

## From 30 to 3000 years walk: Do we need to recalibrate the compass?

Getting an award at the hands of the President of India does make an important statement, that innovation matters, country cares and the Honey Bee Network nurtures. The Network scouts and shares a large number of innovations to foster an empathetic innovation ecosystem. But is that enough? Will that sustain the hopes of creative people well enough to take their ideas forward? After all, out of say 30-40,000 thousand entries received in every biennial competition, we recognize hardly 60-70 technological and herbal innovations and traditional knowledge practices once in two years. At this rate, we are raising a storm of expectations without a cogent pathway for sustaining the generosity of rest of the knowledge providers.

We have to develop new strategies to tackle this challenge. We will like to hear about different ways of not only scouting more new and innovative ideas but also of taking many more of them forward. A way has to be found of supporting thousand more of those ideas which have helped solve a local problem in an ingenious and affordable way. Many of these solutions may not completely be new according to the prior art, review of the patent or literature database. At the same time, these are also not available in market. Should such unmet social needs remain unmet? Perhaps, giving award to a few but support to many more will have to be one of the realistic way forward.

There are several other challenges that the Network faces which require imaginative and inclusive solutions. As the Network grows, new kinds of skills, perspectives and social capital are needed to serve the innovation ecosystem without losing the energy drawn from the spirit of older colleagues. The scouting of innovations in the field needs new methods since the existing methods may have reached their limits. Also, easier to access innovations may have already been scouted. As we have observed during shodhyatras, after walking for a week and covering a distance of around 150 km, one hardly ever finds 3-4 worthy innovations. Sometimes lesser. Unique traditional knowledge practices of course continue to be discovered. New approaches will also need new kind of partnerships in each state of the country and other countries. For a long time, volunteers have played a very crucial role in searching and spreading grassroots innovators. We need to involve students and teachers from rural and urban institutions in summer vacation to look for innovators from interior regions. Recognition for such efforts must also follow from the fellow Network members so that every new volunteer feels welcome and intensely encouraged.

The strategies which worked for scouting may not work for spreading ideas. Also, the expertise in scouting may not always mirror in spreading process. Both need somewhat different social seeding approaches. Spreading requires networking with farmers' associations and small industry organizations so that the creative and innovative ideas get

embedded in ongoing programs and practices. Innovators also need to be organised. Vivekanandan in Tamil Nadu experimented with forming association of innovators to trigger self-organising process of peer encouragement and support. Many more such models need to be tried in the years ahead. Brig Ganesham (retd), Telangana, tried chinna shodhyatras. Balaram, Odisha tried moving school (*Paathe Paathshaalaa*) for seeking and spreading ideas. SRISTI tried summer scouting by students, Shodh Sankals, shodhyatras, and Sattvik traditional food and organic crop festivals besides numerous other ideas.

When the patents had to be filed, the Network needed support of IPR attorneys. None of them charged for their time. Crores of rupees worth of financial resources were thus contributed by the IPR community towards the Network growth and development. They are important collaborators whose role has not been adequately recognised by us. Similarly, scientists and technologists in mainly public sector but in some private sector institutions too have made a huge contribution towards validation and value addition in grassroots innovations and traditional knowledge practices. But we have not recognised them enough. Their role needs to expand. Some of the senior scientists may like to visit innovators and build local capacity. Without blending formal and informal science and technology, the local knowledge systems will not become robust. Many of the senior leaders of the R&D system have helped in the research advisory committees just as grassroots innovators have helped in the evaluation process of the shortlisted entries. Maybe, on the wall of every collaborator's office, workshop, house, there must be a plaque celebrating their role in strengthening HBN so that the Network becomes a subject of everyday conversation. Sometimes, our individual identities may overshadow the Network identity though it is the Network which brought us all together. This is one of the sources of tensions. When we welcome new volunteers and help them have a sense of shared ownership of the Network within the country and globally, these tensions may get diluted.

Distributed on-farm and in-workshop research on adapting agricultural and small scale industrial innovations needs new protocols, new ways of validation of systems and rules of engagement among different actors. If tens of thousands of innovations have to be tested around the country in coming decades, current systems will not work. These experiments will have to be tracked through agile, simple interactive apps capable of crossing linguistic, cultural and socio-ecological boundaries.

Similarly, hundreds of thousands of ideas of school children, ITI students and others will need to be processed in a short time with due diligence and high reliability so that we do not miss out on any unique idea. In situ incubation, including extensive mentoring of the shortlisted ideas, will

also require new kinds of Apps helping on and offline communities with strong social and ecological connect. Digitisation of the Network in local languages will be one of the key challenges.

In the coming decade, nurturing talent of children in government schools will occupy much of our time. These children come from economically poorest backgrounds. Yet, they hardly get much attention to identify, reinforce and leverage their unique talents. The Network will build upon a lot of work that has been done already by senior colleagues like Prof Vijay Sherry Chand ([www.inshodh.org](http://www.inshodh.org)) in this direction with particular reference to the innovation by teachers in government schools. We will need to identify more teachers, empathetic educational administrators, help them become social entrepreneurs, and let hundred flowers bloom all around. It is well known that children from the poorest families go to government schools. Rest, who can afford even a little more, move to private schools. We seem to be producing two kinds of citizens: one to rule and other to be ruled. Unless we unleash creative potential of children in government schools, will India become truly inclusive? The Network will have to engage with such disadvantaged children much more in coming decades.

May be, the new leadership of the Network will emerge from these students and the teachers. The youth in conflict prone regions need reassurance that this country cares about them. They have to be provided creative means of livelihood based on their existing strength in skills and endowments. The concept of *Innovation Insurgent* may provide an optimistic

pathway for motivating angry youth to explore constructive and creative means of pursuing developmental goals shunning violence completely on the way.

How will the Network reinvent itself to serve creative communities during the coming decades and centuries will be discussed in coming months?

If an inner calling compels you to connect, then just engage and involve with this social innovation movement. Please join the humble exploration for more compassionate, and collaborative methods of bridging formal and informal sector together. Educational, institutional, technological and cultural creativity, the four pillars of the Network will be pursued with an open mind and even more open heart. Long term visions, from 30 to 3000 years, provide unbounded energy. They make short term failures and setbacks more easily tolerable. They sustain the spirit of service before self. If inclusive development is facilitated by self-triggered and self organised grassroots innovations, then this must be possible in every country of the world. This, in itself, is a formidable challenge for coming centuries. Every innovation threatens somebody's inertia. Every inclusive initiative also overcomes social prejudices or biases. Let us hope and resolve that future volunteers of the Network will create even higher standards of inclusivity.



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Children researchers trying to understand making of broom: UNICEF - SRISTI children workshop 2016