

Advancing Good Governance Seminar

8 June 2012 -- 11.15 – 12.30

Radical Innovation for Change

The key focus of this panel was to look at how radical innovation could bring about social change, with “innovation” being defined as new ways of solving problems; “change” being defined as the social outcomes emerging from the innovation; and “radical” being the way and spirit in which the changes are being effected. It was agreed by the panelists that incentivizing social sector innovation must be a key focus of efforts in the space, and that innovations related to transparency and accountability were a very promising area of intersection between social transformation and innovation.

Key Points from the Panel

1. **Innovation related to aid transparency.** Given the prevalence of innovations around the availability of information – the democratization of inexpensive, potentially valuable information brought about by the internet, mobile technologies, etc – a particularly fertile space for social transformation as a result of innovation relates to transparency and accountability. Organizations like Publish What You Fund and websites like Thomson Reuters’ TrustLaw are harnessing the power of this innovation, making critical information available to all stakeholders, which will lead to more effective aid and empowered constituencies at multiple levels of the aid delivery chain.
2. **The role of information in aid.** Information can be a form of aid which empowers people. Good journalism aids good governance, and can assist expertise coming together to create change for good. There needs to be an information flow between aid agencies and beneficiaries. However, the mere presence of increased information flow, without any consideration of the quality of that information, does not guaranty the social transformation sought. Is it possible to innovate the quality of information, not simply its availability?
3. **Fostering innovation.** Although the direction and impact of innovation is impossible to predict, what can be done in advance is the creation of a system of incentives that foster the kinds of innovation that generate social transformation. One way of doing so is through an “advanced market commitment” approach, which seeks to create, in advance, demand for a socially beneficial product that the free market would not necessarily generate on its own.

Emerging Questions

1. Is it possible to identify areas within the social sector particularly fertile for innovation? Conversely, are there areas within innovation particularly disposed to generate social transformation? Information technologies clearly are aligned with transparency and accountability mechanisms; what are the other areas where such synergies might reside?
2. Are there information innovations that go to qualitative issues as opposed to quantitative or accessibility issues? More information is available, yes, but the information out there may be of little value: quality may be poor, it may be distorted or manipulated, etc. Is there a way to innovate past this problem?

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3. What are the mechanisms that can incentivize social sector innovation? Would a dedicated financing pool help, or is the availability of financing not the problem? How does the social sector get more creative brainpower dedicated to solving the problems it confronts?