought together researchers, activists and policy-makers to learn from one another about grassroots innovation movements. The workshop was organised by Dinesh Abrol at Centre for Studies in Science Policy in Jawaharlal Nehru University in collaboration with Adrian Smith, Elisa Arond, and Mariano Fressoli (all from the project, Grassroots Innovation: Historical and Comparative Perspectives). Against a backdrop of increasing policy interest in ideas for inclusive innovation, the workshop drew upon the experiences of grassroots innovations in order to critically assess the who, what, how, where, when and why of inclusions and exclusions in innovation. Most of the day focused on movements in India, such as Peoples' Technology Initiatives, Honey Bee Network, and free software movements in India; but debate also encouraged through contrasts with movements in South America and United Kingdom.

## **Every Case is Its Own Study? Every Movement has Its Own Goals?**

### **@ STEPS Centre-JNU Symposium**

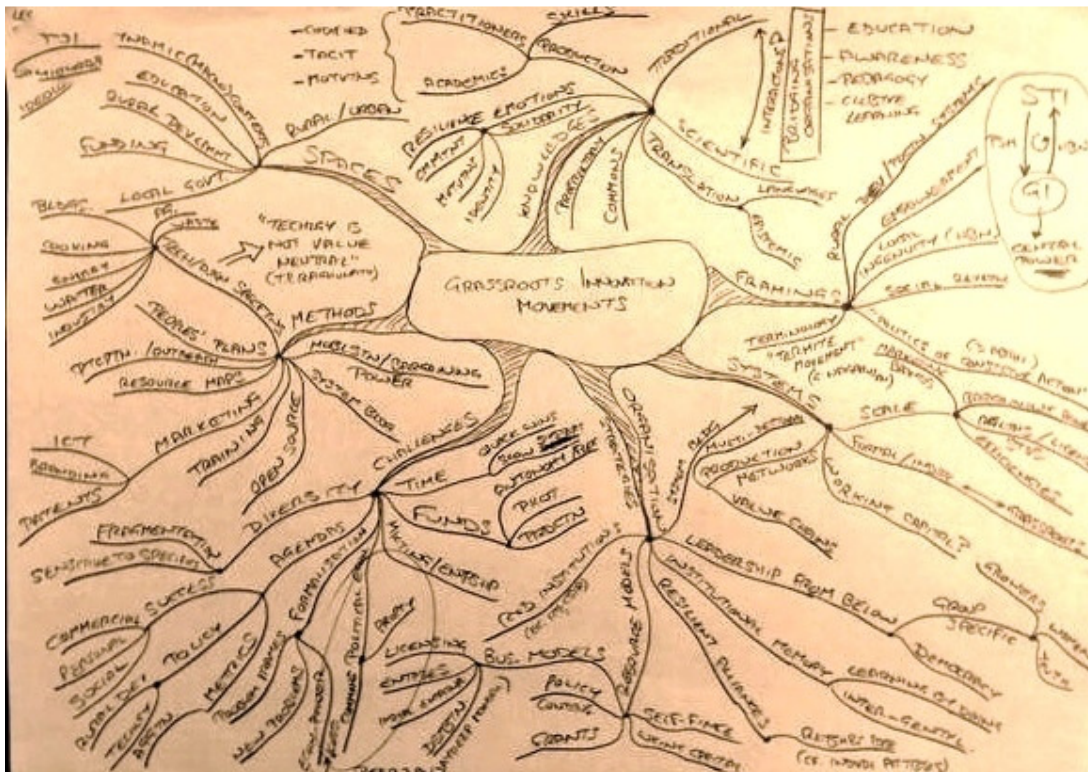
By **Adrian Smith**, Researcher, STEPS Centre / SPRU

Blog Posted on 11 February 2014 by Julia Day

### *Learning with and across diverse grassroots innovation movements*

Here in Delhi, first at the Grassroots Innovation Movements Workshop, and then at the STEPS-JNU Symposium, participants were interested in the commitments and positions taken in STEPS Centre research projects. Our project on Grassroots Innovation Movements in Historical and Comparative Perspectives is investigating six grassroots innovation movements whose diverse histories arise in very different geographies, and whose activities, participants and sectors are similarly varied:

- Honey Bee Network in India
- Peoples Science Movement in India
- Social Technology Network / Technologies for Social Inclusion in South America
- Appropriate Technology Movement in South America
- Movement for Socially Useful Production in the UK
- Grassroots Digital Fabrication in Europe



Not only does this raise questions about research methodology, but also what the project expects to achieve practically in engaging with these movements. At root, this is a question of motivations for the research: why study such a collection of disparate movements? I tried providing my own, personal answers to this question when introducing both the workshop and the session on grassroots innovation at the symposium.

My answer had three aspects to it: each engaging with different communities. The first relates to activists and practitioners. The second relates to the research community. And the third aspect relates to the world of policy-making.

At any time, in many places around the world, if we look carefully enough we can find networks of activists and communities generating bottom up solutions to the challenges, opportunities and aspirations for development as they view it. Ingenious grassroots activity produces a variety of innovations, and which activists, engineers, scientists, and others (including investors and entrepreneurs) sometimes try to develop further and help scale-up and spread in some form. This activity can involve improvisation as well as knowledge, and both of which can be elusive for formalisation and dissemination. Conversely, activists concerned for the problems of often marginal or disadvantaged communities, and overlooked by many innovation institutions, try to bring science, engineering, and project development into dialogue with the grassroots, and to develop solutions in which communities are empowered to shape the design and execution of projects that make use of appropriate innovations (even if they did not originate within the particular grassroots setting).

What we see repeatedly over time is participants in these varied grassroots innovation initiatives looking to those involved in similar activities elsewhere. Networks are formed, experiences shared, reflections are made, and discourses and practices emerge around how

to help deepen and spread this mix of grassroots innovation activity and grassroots activism making use of innovations. We call these developments grassroots innovation movements.

The first aspect to our research motivation is to engage with these movement processes, and to try and contribute to the dialogues involved by making connections with other movements elsewhere. Even where movements appear to have little in common at face value, such as the Honey Bee Network in India today and the movement for socially useful production in the UK in the 1970s, bringing them together and contrasting them can still have its uses. Looking carefully at a contrasting case can help activists step outside their day to day activity, and in thinking about grassroots innovation experiences in very different times and places, reflection can help reveal, recast, and rethink the processes they are engaged in, and which daily pressures may obscure. Just as foreign travel can enrich how we think about our home countries, so we hope dialogue between contrasting grassroots movements will enrich the reflections of activists in each. Contact such as these may even help processes of international solidarity. As we'll see below, policy for inclusive innovation has an international dimension, and so it might make sense for movements to engage internationally too.

The second aspect to our research motivation relates to how we study these movements, and how we engage others in our analysis. There exists already considerable research into grassroots movements. However, much of this research attends to either protest movements, movements for rights, or movements for cultural identification. Studies of grassroots movements that innovate, and that are doing alternative development, are fewer. Some exist, such as the work of David Hess. But few have looked across a diversity of grassroots innovation movements in the way we are trying in our project. Elsewhere, we have also argued how the field of innovation studies gives insufficient attention to the particularities of grassroots innovation. Innovation studies have tended to focus on systems of innovation based around firms, markets and research institutes, and if they turn to questions of alternative innovation, then they tend to apply the same conceptual apparatus developed for market-oriented settings. So a second motivation for the project is to contribute an empirically-grounded, theoretically-informed understanding of grassroots movements involved in innovative solutions for alternative developments.

The third and final motivation for our project is to engage with renewed policy interest in grassroots innovation. The activities of grassroots innovation movements are attracting attention in the context of elite policy interest in inclusive innovation. The OECD and other international bodies are interested in inclusive innovation. They are conducting studies and developing programmes. A common feature for the discussions is the search for models of inclusive innovation, and how to scale-up the use of these models. Understandably, these discussions often draw on conventional innovation terms and concepts familiar to these organisations. So, for example, grassroots innovation is seen in terms of the development of innovative devices, which can be developed into products through processes for cultivating entrepreneurship and marketing. These approaches do make sense to some in grassroots innovation movements. But they do not make sense for all participants. Terms like inclusion, scaling-up, and even innovation itself, need to be interrogated in the context of grassroots attempts to democratise innovations for alternative modes of production and consumption.

There is much more to grassroots innovation than an overlooked reservoir of appropriable ideas and devices, open for selection, inclusion, and commercialisation. Grassroots innovation movements are also about mobilisation around different visions for

development and alternative ways of innovating. In the process of developing solutions for alternative development problem frames, grassroots innovation movements generate new subjectivities, discourses, agendas, and visions for innovation in development, and not just devices, capabilities, and infrastructure. Some grassroots innovators become protagonists in a different kind of development. Some even present alternative innovation as a tool to resist being included, or subsumed as they might term it, into conventional innovation agendas. This is a position that asserts a right to innovation in a way that poses discomfiting challenges to the fundamental notions held by elite innovation institutions. It is a position that speaks to knowledge politics and relations of political and economic power. It is a position we were reminded about in the discussions in our workshop and Symposium in Delhi. It is important to pressure policy-makers also to recognise this more radical and transformational aspect in grassroots innovation movement.

Source: [http://steps-centre.org/2014/blog/stepsinu\\_grassroots\\_smith/](http://steps-centre.org/2014/blog/stepsinu_grassroots_smith/)

### **Project “Grassroots Innovation: Historical and Comparative Perspectives”**

This project examines inclusive innovation and the present-day programmes and social movements which promote it. It looks at possible strategies and approaches to support and harness inclusive and grassroots innovation.

#### **What is “inclusive innovation”?**

Creating new technologies, systems and approaches is crucial to development. But mainstream approaches to innovation have uneven results, the benefits are not always equally spread, and some groups of people are routinely excluded.

As a result, there is growing interest in “inclusive innovation” approaches, including many that operate at a grassroots level. Activists and communities are looking for ways to develop solutions to the problems of those on the margins of economic growth, and who frequently suffer the downsides of mainstream growth.

#### **Project activities**

- Examine Social Technologies initiatives in South America, and Grassroots Innovation activities in India – two notable and different forms of inclusive innovation.
- Consider these movements in historical context.
- Explore how “niche” spaces – where small scale innovation is allowed to flourish, protected from wider markets – are created.

## **Delhi Workshop on Grassroots Innovation Movement**

Centre for Studies in Science Policy (Jawaharlal Nehru University)  
STEPS Centre (University of Sussex)

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014,

Venue: Centre for Studies in Science Policy, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, Delhi

### *Background*

This workshop aims to bring participants together to discuss and share lessons from a variety of grassroots innovation movements in the context of discussions taking place among the academics on the theme of how to promote inclusive and sustainable development. Developments occurring in the policymaking circles indicate at both national and international level a major spurt in the attention to the role of grassroots innovation activities. Social movements promoting grassroots innovation have long histories. There exists a wealth of experience to draw upon as the topic returns once again up on the agenda of policymakers and scholars.

In this workshop we plan to meet as a small group of practitioners (10-12), policymakers (3-5) and researchers (3-5) as participants in order to generate discussion, debate and reflect on the potential and contribution of grassroots innovation movements to the processes of economic, social and cultural development. This workshop will be held on Saturday, Feb 8, 2014 in the committee room of the Centre of Studies in Science Policy, Jawahar Lal Nehru University New Delhi.

We already have the confirmation of participation of scholars from Argentina, United Kingdom and United States in this workshop. These scholars will be feeding back from some of their own research on a wide variety of grassroots innovation movements active in Argentina, Brazil, United Kingdom and India. The results of their own research work on social movements whose wider variety of contexts permits discussion about both the generality and limitations of lessons sharing will be shared with the participants.

Participants confirming their participation in the workshop will benefit in the form of an opportunity to step back from day-to-day activities and share reflections and gain access to some of the latest research on grassroots innovation movements. Participants will have a plenty of opportunity to network with each other. Since the benefit of exposure to ideas and experiences from an audience interested in their own movement can be wonderful and refreshing for everyone participants will be able to energize themselves.

During the forenoon sessions of the workshop we will have about eight to ten presentations of 15 minutes each to give an opportunity to the invited participants to share their experience and reflect on a common set of broad questions identified by the organizers. After each presentation plenary discussion of fifteen minutes will be allowed to the fellow participants to

give them an opportunity to contribute to the dialogue on the identified theme of potential and contribution of grassroots innovation movements active in India, Latin America and United Kingdom. Finally in the afternoon session of the workshop on grassroots innovation we will discuss the outcomes of smaller group discussion on the common challenges identified by the organizers, followed by the feedback to plenary discussion, which will be discussed after hearing the scholars from Latin America and United Kingdom on the movements of their own regions. In the closing reflections session we will have an opportunity to reflect on the scope for learning across movements rooted in different contexts.

You are requested to go through the proposed outline of the programme given below. We welcome suggestions from you on the programme.

### *Questions and themes*

We would like the practitioners and researchers of each movement to consider the following questions:

1. Why did the grassroots innovation movement emerge and what was the aim?
2. How have activists mobilised support and activity, and what have been the major achievements?
3. What challenges have confronted the movement, and how has it addressed them?

We would like policy-makers to explain why they value grassroots innovation activity, and how policy support for that activity has developed over time.

As far as our analytical focus is concerned, in the course of plenary discussions we expect the participants to shape their own interventions with the aim to reflect on the following aspects of the approach as well, that is how the social movements and policymakers involved have been framing their own role with regard to the promotion of grassroots innovation making processes, what kind of strategies have been used by the social movements to expand the space for innovation making at the grassroots and what is their own assessment of the challenges facing the pathways under construction through the initiatives of grassroots innovation movements active in India.

Some further themes that the participants might also consider touching in the discussions:

- Relationships between informal and formal expertise in grassroots innovation
- How does grassroots innovation viewed as the development of objects/techniques intersect with views of grassroots innovation as mobilisation processes?
- The economic development of grassroots innovations
- Knowledge politics in grassroots innovation (common knowledge and intellectual property)
- Indicators required for measuring the outcomes and impact of the ongoing initiatives of the grassroots innovation movements

During the smaller group discussions, we want participants to reflect across all the movement presentations, and consider the following challenges:

- a) Scaling-up whilst remaining context sensitive
- b) Remaining appropriate whilst bringing about change
- c) Connecting with broader and deeper processes of development





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### **Programme**

- ❖ **9.00-9.30 hrs** Registration of participants and Tea
- ❖ **9.30-10.00 hrs.** Opening Session
  - Welcome by **Pranav Desai, CSSP**
  - Grassroots innovation movements in India  
**Dinesh Abrol (CSSP)**  
**Adrian Smith (STEPS Centre)**
- ❖ **10.00-11.15 hrs** **Peoples' Technology Initiatives: Case Studies**

**Chair and Discussant: Suhas Pranajape (SOPPECOM)**

Initiatives in the fields of Energy, Environment, Rural Development, Education and Peoples' Planning from Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC) / Kerala Shastra Sahtiya Parishad (KSSP)  
**(P. K. Ravindran, KSSP, Kerala)**

Initiatives in the fields of Leather, Fruits and Vegetable Processing from CTD, Dehradun, STD, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh,  
**Joginder Walia, STD, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh**  
**Rajeev, CTD, Dehradun, Uttarakhand**

Initiatives in the fields of Agro ecology and Water Management (CERD) and AICP,  
**(T. P Raghunath, CERD)**

- ❖ **11.15 -11.30 hrs. Tea Break**
- ❖ **11.30-12.45 hrs. Honey Bee Network: Case Studies**  
**Chair and Discussant: Dinesh Abrol (CSSP)**



- Honeybee Network: Overview (**Hemant Kumar, Central University of Gujarat**)
- Initiatives of the Honeybee Network for the diffusion of innovations through the linkage of informal with the formal sector (**Jaydeep Mondal, Aakar**)
- Initiatives in the field of grassroots innovation, / student innovations under Techpedia and Ignite programmes of Honeybee Network (**Brigadier Ganesam, Honeybee Network, Andhra Pradesh**)
- Initiatives of GIAN and MVF by **Faiyaz Ahmad Sheikh**, CSSP and formerly worked with GIAN in Kashmir and NIF

❖ **12.45-14.00 hrs Case Studies-Continued**

❖ **Chair and Discussant: Adrian Smith (STEPS Centre)**

- Initiatives in the fields of science education from Jodo Gyan and Nav Nirmati (**Usha Menon**)
- Initiatives in the fields of Free software foundation and Development of Network of CUBE in India (**M.C. Arunan**)
- Free Software Foundation and related Citizen Science Initiative (**G. Nagarujan**)

❖ **14.00-14.30 hrs. Lunch**

❖ **14.30-15.30 Reflections on the Encounters of GRI Movements with Policymakers**

❖ **Chair and Discussant D. Raghunandan (CTD)**

(**Er. Anuj Sinha (Formerly with NCSTC / Vigyan Prasar, Science and Society),**  
(**Major S. Chatterjee (RUTAG, PSA, GOI),**

❖ **15.30-16.30 hrs Small Group Discussions (including tea)**

(**Moderators: Sardendu Bhaduri (CSSP) and Anand Saxena (Delhi University)**)

❖ **16.30-18.00 hrs Grassroots innovation movements in Latin America and United Kingdom**

**Chair: T Sundararaman (NHSRC)**

- **Mariano Fressoli Quilmes University, Argentina,**
- **Elisa Arond, Clark University, USA**
- **Adrian Smith STEPS Centre, UK**

**18.00 -19.00 hrs.** Plenary discussion and Closing reflections

**Chair and Discussant: Upen Trivedi (Formerly, Science and Society Programme, DST)**

**Wrapping up: Adrian Smith and Dinesh Abrol**

**Workshop Dinner**

Compiled by

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