

Grassroot Innovations: New Opportunities for Indo-German Cooperation?

(An event of the India Week Hamburg 2011)

Last few years have seen the rise of several new and dynamic paradigms in innovation management, e.g. the “Bottom of the Pyramid” (BOP) or “Frugal Innovations”. These seek to motivate firms to develop affordable and good-quality products for rural and/or poor customers especially in developing economies. Such ideas, though admirable in their own right, have in many instances however failed to fully appreciate and utilize the power of innovative ideas and the rich heritage of traditional knowledge emerging at “grassroots” from common people.

Rather than selling to poor, as BOP implies, Honey Bee Network – an initiative from India – insists on buying from people, helping them disseminate a lot of creative knowledge as public goods, and/or as platforms for collective co-creation of location specific solutions. “Poor people are not *sink*, but *source* of ideas, innovations and initiatives,” says Prof. Anil Gupta of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad, in a thought-provoking statement.

Many local users in rural areas come up with inventions that are not only innovative and useful but also less expensive than the usual solutions available in the market. Another important feature of grassroot innovations is that they are generally environment friendly and in sync with the given infrastructural conditions. Examples of such innovations include water-based cooling systems that do not require electricity, or non-sticky frying pans made of earth. The idea of “grassroot innovations” has been popularized by untiring and inspiring efforts of Prof. Anil Gupta, called “Gandhi of Technology” by the reputed German magazine “Der Spiegel”. Grassroot innovations are being fostered by institutions like the National Innovation Foundation (NIF), SRISTI and the Honey Bee Network in India.

The Institute of Technology and Innovation Management at Hamburg University of Technology (TIM/TUHH) has recognized the potential of this paradigm, both, for the practice of innovation management in firms and for giving an impetus to Indo-German cooperation in fields of science & technology, and business. There are several studies currently under progress at TIM/TUHH to survey the potential implications of grassroots innovations.

TIM/TUHH, together with the German-Indian Round Table (GIRT) and some other partners, will hold a workshop during the India Week Hamburg 2011 to explore and demonstrate the vast cooperation opportunities for German firms, especially small and medium-sized ones, to assist the inventors with technical and marketing know-how. Mutual benefit can be found, for instance, in the giant domestic Indian market as well as in international marketing of such products in other corresponding markets of Africa, Latin America and Asia. In some

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cases, e.g. herbal medicines, it might even be possible to introduce the products in Germany or other developed countries. Prof. Anil Gupta is scheduled to deliver the keynote address and to participate in a panel discussion. A detailed program will follow soon.

Organizers: Hamburg University of Technology (TU Hamburg-Harburg), German-Indian Round Table, National Innovation Foundation Ahmedabad, Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

Event Sponsor: Mahindra Satyam

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Venue: Plenarsaal, Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

Date: Thursday, 20th October 2011, 12:00 – 18:00h.

Registration & further information under: www.global-innovation.net

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Note: This event is a part of the India Week Hamburg 2011



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