

Grassroots Movements

Introductory Statement

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The grassroots movements can be seen as a means of improving participation in decision making by the rural population, in particular by the poor. Only in improving the ownership of rural development activities can their sustainability be ensured. The key impacts of grassroots movements have been (a) the increased economic emancipation and social integration of specific sections of the population (women and youth) into the society as well as the acceptance of the rural population in general, (b) pressure on the state for becoming more accountable towards the urges of the people at grassroots, and modify policies accordingly (c) make research and development systems more sensitive to the problems of the people at grassroots, (d) help rural poor become actors in their own development and (e) learn from the innovations and solutions developed by grassroots innovators on their own without outside help. As has recently been seen, grassroots movements also play a significant part in fostering good governance at the national and international levels.

The following contributions highlight specific aspects of the over-all agenda regarding grassroots movements. Especially the importance of NGOs in the non-formal sector and their growing social capital for innovations is discussed. Each contribution offers a unique perspective, including those of the environmental and educational movements in different countries.

The Sahelian Areas Development Fund Program, which is the most advanced model of participatory development interventions tested by IFAD for directly channeling development funds to grassroots movements, is introduced. The program is built on mutual trust between all stakeholders, encouraging groups to initiate their own investment ideas, to provide equity capital according to their capabilities, and to seek complementary funding from other sources (*Jatta*).

The further process of Grassroots Movements has to take into account the consideration that all policies should adopt a gender perspective to ensure that development and dividends are shared equally, ensuring secure livelihoods (*Okoed*).

Grassroots movements as means to overcome rural financial market failures is analyzed. The informal livelihood support groups of the local communities are not as well appreciated today as they were some years ago, or at least two decades ago. For some strange reason these rotating savings and credit associations have not become a building block in the entire global microfinance movement, and yet they remain a very important institution at the local level providing means of livelihood to the poorest people and contributing to the reduction of the income gap (*Heidhues*).

Grassroots' innovation is a further investment in a better rural future. The emphasis is on what people already know in rural areas, on their knowledge systems, and on their ways of doing things. It looks at their already existing capacities for innovation, for producing new ways of thinking and of acting, new technologies, new ways of marketing, etc. The idea is to make the rural societies dynamic not through the process of receiving knowledge either through modern communication technologies or through formal systems of education but through the creation of new systems of knowledge based on local perspectives, on already existing systems of knowledge and on local capacities for innovation (*Roy*).

The organic agricultural movement is presented as a grassroots and bottom up movement, not just to bring about technological change but also a cultural value change where nature is respected (*Geier*). The paradigm and reality shift which is emerging in European consumption patterns nowadays involves increased access to healthy and organic foods as well as planning not only to produce healthy crops but also to provide more jobs and better livelihoods in rural areas. This gives organic farming understood as a grassroots movement a prospective outlook for the 21st century and beyond.

Two concrete examples from Egypt and India demonstrate the capacity of grassroots movements with comprehensive approaches, covering economic, social and cultural activities. All these fields of activity and project parts are interrelated, forming a network and cross-fertilizing each project part. So many different innovative aspects within the project parts can be realized. (*Merckens and Shalaby and D'Costa and Samuel*).

The contributions presented in this session give me faith in the spirit of enterprise, in the spirit of creativity, in the spirit of innovation at the grassroots level. This spirit combines what are called the "5 E's": equity, excellence, efficiency, environment, and education. There will be no sustainable development without resource mobilization and judicious utilization of the existing local resources by the community through locally evolved practices, institutions and management structures. It is high time that the formal, national and international development organizations encourage fuller participation of the rural population, especially the rural poor in the rural development process worldwide. It is, however, equally important to make clear to the local active society that grassroots movements on their own are not able to sustain their achievements. Only in cooperation with national and international organizations can experiences be shared and further innovations be stimulated.

Honey Bee Network may serve as an example. Honey Bee Network has helped provide a sort of informal platform to converge creative, but uncoordinated individuals across not only Indian states having varying cultural, language and social ethos but also in 75 other countries around the world. What it is trying to do in a rather quiet manner may transform the way the resources in which poor people are rich are used in future. These resources are their knowledge, innovations and sustainable practices. The Honey Bee Network evolved twelve years ago in response to a personal crisis. While I had grown in my career,

received awards¹, recognition and remuneration for writing about knowledge of innovators and other knowledge experts at grassroots, very little of this gain had actually been shared with the providers of knowledge in concrete terms. Much of my work was in English language till that time. I had tried to share the findings of my research with people; but it had not been institutionalized in local languages. Likewise, I had tried to acknowledge the knowledge providers; they still had remained broadly speaking, anonymous. It was obvious that my conduct was not very different from the conduct of other exploiters in society. They exploited in land, labor or capital markets. I exploited the poor in knowledge market. It is at this stage a realization dawned that something had to be done to overcome this ethical dilemma. The Honey Bee as a metaphor came to rescue one day. Honey Bee does what we, intellectuals, don't do. It pollinates the flowers and takes away the nectar of flowers without impoverishing them. The challenge was, to define the terms of discourse with the people in which they will not complain when we document their knowledge, they will have the opportunity to learn from each other through local language translations, they will not be anonymous and they will get a share in any wealth that we may accumulate through value addition or otherwise. Honey Bee Network has brought lots of volunteers together who share this philosophy partly or completely and who want to link up with an immense source of energy and inspiration available with the grassroots innovators².

¹ The Honey Bee Network (<http://www.sristi.org>) has also received many awards and recognition. Apart from Pew Conservation Scholar award to Prof. Gupta in 1993, the Far Eastern Economic Review chose SRISTI and Honey Bee Network for Asian Innovation Gold Award in 2000 9 Oct 26, 2000.

² The Honey Bee Network was founded with the help of Prof Vijay Sherry Chand, Jyoti Capoor, and many other friends. Later Kirit Patel joined and made an immense contribution. Kapil Shah, Rakesh Basant, Amrut Bhai, Riya Sinha, Srinivas, Dilip Koradia, Murali Krishna, Alka Raval, Chiman Parmar, Praveen, Mahesh Parmar, Hema Patel, Shailesh Shukla, T.N. Prakash, P. Vivekanandan, Sudhirender Sharma, and many others have contributed to the growth of Honey Bee Network.

Principle 22
Indigenous people
and their communities
and other local
communities
have a vital role in
environmental
management
and development...
States should
recognize
and duly support
their identity,
culture and
interests...

