



Translating Policies and Programs at the Grassroots: China's Experience

Speaker: Prof. Zhang Liyan

Chair: Prof. Alka Acharya

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The presentation elaborated on the mechanism of translating government policies and programs at the grassroots in China. The logic of promoting grassroots innovation for inclusive development is to enable people at the grassroots, support their research and help the diffusion of their achievements. In China, enabling the grassroots is mainly to improve their farming and professional skills. Based on several detailed case studies conducted by the speaker and her team in the last few years, the speaker discussed the following: the various grassroots innovations in China and their importance, the panorama of translating the eco-system interweaving grassroots innovators with the formal sector and the links between government policies and programmes and the support that grassroots innovators may receive.

The speaker through some photographs introduced the audience to the kind of innovations the rural population of China has been doing to make their lives simpler and increase productivity. The speaker also discussed the various ways in which the local level governments and the central government has been encouraging these innovations.

According to the speaker, the local governments have not only supported the local innovators by providing adequate funds but have also supported them to establish research associations so that the local farmer innovators can work and innovate more. The local research associations, as stated by the speaker, has also been a success as it has played a huge role in guiding other people regarding patent application, among others and establish workshops to produce their machines for local use. In the speaker's experience, the main motivation behind these innovations is not only for individual use but also to earn more money.

Earlier, farmers faced problems relating to gathering information about farming techniques and so on. As a result, the research associations that were established by the farmers started providing such assistance and also published books and articles in the local languages so that it was comprehensible to the farmers. These research associations were organizational innovations, however, with help from the central government it also became an institutional

innovation where the central government and the local government not only recognized such institutions but also provided them funds for development. The different departments of the central government also participated in encouraging research at the local level. For example, if a research is beneficial for the environment, the Environment Bureau stepped in to provide support to the innovator. Moreover, these farmers-cum-innovators are also encouraged when they are invited to share their skills at the rural schools that are established by the government for the adults in the villages.

Through a flowchart, the speaker tried to explain the process of evaluation and certification that is being conducted by the government and also explained the mechanism of transferring science and technology policy and programmes of the central government to the grassroots. According to the speaker, if an innovation is important for local economic development, then the local government will contact and help the local innovator get support from the central government. The Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture at the central level, prefectural level and the county level actively participate in encouraging innovations at the grassroots. The speaker concluded the talk by emphasizing the fact that the interactions between innovators, governments and enterprise and other stakeholders are active and flexible.

Discussion

The technical aspects of research and innovation were discussed after the presentation. An important intervention was regarding how the surge in innovation has affected the employment rate at the rural sector, as invention of more machines would reduce human labour and therefore increase unemployment. According to the speaker, the use of more machines would not affect the employment rates very much as the youths have been increasingly migrating to the cities for employment.

On the question of technology approval and certification of the innovations that is followed by China, the speaker replied that since in rural areas things are made for individual use, therefore, it is not seen as very important and only becomes important when it comes to the formal sector. Moreover, no one cares or monitors the certification for the process of commercialization of innovation in the rural areas.

On the question if local innovators get patent easily, the speaker replied that prior to 2000, the Chinese government was not sensitive to the IPR issue and the concept was brought to China by foreign companies. At the end of 1990s, Chinese economy suffered due to big and medium sized state owned companies, as a result of which, the government could no longer support state owned research institutes and people were also not encouraged to do research. After the 2000s, the central government started to pay attention to patent application and have now started giving financial support for patent registration.

Report prepared by Jaya Kumari, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.

About the Speaker

Zhang Liyan is Professor and Director, Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Tianjin University of Finance and Economics. She has previously taught at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and was a visiting professor at Deakin University, Australia. She was awarded 'Advanced Individual of Tianjin' by the Tianjin Municipal Government in 2002. Her research interests are grassroots and innovation, innovation policy, and entrepreneurship education. She has published extensively on these topics in Chinese and international journals and has authored several books.

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