

# Taking note of grassroots innovators



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**A**fter travelling for 18 hours almost non-stop, on unbelievably smooth roads in Bihar and West Bengal, I reached Gangtok to interact with the members of parliament from north-eastern states. One of our alumni from IIMA, PD Rai, now an MP from Sikkim initiated this forum of MPs from NE to trigger collective thinking about regional problems.

What an idea in bipartisan politics. MPs belonging to different parties ranging from Congress to BJP and regional outfits discussed their strategy about holistic regional development. Why insurgents of various hues should be brought to the table and dialogue started to achieve peace, so that development can follow. But many others believed that peace will follow only after the years of neglect by state and market can be overcome in a time bound manner, not only in north-east but also perhaps elsewhere.

My reason for going to this meeting was different.

I had gone to share the exciting

experience of Honey Bee Network and National Innovation Foundation in scouting and supporting grassroots innovations from all the north-eastern states. Without practically any support from any central, state or regional agency, many grassroots innovator or traditional knowledge holders had made progress in their journey, albeit very small and sporadic.

It was not surprising that almost all the MPs acknowledged that they had not known about dozens of innovators who had been recognised by the president of India. One of them admitted that he was quite embarrassed. When Deepak Bharali shared the design of his handloom with magnetic bobbins, several MPs were on their feet to order a few for the people in their constituency right away. A beginning was made, ice was broken, a new channel of communication got initiated with the people's representatives.

Time will tell how viable this channel is. We requested that guidelines of MP local area development (MPLAD) fund be modified so that every MP could allocate some funds to recognise, respect and reward the innovations in their constituency. Incidentally, the current prime minister, when he was the leader of opposition a decade ago, had offered to initiate the dialogue with the then parliamentary affairs minister. We had

written to all MPs exhorting them to recognise the creative people offering new opportunities for generating knowledge-based employment in their respective areas.



**(Above) Deepak Bharali with his double-shuttle loom**

We also pleaded that education curriculum should include these stories of grassroots innovators and humble achievers who have made breakthroughs against all odds. Are MPs not known for making promises which they are not able to keep many times? But we should give a chance to this initiative. What is at stake is the viability of this line of communication which is most basic in a democracy.

Bureaucracy can be in indifferent and so can be markets. But people's representatives may not be, at least that is the hope. Hopefully similar dialogues will take place closer home, at the state-level with MPs as well as MLAs across party lines. Don't creative people deserve at least an empathetic ear of their representatives?

**MINDS ON  
THE MARGIN**