



Plenary 1: Social Innovation and Sustainable Livelihoods

Monday 23 May 2016

9:45am

Session Reporter: Faith Wong

Summary of the Content of the Session:

Moderator: Christian Seelos (Visiting Scholar, Stanford University)

Speakers:

- Watanan Petersik (Founder, Asia Capital Advisory)
- Kim Salkeld (Head, Efficiency Unit)
- Johan Andresen (Chairman, Ferd)
- K. Anil Kumar (Executive Trustee & CEO, Axis Bank Foundation)

CS: Today's focus is on the relationship between social innovation and sustainable livelihood. How can social innovation do good to sustainable livelihood?

1. There is distance from the innovation to the promotion for livelihood. So what are the special factors of innovation that contribute to this leap? What are the key facts that make it come into being?
2. What are the different roles and aspects of the government and private sectors in this process?
3. What are linkages between different sectors? How can they remain sustainable?
4. What is the relationship between means and aims? Which part of social impact should we focus on?
5. Who at the end should be leading the process?

WP: My last sharing is actually about the key factors of social innovation. People always feel excited when they talk about innovation, but the discussion about social innovation has already been around for a decade. I think a more important question is: why doesn't social innovation necessarily contribute to sustainable livelihood? When we talk about sustainable livelihood, we are in fact talking about scale - how to try to raise people to a certain level of living on a large scale. That for me is the key to this debate.

Kim: I want to address the question of the government's role. People often say that the government should be the leader. According to my understanding, the fundamental role of the government is second direction and enabling people to act effectively. I think the most effective way the government can think is not using the term leadership, but learning- Creating frameworks that enable public service to learn what is happening in NGO sectors and business; enabling businesses to engage NGOs and government; learning from NGOs to see what it means to create sustainable businesses; creating framework to bring academic research, involving passionate students and to connect them with entrepreneurs to learn how to create value to people and framework to make civil servants, businessmen, academic



people work together and understand what do people inside the community want to know and their understanding on sustainable livelihood.

JA: I am from Norway. Social innovation will be needed in such an advanced welfare state for the exact same reason as why it is needed in a one-party state. We had the discussion on China about how to face the issue of how to promote social innovation in such a large one-party state. There is no way that people from welfare can be better innovators or entrepreneurs, nor investors. No matter what type of state you are in, you will face the same need for social innovation coming from different aspects of society.

What's the link between social problems and solutions? The link is simply to act. If you have 75% certainty about solving the problem, then do it. Never wait until the 100% perfect solution comes up. You will be closer to the aim than other people simply because you do it. Money is indeed our concern, but time is the scale to be. If you have a solution in mind, you have to act.

CS-->Kim: How do your means to promote sustainable livelihood differ from traditional ways of government and other sectors that have been kept for many years? What is your role- to support existing initiatives or in fact act as a pilot within the government that shows a new and effective way to fulfil the link between action and deeper philosophy? What are your assumptions and approaches?

Kim: In 2012, the government had reestablished the commission on poverty that was specifically aimed at social innovation and entrepreneur developments. To create the diversity of actions, there are other ongoing programs that work on increasing funding for traditional social enterprises and NGOs and we don't want to simply add on to that. How should we use the money to create an eco-system to bring social innovation and social entrepreneurs to address the social issues in HK? Very often people think HK is rich enough that there is no issue of poverty like in other places in South East Asia. We try to make people understand that there are huge discrepancies of wealth and opportunity in this society, and in order to make this society develop sustainably, we try to meet up the challenge of sustainability and try to create community that create value on every diam in the society, and create a community that value could be shared across the region and the world.

Now, my unit that I am running is the government's efficiency unit and consultant. We have been told from 2015 that we should help promote social innovation and entrepreneurship outside of the government. We are forced to learn. People may say that the government hasn't invested enough money, but what I value more is how to use money more effectively and have more open discussion to learn. We have realized that many young entrepreneurs and business students are very passionate and we cannot waste it. Very often, young children and students are very passionate but they lack the scale and principles that entrepreneurs have. How can we build up a system to help them cooperate and help the students to learn to put their ideas into reality? These are very important questions.

What's the definition of social innovation? If we ask people on the street, they may know nothing about it and think that it is irrelevant to their life. Social innovation must be addressing a problem or frustration that ordinary people have in their lives. Giving a voice to the poor is key. Go out and talk to people. Understand their problems, stories and priorities.