



Building Bridges, Not Silos: Fostering Collaboration between Social Innovators and Extension Workers for Inclusive Agriculture Transformation

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Abstract

Social innovators offer people-centered solutions that empower underrepresented communities, while extension agents have access to institutional resources and deep local experience. This research paper explores how collaboration between social innovators and extension agents can transform agricultural systems. The paper examines several barriers to collaboration, including a lack of communication, organizational silos, and inconsistent performance criteria. It proposes strategies to overcome these obstacles, such as fostering cross-sector partnerships, establishing knowledge-sharing platforms, and conducting group workshops that promote collaboration and understanding.

The research underscores that social innovation can help extension services become more responsive to the needs of the community whereas extension agents sustain social innovation by fostering community engagement, and establishing institutional networks. Moreover, by working together, social innovators and extension agents can develop more flexible and effective solutions to pressing global challenges, including food security, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience. Beyond enhancing creativity and resource efficiency, collaboration ensures equitable and inclusive outcomes, involving marginalized populations and advancing sustainable development. The partnership between social innovators and extension agents strengthens mutual understanding, builds capacity, and drives meaningful, long-term change for the global and local communities including Nepal. Therefore, the findings can be a reference material to the policy makers and planners working for transforming Nepalese agriculture system.

Keywords: Social innovation, extension, collaboration, inclusive, agriculture transformation

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1. Introduction

In this changing social innovative context, it is more important than ever to build bridges across conventional divides and encourage cooperation. At the heart of this lies a dynamic relationship between social innovators and extension workers, for fostering agriculture transformation in global to local context. It takes a varied group of stakeholders working together effectively to address difficult societal issues and promote inclusive development. In particular, social innovators and extension agents have resources and experience that complement each other well and can be used to produce solutions that have a lasting effect (Hung et al., 2021). Implementing of synergistic strategy that capitalizes on each group's distinct strengths arises by bridging the gap between these two groups is inevitable.

Social innovation's emphasis on people-centered solutions and the empowerment of diverse stakeholders. It is promising approach for enhancing the impact of extension services as the world struggles with issues like poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Millard & Fucci, 2023). Designing beyond traditional solutions- is a fundamental tenet of social innovation (Steen, 2016). In order to do this, traditional top-down, expert-driven methods of extension must give way to more collaborative, participatory strategies that include communities as active participants in the innovation process.

Social innovation can assist in making sure that extension programs are more in line with the needs and goals of the communities (Steen, 2016). Thus, social innovators serve by bringing beneficiaries into the process directly and utilizing their life experiences. While extension workers have profound knowledge of local contexts, longstanding contacts with community people, and access to institutional resources, social innovators are frequently agile, experimental, and sensitive to the needs of marginalized populations (Diamond & Fisher, 1995). According to Rice et al. (2017) social innovators can result in solutions that are more responsive and holistic in nature. Social innovators could create new strategies to deal with urgent social issues like poverty, and extension workers can help by facilitating community involvement, offering vital on-the-ground support, and making sure these efforts are sustained.

The efficacy and efficiency of extension services can be increased by social innovators through the integration of cutting-edge technologies and creative techniques. For example, real-time information sharing and training for educators, farmers, and health workers can be facilitated by digital platforms (Chowdhury et al, 2014). By offering innovative and revolutionary answers to challenging social problems, social innovation has the power to completely change extension

procedures. Social innovators can improve the efficacy and reach of conventional extension services by bringing new ideas and approaches. In order to address today's issues in agriculture, health, education, and other areas, these innovations frequently involve using technology, encouraging community involvement, and advancing sustainable development methods (Mulgan, 2006). Therefore, it takes cooperation amongst various stakeholders to realize social innovation's potential advantages. Extension agents and social innovators each bring special talents and viewpoints and when they work together, they can forge synergies that will increase the effectiveness of their combined efforts. Cooperation that works may take use of different areas of expertise, make the best use of resources at hand, and create a culture that welcomes experimentation and idea sharing (Neumeier, 2012; Hartley et al., 2013). Stakeholders may minimize effort duplication and increase the effectiveness and reach of their activities by cooperating. By include a wide range of stakeholders, including underprivileged and marginalized populations, collaboration also guarantees that interventions are inclusive and equitable (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Thus, creating connections between extension agents and social innovators is crucial to attaining sustained and inclusive transformation, driving meaningful and lasting change in communities worldwide (Baker & Mehmood, 2015).

2. Methodology

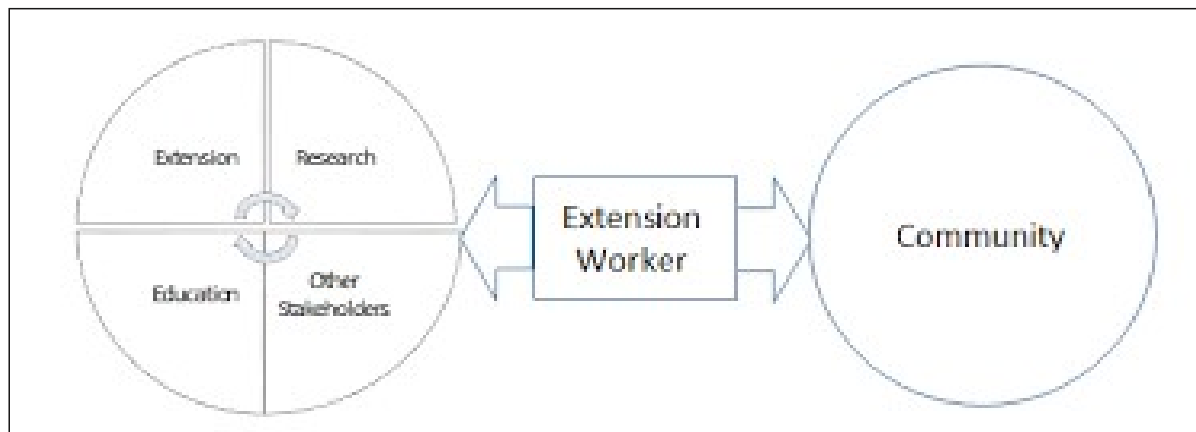
In order to examine collaborative tactics between extension workers and social innovators, this review paper's methodology consists of a theme analysis and a methodical literature evaluation. With a focus on concepts like "social innovation," "extension collaboration", "inclusive transformation", and "community engagement", a selection of relevant academic publications, books, and policy papers were analyzed using databases including JSTOR, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. To ensure comprehensive coverage, theoretical and empirical studies that address the benefits, challenges, and frameworks of collaboration were highlighted using inclusion criteria.

3. An Appraisal of Research Issue

3.1. Social Innovation

Soil innovation refers to the development and implementation of new methods, technologies, or practices aimed at improving soil health, fertility, and productivity. These innovations can include techniques for better soil management, sustainable agricultural practices, and the use of advanced technologies to monitor and enhance

soil conditions. Soil innovation aims to increase agricultural efficiency while minimizing environmental impact (Borrelli et al., 2020). A new approach to a social issue that is more just, sustainable, efficient, or effective than current ones and for which the value gained largely benefits society as a whole rather than specific people is known as social innovation (Phills et al., 2008). Extension workers, with their extensive community ties and hands-on experience, and social innovators, with their distinct viewpoints and creative methods, are ideally positioned to work together and make a long-lasting difference (Zuchowski et al., 2018). By creating connections between these complimentary fields, we can use the potential of cooperative efforts to address long-standing issues and promote long-lasting transformation. Research already conducted emphasizes the importance of these kinds of partnerships, stressing the possibility of revolutionary learning, the creation of fresh perspectives, and the spread of creative models (Enfield & Owens, 2009).



3.2. Extension Program

The front-line extension worker, sometimes known as an “agricultural advisor” or an “extension educator” in other contexts, is the main agent of change within agricultural extension services (Suvedi & Kaplowitz, 2016). The duties assigned to extension agents include creating, implementing, and assessing educational initiatives that meet the unique requirements of a wide range of clients (Hamisu, Umar, Isma’il & Gona, 2020). They collaborate as equal partners with farmers to achieve good improvements, playing a crucial role in agricultural and community development (Triastuti & Damanik, 2022). Extension workers, often referred to as agricultural extension agents or rural development officers, play a vital role in bridging the gap between agricultural research and the practical application of new technologies, techniques, and best practices by farmers and rural communities. They are the key link in the agricultural extension system, responsible for

empowering and supporting farmers to improve their knowledge, skills, and self-reliance (Rosnita et al., 2017).

4. Challenges and Barriers

Communication gaps and organizational silos frequently impede social innovators and extension workers' ability to collaborate. These silos are ingrained in organizational structures and are supported by different funding sources and operational missions. There is often little interaction between social innovators and extension workers because they work in different fields, which prevents them from knowing about and comprehending one another's work. For example, social innovators might be more concerned with developing novel approaches and utilizing state-of-the-art technology, whereas extension workers are more likely to be involved in sharing useful information and offering communities hands-on assistance (Mulgan, 2006). Different performance measures and reporting requirements might further worsen this alienation by encouraging competition rather than collaboration for scarce resources (Hartley et al., 2013). Ineffective communication can also be a major obstacle to productive teamwork. These disparities result from variations in terminology, vernacular, and modes of communication. Extension workers may misunderstand and misinterpret social innovators' use of language and concepts because they are unfamiliar with them (Neumeier, 2012).

Collaboration is further hampered by the disparate viewpoints and methods of social innovators and extension agents. Social innovators frequently place a high value on creative, scalable solutions that deal with systemic problems. They usually take chances, are adventurous, and want to have a large societal influence. However, extension agents typically take a more modest and pragmatic approach, focusing on the pressing needs of local populations and implementing tried-and-true methods (Westley et al., 2006). Tensions may arise from these divergent viewpoints because social innovators may consider extension workers to be change-resistant, while extension workers may consider social innovators to be unduly idealistic and detached from the actual world (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

These divergent strategies may also result in conflicts between objectives and moral principles. While extension workers may concentrate on short-term, attainable changes and the practical application of information, social innovators may emphasize long-term, revolutionary change and the employment of modern technologies (Pol & Ville, 2009). It may be challenging to create shared goals and cooperative plans as a result of this misalignment, which can lead to competing priorities and tactics. Furthermore, mistrust and perception problems can impede

cooperation even more since they can obstruct the development of mutual respect and understanding by fostering prejudices and predetermined beliefs about one another’s responsibilities and skills (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Paudel et al. (2023) highlighted both “social innovations” and “inclusive transformation” which are important in agrifood system. The factors enabling social innovation and barriers to social innovation developed the authors have inserted in below table:

Table 1: Motivating and Barriers to social innovation

Factors enabling/motivating social innovation	Barriers to social innovation
Conditioned by policy/ political factors	
Policy awareness about social innovation Policy awareness about social needs Government effectiveness Press freedom Political stability and democracy	Administrative and bureaucratic barriers to authorize and execute social initiatives
Economic/ resource factors	
Public social infrastructure Private spending ICT and overall infrastructure	Economic situation doesn't allow generation of profit Over dependence on external donor/grant Lack of technical efficiency Lack of financing structures Lack of access to information
Institutional/ Social/Cultural factors	
Gender equality Human rights institution Intersectoral collaboration Social impact Scalability and replicability of innovation Social learning	Lack of clear definition on social innovation Lack of confidence in social innovation building Passivity in society Risk aversion Lack of organizational learning and culture
Individual factors	
Interest in shared social needs Citizen's openness in risk taking Willingness towards change Leadership and training Membership in civil society	Resistance to change Distrust to innovators Poorly developed skills Minds; Risk aversion Lack of knowledge

4.1. Fostering Collaboration

In order to facilitate cooperation between extension workers and social innovators, strategies that support good communication, common objectives, and mutual understanding must be put into practice. Collaborative workshops and training initiatives can offer a forum for various parties to share insights, learn from one another’s experiences, and establish mutual comprehension of their respective

responsibilities and methodologies (Lonsdale et al., 2017). According to Tenywa et al. (2011), the creation of online knowledge-sharing platforms can enhance ongoing communication and cooperation by enabling the exchange of case studies, best practices, and resources between the two groups. Encouraging cross-sector collaborations can also offer a complete support framework for joint activities, bringing together government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and business sector actors (Rodriguez-Pose & Wilkie, 2016). Sustaining these initiatives requires creating integrated policy frameworks that reward collaborations and offer funds for joint ventures (Baker & Mehmood, 2015). Participatory techniques to community engagement also guarantee that interventions are pertinent and sensitive to local needs, which increases the sense of ownership and sustainability (Sharma et al., 2014).

There are many advantages to working together between social innovators and extension workers to achieve inclusive transformation in the agriculture sector. These cooperative efforts can result in the development of more effective and flexible solutions, addressing complex challenges like food security, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience. Social innovators' inventiveness and creativity are combined with extension workers' practical knowledge and local expertise (Westley et al., 2017). Furthermore, by combining financial, human, and technological resources, collaborative initiatives can maximize resource utilization and achieve higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness. Reaching more clients and addressing a wider range of issues may be possible as a result of cost savings and increased impact (Hartley et al., 2013).

All parties engaged in the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food are included in the comprehensive transformation of an agrifood system. Comparable to social innovation, inclusive transformation is required to eliminate discrimination and inequality in all spheres of life, from production to consumption. Change is required in the agrifood system's revenue level, involvement level in the field, institution, market, and other sectors. One of the key issues that is drawing attention from academics, decision-makers, practitioners, governments and nongovernmental organizations, as well as other professionals and citizens, is social innovation. It is a novel idea that has to be explored and advanced. It is clear to take into account the power of farmer-led roles that drive inclusive transformation in order to narrow all kinds of divides in Nepal when social innovation is linked to the inclusive transformation of the agri-food system. This review attempts to determine how social innovations address inequality in the agri-food system with regard to income, gender, ethnicity, and land holding in the provincial contexts and through a variety of conceptual lenses. The state can reduce the disparities that currently exist

in the agri-food system with regard to income, gender, ethnicity, and land holding by implementing appropriate social innovation policies (Poudel et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

Encouraging cooperation between extension agents and social entrepreneurs is crucial to transforming the agriculture system in a way that is inclusive. By combining collaborative workshops, knowledge-sharing networks, cross-sector alliances, and community-based participatory methods, it is possible to overcome current communication gaps and organizational silos and improve stakeholder collaboration. With the cooperation of extension agents and social innovators, there is a great opportunity to perform transformation in agriculture sector. If we can bridge the divide between these two groups, we can leverage innovation to address challenging societal concerns like food security, poverty, and climate change.

With their creative and disruptive strategies, social innovators can bring new life to traditional extension practices. However, because of their close relationships to local communities, extension agents can provide the on-the-ground support needed for social innovations to thrive. The benefits of such collaboration extend beyond enhanced innovation and resource utilization. Collaborative projects can ensure that interventions are inclusive and equitable, engaging marginalized and underserved communities and promoting sustainable development. By building capacities and fostering mutual understanding, collaboration can drive meaningful and lasting change, ultimately improving the well-being of communities worldwide. Therefore, deliberate efforts to promote and sustain collaboration between social innovators and extension workers are crucial for realizing the full potential of social innovation in transforming the agriculture system.

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