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Social Innovation Labs and Sustainable Development: Exploring a Social Innovation Approach

Sajid Hussain

Al-Madinah International University, Malaysia

* Corresponding author: sajidhussain.ms@gmail.com

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Abstract (English): Social innovation has become emerging field in today's emergent socio-economic environment. Social Innovation Labs are known as entities that rigorously work on complex social problems by involving multi-disciplinary stakeholders to create an environment for innovation and experimentation. These labs offer wide range of perspectives of social problems to be solved with the help of design thinking process supported by prototype solutions. These labs are becoming important ingredients for developing countries to create sustainable solutions of complex problems at systemic level by involving communities and key stakeholders.

Keywords (English): Social innovation, Social Labs, Complexity, Sustainability

社会创新实验室与可持续发展：探索社会创新方法

摘要：社会创新已成为当今新兴的社会经济环境中的一个新兴领域。社会创新实验室被视为致力于解决复杂社会问题的实体，它们通过吸引多学科利益相关者，共同创造一个促进创新和实验的环境。这些实验室通过设计思维过程和原型解决方案的支持，提供了解决社会问题的多种视角。对于发展中国家来说，这些实验室正成为解决系统性复杂问题、创造可持续解决方案的重要组成部分，尤其是在社区和关键利益相关者的广泛参与下。

关键词：社会创新、社会实验室、复杂性、可持续性



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Introduction

Social innovation is getting growing attention from academic scholars, entrepreneurs, policy makers, and community members in recent contemporary era as a practical substitute for solving social problems. Social innovations embrace the potential of proposing solutions to wide range of today's societal problems (Murray, Mulgan, & Caulier-Grice, 2008). The politicians in USA have included social innovation in their political agendas in order to engage community members (Choi & Majumdar, 2015). Same steps have been taken by different countries to address most pressing social problems. Universities around the world are establishing center for social innovation and social innovation labs for escalating civic participation. It is very hard to find academic research on social innovation except the practices-oriented research reports published by various organization and foundations. In September 2015, united nation proposed Seventeen (17) points for sustainable development, named as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for year 2030. These points address the most pressing social problems to be solved by using novel & innovative solution to ensure the sustainability.

In a developing country such as Pakistan, we are facing pressing social problems of an unprecedented scope & scale. These challenges demand appropriate skills, passion and commitment to deal such pressing social problems. The extent and intricacy of social challenges entails a more vigorous, assorted and endowed force of social innovators. It has been observed that social innovation is often being discussed in the context of social entrepreneurship but the application of social innovation is much broader than social entrepreneurship (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). Social innovation has become a wider creative tool for civic participation (Mumford & Moertl, 2003). The emerging phenomenon of social entrepreneurship gives new perspective to social innovation; it is an entrepreneurial way to solve social problems (Dees & Anderson, 2006). Pakistan is one of those developing countries which are facing pressing social problems in great numbers with respect to Education, Health, Poverty, Unemployment and lack of entrepreneurial orientation in youth. Apart from majority of population is living in Rural & sub urban areas, the unemployment rate is

surpassing in urban areas as well due to lack of entrepreneurial skills in youth to become entrepreneurs. The government and different institutions are striving to tackle these pressing problems up to some extent but it requires a rigors effort from community to join hands with likeminded institutions to cope the prevailing challenges. While addressing the lack of entrepreneurial culture among youth in Pakistan, Shah and Shubhisham (2012) found that "The Youth Engagement Service Network" (YES Network Pakistan) is playing very vigorous role by disseminating the awareness of social entrepreneurship among youth in Pakistan. The YES network has very clear vision to develop entrepreneurial culture in Pakistan (Zain, Suet Leng, & Muhammad Waqas, 2016). Taking the example of other adjacent developing nations in south Asia i-e India and Bangladesh; they are dealing with these problems by doing social businesses, developing social innovation Lab's culture and escalating social enterprises in the country. The same is required in Pakistan, but to do this, we need to build social innovation Labs to deal with such complex social problems.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research paper are:

1. What is the nature of social innovation Labs?
2. How social innovations Labs are vital for sustainable development under complexity?

Literature Review

Social Innovation

Social innovation has become emerging field in today's emergent socio-economic environment. Social innovation as a transformative movement in the world and not simply as a field for academic study now there are two approaches to social innovation: the minimalist and a maximalist. According to the minimalist, it's a movement within civil society whereas maximalists are in the view that this is the movement of power incubators of the state like Government, corporations and donor agencies (Hassan, 2014). Our focus is to solve these pressing problems with the collaboration of all giants supported by resource sharing notion. Due to the lack of research articles in peer reviewed

journals on social innovation, the definition of this concept is still unclear to everyone (Pol & Ville, 2009).

“A social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions. The value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals”(Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008).

In order to solve complex problems of the society at systemic level, an emerging field labeled as “social innovation labs” is being adopted for producing novel solutions of prevailing social problems (Rodrigues, 2014). This new emerging phenomena of social innovation labs is solving societal problems from its root rather than symptoms (Hassan, 2014). The blend of complexity science, contributing processes, systems thinking, stakeholder partnership and social innovation created such types of Labs.

Nature of Complexity

In order to deal with complex problems in an efficient way, Senge and Scharmer describe three categories of complexity; social complexity, dynamic complexity, and generative complexity (Senge & Scharmer, 2008).

- Dynamic Complexity represents the nature of complexity that is prevailing in a situation where cause and effect is beyond the human control. One needs to adopt systemic approach to deal with such type of complexity.
- Social Complexity represents the participative type of complexity where people are not agreed on a solution and encompass different views and aims to deal with the problem. It is very important to have collaborative effort from social actors to form a cohesive conclusion.
- Generative Complexity highlights the emergent nature of complexity that entails unpredictability. An emergent approach is the only option to respond the change in order to solve problems.

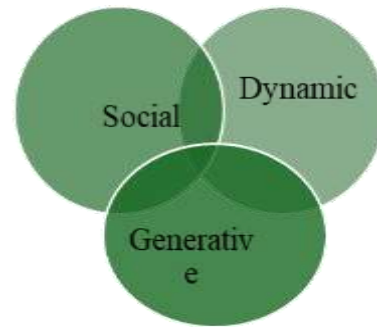


Figure 1.1: Nature of complexity (The Reos Change Lab 2013)

Sustainability Challenge

The complex and interconnected social problems such as increasing inequality, poverty, growing population, vanishing natural resources and ecological issues made sustainability a big challenge in the world today (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). In response to these challenges, there is various ways to define sustainability. However, all definitions explore the right path for humanity to ensure sustainable future (Rodrigues, 2014). A well-known definition of sustainability describes its essentials in following way:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987).

The prevalent economic growth indicators in today’s success are based on demand and supply concept (Rees, 2012). But this approach is insufficient to determine a systematic successful economic transition to deal with such complex problems (Rodrigues, 2014). In response to such complexity, it has become necessity of the time to adopt news ways to deal with these problems to ensure a sustainable future.

Social Innovation Labs

The concept of a Lab has usually been used for conducting research & experiments in science and technology as a facility under controlled conditions (Rodrigues, 2014). Hassan (2014) defines Lab, “A facility that is defining a domain, searching for solutions in that area, running experiments and documenting the search.” This study is focused on Labs that address pressing complex social problems at a systemic level with

the integration of design thinking, prototyping, and collaboration of social actors. Hassan (2014) suggests that we need to adopt new ways to deal with prevailing complex social problems by using experimental approach, and this approach is creating more social Labs to counter the complex societal problems.

“A social lab is a strategic approach toward addressing complex social challenges. As a strategy, it isn’t too hard to grasp. It can be stated simply. Bring together a diverse, committed team and take an experimental, prototyping-based approach to addressing challenges systemically, that is, at a root-cause level. Keep going. That’s it” (Hassan, 2014).

Need of Social Innovation Labs

With a specific end goal to understand the degree of social development, we require a specific multi-partner collaboration that takes the best components from those that as of now exist. Like learning about complex frameworks, framework change, organization, and the re-engagement of marginalized communities. The strategy proposed in this research is to adopt a systemic approach towards a complex problem to ensure sustainability for future generation. We suggest it as a Social Innovation Lab and it can serve better to achieve social development.

A lab of any sort means the meeting up of a gathering of individuals in shared manner keeping in mind the end goal to try different things with discovering novel solutions. It could in this way be contended that all labs work best in the early phases of any conscious endeavor to make change. The Social Innovation Lab is rather a procedure that backings the outlining of intercessions and techniques that have the most ideal possibility of achieving these later phases of frameworks change (Hassan, 2014).

Elements of Social Labs

1. **Social:** Social labs begin by bringing together different members of the society at one place. They need aid ideally drawn from diverse parts of Society, for example, such that government, common society, and the business group.

2. **Experimental:** As we do experiment in science labs, similarly we have to experience, develop prototype of solutions of social problems.
3. **Systemic:** Social innovation labs deal with the problems from systemic level unlike dealing with symptoms only.

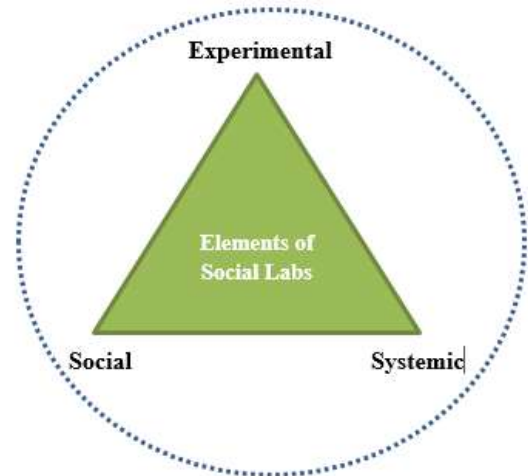


Figure 1.2: Elements of Social Labs (Hassan, 2014)

The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (The FSSD)

The framework for strategic sustainable development suggests scientific strategic way to encounter complex challenges of sustainability. This framework was proposed by *Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt* in 1989 and received acknowledgment from different scholars for developing an approach to ensure sustainability for future. The FSSD consist of “Five Level Framework (5LF) that offers the solution of complex problems in a systematic way” (Rodrigues, 2014).

Table 1.1: The Five Level Frameworks (Based on FSSD)

Levels	5LF
Systems	Relevancy of system with overall goal/objectives
Success	Core proposition to define success
Strategic	Pathway to ensure sustainability and success
Actions	Pragmatic actions to ensure strategic guidelines towards success are being followed

Tools	Strategic tool that can facilitate the whole process
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(Broman & Robert, 2015)

I. Methodology

The basic purpose of this study is to explore the nature of social innovation Labs and its sustainability under complexity; this phenomenon has not been explored in social innovation Lab's perspective in Pakistan from the previous studies. Therefore, the result of this study would generate a theory. Thus, this study according to Gummesson (2000) "is inductive research as it starts with real-world observation, data, concepts, models or patterns and eventually theories emerge as a result from this input". Remenyi and Williams (1998) describes that induction comes through experience and observation within the interpretivist paradigm. This study is not going to validate or test any theory in deductive manner. This study is purely inductive in nature and an attempt to formulate a theory.

On the basis of available literature on case study of Yin (2015) and Eisenhardt (1989) the research design of this study is formulated. Yin (2015) describes the research design is "the logical sequence that connects empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions". It is known as the outline of the study that investigates four problems: "what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results". Thus, case study method is selected as a research approach for this study. This method provides a holistic and vibrant view of the research which is being studied (Yin, 2015).

II. Discussion

This research investigated how Labs, as an elective approach with managing complexity, can be planned to ensure sustainable future. The vital role of FSSD and Five Level Framework towards sustainable future is interconnected with success. In order to take actions, we should aware of the preconditions which we have to meet. We should know the core problem to which we are going to address? Second, we should be clear enough in order to decide who do we need to address the

challenge? Thirdly, we must know the required resources, and what are the pre-requisites of resources we should entail. Lastly, we should be clear about strategic direction that what direction should we take? In order to trace the roots of preconditions, this paper proposes some of the strong themes to construct theoretical model to move forward. These themes are:

- 1) Definition/Nature of social innovation Labs in developing country context such as Pakistan
- 2) Nature of complexity in dynamic socio-economic environment
- 3) Factors of sustainability under complexity
- 4) How The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development and Five Level Frameworks helpful towards sustainable solution at systemic level
- 5) Developing culture of social innovation Labs in educational institutions

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