Enhancing innovation for inclusive development of national research councils in Southeast Asia

Process and outcomes

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1 Context

For decades, governments, the private sector, and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) in Southeast Asia have dedicated themselves to bringing about "inclusive growth" or "inclusive development" in their economies and societies, but overall, the results have been unsatisfactory. The concept of a national system of innovation (NSI) has been proposed recently to encourage inclusive growth or development. Inclusive development that transforms societies requires collective impact. Collective impact for inclusive development requires the creation of working national systems of inclusive social innovation that bring together government, private sector, and academe into a grand problem-solving network to take on the intractable problems of societies, economies, and even polities. Inclusive NSIs are now looked to as the source of dramatic changes in the lives of the poor and marginalized.

Universities and national research councils (NRCs), as both generators and repositories of knowledge, are expected to help demonstrate the desirability, feasibility, and viability of inclusive development for societies over the long term. Universities and NRCs in developing countries, however, appear to be under-performing in terms of their potential contribution to inclusive innovation recognizing their resources, influence, and prestige in society. Increasingly, universities in developing countries have been challenged to have broader societal impact. Similarly, scientific R&D councils

have limited capacities and resources to direct national R&D and innovation agendas and policies toward more sustainable and equitable development. Questioning their social relevance, purpose, and impact is happening amid the genesis of new research and organizational models that deal with "creative and interactive problem-solving" to deepen the development impacts on groups of greatest need and vulnerability in developing countries.

UNIID-SEA project — The Universities and Councils Network on Innovation for Inclusive Development in Southeast Asia (UNIID-SEA) project started with the premise that the contributions of universities and research councils to inclusive development could be significantly enhanced. The project engaged universities and NRCs in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam in strategic dialogue, experimentation, and program and policy development.

The university-directed component was carried out by the Ateneo School of Government (ASOG) ; whereas, the NRC component was led by National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP). The project sought to promote and develop innovation for inclusive development (IID) as a distinct field of study and policy action. IID is broadly defined as : innovation that reduces poverty and enables all groups of people, especially the poor and vulnerable, to participate in decision-making, create and actualize opportunities, and share the benefits of development. IID is expected to generate income and employment, help alleviate poverty, and in the long run, lead to more inclusive development.

The goal of the project was to help universities and NRCs in Southeast Asia reorient their roles and functions to support IID. Universities were expected to introduce IID in their teaching, research, and extension activities, and the NRCs were to mainstream IID in research policy, grant-making, and advisory functions. The NRC partners were the Dewan Riset Nasional (DRN) of Indonesia, the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), the National Council on Science and Technology Policy (NCSTP) of Vietnam, and the NRCP of the Philippines. The project introduced IID to universities, NRCs, and related organizations in Southeast Asia and built a network of 128 network fellows from 10 countries, and 21 institutional partnerships with universities, NRCs, NGOs, and government offices.

2 Empirical Approach and Main Findings

UNIID-SEA was an action-research project to understand the challenges and opportunities of enabling NRCs to promote inclusive development in their societies. The objectives were to : introduce the concept of IID ; demonstrate IID as a lens for NRCs research granting and research agenda-setting activities ; and promote IID in their policy-advisory activities. The university and NRC components of the project developed separate and joint capacities for pursuing IID initiatives.

Process —NRCs in Southeast Asia typically set research agendas, implement research programs, grant research funding, and provide policy advice to government. Poverty alleviation and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized sectors are explicit or implicit in these functions and programs but IID was an entirely new concept

to the NRCs. The first task was to support activities in these institutions to introduce the concept of IID and to discuss its relevance and usefulness. The second task involved the design and prototyping of a more IID-oriented research grant process in NRCs. Because the NRCs would eventually exercise some control or influence on research-granting agencies, the project engaged all of them in the IID Research Grant Challenge. The third task was the IID Fellows Program, which involved the identification of "force multipliers" — development and intermediary agents (individuals, groups, and organizations) from the public, private, and NGOs who were producing research and training materials for the poor and marginalized sectors in their societies.

The implementation of the IID Fellows Program and the IID Challenge Program demonstrated a replicable way of increasing and networking the capacities of both the co-implementing institutions (ASEAN University Network for the IID Fellows Program, and the NRCs of Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam), and the selected grantees. In its implementation, the IID Challenge Program introduced these innovations in the administration of grants by the NRCs : expansion of the list of eligible research proponents ; introduction of IID criteria for research evaluation ; and inclusion of the community as a target user of the research output. Of the 81 entries received from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, four were chosen : Innovative Accessibility Map Applications for People with Disabilities in Ho Chi Minh City ; Science Field Shops in Indonesia — Agrometeorological Learning and the Provision of Climate Services to Rice Farmers in Indramayu ; Motorcycle Taxi Drivers as Community Surveyors ; and Sustainable Food Systems of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines — Linking Nutrition, Agroecology, and Culture Toward Food Security and Resilient IP Communities.

Initial outcomes — The NRCs responded to the IID initiative in different ways. The Dewan Riset Nasional Indonesia (DRN), when introduced to the concept of IID concept, identified similarities with four government programs they considered IID-oriented — a poverty reduction and community development program ; a program to develop infrastructure and strengthen national communications to support disadvantaged areas ; a program to strengthen access to education and health for all groups ; and a program to develop credit access for small- and medium-size enterprises. One major program was the National Community Empowerment Program, which since 2007 had worked in 72,700 poor rural communities and involved 750,000 people, of which 63% were women who acted as agents of change.

During the project, DRN members continued to understand inclusive development as essentially community development or sustainable development. Some 80% of DRN members are scientists and engineers who do not usually deal with social problems. The UNIID-SEA involvement of the DRN occasioned no structural changes. It has, however, empowered the Commission on Social Sciences and Humanities of the DRN to more aggressively promote social concerns among the other commissions as part of the national research agenda. In fact, the Commission recently advocated "inclusive development" as one of the themes in the national research agenda for 2015–2019. There is growing awareness among DRN members of the need for social scientists to collaborate more engineers.

For DRN, this insight to increase the interaction between social scientists and engineers and physical scientists proposed modifications to the organizational structure of the councils. To promote IID in Indonesia, the key opportunity is for DRN to encourage and support the various regional research councils to identify specific innovations (products and processes both social and technical) that respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized in the regions (provinces, districts, sub-districts, and villages). There is also a role to be played in promoting, diffusing, and disseminating IID-oriented research targeted to specific communities.

The National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP) was the lead for implementing the UNIID-SEA project. Arguably, it was the least prepared to advocate IID. Despite the various project activities to promote IID, the NRCP has been unable to cascade the framework to the NRCP members as was envisioned in the project. The IID framework has not so far been adopted in the research work of the NRCP or used to provide policy advice to the national government. The opportunity for IID-oriented organizational change in NRCP has not been realized in its research, policy advocacy, and operations. Nevertheless, there has been some progress, as IID will the theme for the NRCP General Membership assembly in 2016. Due to the limited exposure of the NRCP membership to the IID concept, research by members is rarely IID-oriented. Many are aware of the existence of the project, but few have participated in its activities. So far, there is no conscious effort on the part of NRCP to fully adopt the IID framework in its research agenda and operations. The NRC has undertaken a series of strategic planning workshops facilitated by the UNIID-SEA Secretariat, so far with no visible organizational results.

The IID framework and strategy has found its greatest resonance in the National Research Council Thailand (NRCT). Beginning in 2014, the NRCT collaborated with the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) to broaden their research framework to include a community-based innovation program. This program aims to support national institutes and agencies involved in research management for social and local community development and to have good collaboration with university networks and policy-making agencies. NRCT has also adopted the IID Challenge Program through its community-based innovation program.

The NRCT is a major player in the S&T and R&D systems in Thailand. The NRCT's broad mandate involves formulating national research policy and strategy, promoting research, enhancing research standards, monitoring and evaluating research, and serving as the national centre for research information. The resonance of IID comes from the early top-level policy decision to use science and technology to reduce poverty and inequality in Thai society. Universities have been harnessed to support this policy, and innovation curricula have been introduced in many universities.

NRCT, as a funding agency, implemented an IID research framework that covers the following themes : product innovation for well-being ; social innovation management that helps vulnerable groups ; and links for innovation scale-up and diffusion of ideas nationwide. The NRCT developed a new design framework for its IID program. The design of its Challenge Grants introduced several changes : the evaluation grid included plans for scaling social innovation ; the expanded eligibility criteria encouraged

broad participation such as social policy and marketing actors ; finally, the duration of the grants allowed research teams to collaborate to test, solicit feedback and scale innovations.

Several constraints to IID-oriented work were identified : lack of close cooperation between innovation-related organizations in the government and the private sector ; lack of understanding of the real problems of local communities ; and lack of awareness of using appropriate communication tools to scale innovations. To overcome these constraints it is necessary to empower problem-solving in local communities by : strengthening relationships with related organizations ; ensuring participation of local community leaders along with academics and researchers, the private and government sectors, and organizations that are socially responsible ; and utilize appropriate communication methods.

The National Council on Science and Technology Policy Vietnam is also strategically positioned to promote IID. The council is responsible for advising the prime minister on STI issues. Mainstreaming an inclusive development framework is a challenging but familiar task. The philosophy of balanced social development is well-established in Vietnam and pursued through a number of specific programs.

The NCSTP realizes the constraints to IID promotion, such as the agenda-setting process for research is largely independent of social development goals. To overcome these constraints, there is a need to : combine top-down and bottom-up approaches in setting research agendas ; change how R&D and STI policy is developed ; and explore new types of links, such as public–private–community partnerships (PPCPs). There are also opportunities to use research and development activities to support similar projects such as the "inclusive innovation" program under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) that aims to involve more SMEs in innovation for the benefit of poor and low-income people.

The NRCs that were selected as partners in UNIID-SEA were chosen on the basis of their being "the" NRCs. A look at the organizational charts of the departments or ministries of science and technology of these four countries, however, shows that the chosen councils were only part of complex, largely fragmented, multi-player STI systems. The NRCT and the NCSTP were strategically positioned compared to the NRCP and DRN to articulate and cultivate an IID agenda linking research, reforms and application.

3 Main messages for policy and practice

The UNIID-SEA project sought to enhance the IID-readiness of NRCs in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam by : convening activities ; designing and implementing an IID Challenge Grant process ; and an IID Fellows Program. It is too early to assess the full outcomes of these engagements. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the concept of IID has resonates with the governments in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. There is pressure on them to respond to urgent domestic and international initiatives to reduce poverty and the marginalization of peoples in the region.

The UNIID-SEA project showed that the NRCs, as well as the universities involved in the project, have a long way to go to being 'IID-ready' and effective instruments for 'IID-promotion'. Further, the UNIID-SEA experience suggests that the traction of initiatives to transform research requires a transformation in S&T and R&D governance structures, arrangements, and dynamics, especially the way institutions work together, and in the way appointments (leaders and managers) and appropriations (funds and resources) are distributed. The NRCP and DRN cases illustrate the effects of neglect in long-overdue organizational redesign and development. In addition to inter-institutional issues, there is also a need to redress the divide between the social and natural sciences in problem-solving for inclusive development, or more properly, the marginalization of the social science component of IID.

Related Resources

Dator-Bercilla, J., La Viña, A.G.M., Angeles-Mendoza, B.J., Osir, E., and Santos, M.G.P. 2012. *Pathways out of poverty : innovating with the BOP in Southeast Asia.* Quezon City and Ottawa : Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC). www.idrc.ca/en/book/pathways-out-poverty-innovating-bop-southeast-asia

Inclusive Innovation Hub. This open-access platform contains multimedia resources on the emerging concept of Innovation for Inclusive Development (IID). www.inclusiveinnovationhub.org

Universities and Councils Network on Innovation for Inclusive Development in Southeast Asia (UNIID-SEA). See Website for additional information on the network. www.uniid-sea.net