

## *Original Paper*

# Innovation in Rural Development in Bangladesh: A Case of Some Rural Development Institutions

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### **Abstract**

*The conceptual basis for this study can be briefly stated as follows. Any innovation in rural development does not happen simply through the introduction of new technologies and new policies, though they are often quite valuable. It is now argued that the circumstances that lead to innovation are often unplanned, serendipitous, path dependent and as a result, specific to the location. This idea places a lot of emphasis on the ingenuity of entrepreneurs and the like in adapting new and existing ideas to suit their need. These innovations are often part of informal networks that are sources of different ideas and expertise and used in often novel and unexpected ways.*

### **Keywords**

*innovation, rural development, innovation in rural development*

### **1. Introduction**

The conceptual basis for this study can be briefly stated as follows. Any innovation in rural development does not happen simply through the introduction of new technologies and new policies, though they are often quite valuable. It is now argued that the circumstances that lead to innovation are often unplanned, serendipitous, path dependent and as a result, specific to the location. This idea places a lot of emphasis on the ingenuity of entrepreneurs and the like in adapting new and existing ideas to suit their need. These innovations are often part of informal networks that are sources of different ideas and expertise and used in often novel and unexpected ways.

One of the main features of inequality in developing countries is the persistent income and productivity divide between urban and rural residents, which results in concentrations of poverty in rural and peri-urban areas. Confronting these challenges require bold measures to accelerate rural transformation in order to increase the participation of rural communities in mainstream economic systems of developing countries, and improve the prospects of achieving many of the other sustainable

development goals (IFAD, 2016; UNCTAD, 2016). Increasingly, states are recognizing the potential value of harnessing innovation to the inclusive developmental task, to build sustainable communities and an equitable society capable of confronting the looming threats of the twenty-first century.

Understanding and fostering innovation in rural areas is central to modernizing the rural economy combinations of resources to generate value' this tends to social innovation "defined as ideas, products" services and models & that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives & and create social relationships or collaborations (Murray et al., 2010.)

Bangladesh Government practicing innovation in every step and trying to make change in the services. In this regard some changes have been made in the public services as well as urban areas. Now government of Bangladesh is trying to foster innovation for rural development. And for this Govt has taken big project named "My Village My Town" that will include road communication, telecommunication including Internet connectivity, health centers and sanitation and waste management among other targets, according to the work plan drafted by the Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives. As a first step towards executing this mega plan, the government has also decided to develop 15 villages as model villages on a pilot basis. Experience gathered from the pilot programme is expected to facilitate the expansion of modern civic amenities in other villages of the country. According to the government's announcement, all facilities including village communication and market infrastructure, modern health services, quality education, safe drinking water, information technology facilities and high-speed Internet, improved sewerage and waste management, community space and recreation, banking, rural resources, power and energy supply, and modernization and mechanization of agriculture will be ensured in the model villages. Besides some Govt. organizations are practicing innovation for the betterment of rural people in Bangladesh. But these are not so much encouraging. There is a gap between urban and rural areas in the context of innovative works. The study focuses on those innovations and their impact on the rural community.

Increasing globalization, improved communications and reduced geographic distances by better transportation are additional drivers of economic change in rural areas. Furthermore, rural regions are highly open to trade and must focus on improving their competitiveness in order to deliver wellbeing to rural dwellers. Increasing global competition and shifts in trading patterns, most rural regions have been forced to find new economic roles.

### *1.1 Rural Development*

Rural development is the up gradation process or endeavor through which the livelihood process, living standard, quality of living, economic standards of a rural area and its demography are improved.

Rural development involves efforts that are economic and social in nature intended to encourage concepts of retention, growth, and expansion in areas outside cities, including improving quality of life for rural residents through such activity.

### *1.2 Innovations in Rural Development*

Socio-economic factors play an important role in the uneven distribution of ICT facilitating human rights violations. Speaking of the uneven distribution of ICT, not only demographic and economic factors play a role but also geographical. Living in rural areas can come with a lower access to technology and innovations, leading to a digital divide. Human rights violations in the periphery are therefore less likely to be reported and difficulties of vulnerable groups may remain unheard. Hence, tackling these challenges with supporting Human Rights Defenders by addressing social injustices and raising awareness outside urban areas is on our agenda.

Innovation is central to the challenges facing rural regions. However, the drivers for inventors and public policies to lead innovation in a rural context are not well understood. Unlocking this knowledge will help rural areas improve their prospects for growth and help support reforms to shift rural policies to placed-based innovation beyond a subsidy and sector specific approach.

In rural regions, innovation comes from a variety of sources, which are different to that found in urban areas. Formal science based innovation systems are typically found in larger cities with universities and large enough firms to have a formal R&D function. These science-based activities can be highly successful and have application in rural areas – for example, forest based bio-energy research. However, innovation is largely different in rural regions to cities and can take a number of different forms.

Imported innovations are important for rural areas and allow firms to remain competitive in external markets. Absorbing these innovations requires connections to the places where the idea is developed and the resources to acquire and introduce the new technology.

### *1.3 Research Gap*

The review of the literature indicates that there is no significant study regarding Innovation in Rural Development. Some scholars of home and abroad are thinking about this matter. However, there is a gap of knowledge in this regard. Therefore, a clear-cut vision is needed to draw a conclusion regarding Innovation in Bangladesh. In this perspective, some questions arise regarding (a) what is the role of the organizations to implement the innovations. (b) what is the impact of those innovations.? The study has sought the answers to these questions in a systematic way through which a clear-cut scenario has been explored. Moreover, the topic is an important one since it is impossible to achieve the target of a poverty-free society without the incorporation of innovation in every step of rural life. It is necessary to identify the role of Govt. for innovation in rural development in the country.

### *1.4 Literature Review*

This section attempts to present a summary of available studies so far conducted on Innovation in Rural Development and their activities in Bangladesh and abroad. The author did not find many studies in this regard.

Baharul Islam et al. conducted a study on Innovation in Climate Change Adaptation: Examples from Northern Bangladesh in the year 2022. The paper presents outcomes of some of the interventions targeted at improving the livelihood of the rural poor in response to climate change.

Iván G. Peyré Tartaruga et al. conducted a study on Tradition, Inclusive Innovation, and Development in Rural Territories: Exploring the Case of Amiais Village (Portugal) in the year 2022. This study discussed the relationship between inclusion and technological changes in the context of territorial development in all of its dimensions (social, economic, sustainable, and technological). Empirically, this study shows an innovative experience in Amiais Village (Portugal), a rural territory, that unites tradition and informatics (internet of things).

Dr. G. R. Joshi conducted a study on Innovation in Rural Marketing in the year 2022. The aim of this research is to study the current scenario of Rural Marketing in India, the rural market presents with its various opportunities and challenges, given how diversely populated the rural consumers in India are.

P. Mele et al. conducted a study on Innovations in Rural Extension: Case Studies from Bangladesh in the year 2005. This book examines these approaches to extension and assesses their potential for replicability and scaling-up. It includes four thematic sections with people-centered case studies and a conclusion with practical applications of the transaction cost theory.

### *1.5 Objectives of the Study*

The general objective of the study was to analyze and review critically. The innovations taken by the rural development organization and their impact on the rural community.

#### **The specific objectives were to:**

- Review the role of the organizations to implement the innovations;
- To identify the impact of those innovations.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Definition of Methodology*

The methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study or the theoretical analysis of the body of methods and principles associated with a branch of knowledge. It typically encompasses concepts such as paradigm, theoretical model, phases, and quantitative or qualitative techniques. It also includes basic parameters to be chosen related to the selected method(s). In addition to that, the instruments for gathering data also fall within the definition of the methodology of a research (Aminuzzaman, M. Salahuddin, 1991).

### *2.2 Sampling Technique*

Among ten rural development organization under Ministry of LGRD&C, 07 organizations have been considered in this study. This research work is based on both primary and secondary sources of materials that include books, journals, websites, reports, web-portals, documents, etc. written on innovation in rural development.

To gain a better understanding of the objectives of the study, mainly content analysis, and interview methods have been applied to the study. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive interpretation according to the objectives. To get clear findings on the topic, 08 rural development organizations have been taken as a sample of the study. For this reason, a total of fourteen officials, two

person from each organization were interviewed for the study by using purposive sampling techniques.

The selected eight organizations are:

Department of Cooperatives

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)

Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development Board (BARD)

Rural Development Academy (RDA)

Bangabandhu Academy for Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (BAPARD)

Bangladesh Milk Producer's Co-Operative Union Ltd. (Milkvita)

Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation (PDBF)

Small Farmer Development Foundation (SFDF)

### 3. Result

Rural development has been the core focus of the Bangladesh economic policies since her independence. The rural sector is pivotal to the country's economic, social and political development. This paper examines the Bangladesh rural development policies, strategies and programs since Independence in 1971. Secondary data were used and collected from various sources especially from BBS and HIES. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as mean and percentage to reach the objectives. Results of this study show that the share of agricultural sector in the country's GDP has declined which is an indicator of a country's progress from an agriculture-based to an export-oriented economy. The success of the agricultural and rural programs in Bangladesh is reflected in the reduction in the poverty incidence in the rural sector from almost 54 percent in the 1983-84 to about 35 percent in 2009-2010. Development efforts of Bangladesh are governed by the twin objectives of achieving growth with equity and reducing poverty. The government policy has to some extent achieved the intended results but poverty and inequality are still significant and apparent. Hence, rural development continues to be an important agenda to the country's development effort. Thus through innovation (Note 1) govt. is trying to develop rural livelihood as presently govt. is giving emphasize on innovation to the rural areas for ensuring the citizen services at the door steps.

#### 3.1 Innovation in the Rural Sector under Ministry of LGRD&C

The following organizations are practicing some innovations for the development of rural community.

#### 3.2 Department of Cooperatives

##### 3.2.1 Fair Marketing of Products Produced by Cooperatives

Through this initiative 9502 members of two co-operative societies got a fair price. The interest of local people towards cooperative societies has increased. The success of this project has raised funds from the "Service Innovation Fund" to develop online software (e-commerce) for marketing products from co-operatives that will benefit producers across the country. There is also the possibility of introducing e-commerce among cooperatives. In the implementation of this project, a section called "Cooperatives for Production and Marketing of Agricultural and Agricultural Products" has been added to Section 11

(1) (a) of the Draft Cooperatives Act, 2017.

**Cooperative Management Development ([www.coopmanagedev.com](http://www.coopmanagedev.com))**

Provide online services to cooperatives through software. This built-in software has a simple message box from the admin site with the term of the management committee of the online associations and three standard messages (changeable) entries related to AGM and audit. Basically, it also works as a digital election calendar. Auto count down is taking place on the term of the committee of each association and the message to prepare to reconstitute the committee is automatically sent to the phone number of the president/editor and office officer of the concerned association 90 days ago. As a result of going to the phone number of the president/editor as well as the officer of this message association, he is being sent to the management committee again by sending a hard copy on his mobile phone. Messages regarding the tenure of the committee can be sent more than once at any time. Apart from this, AGM, Dividend Distribution and Audit, and even any other urgent message are being sent immediately to the President / Secretary of the Association. In the case of expired societies, the expiration of the term of the committee has resulted in the formation of an interim committee of those societies and it has become possible to mobilize the societies by taking further action.

**Preparation, digitization and regular updating of accurate list of central and primary cooperative societies of all divisions of Rangpur division with correct information.**

All Central and Primary Samabay Seba (Cooperative Service) under the department are effective Digitization and regular updating of accurate list of all Central and Primary Cooperative Societies of Rangpur Division with accurate information. Association has accurate list with correct information. Creation, digitization, database creation and regular updating of list Service recipients are getting what they expect.

*3.2 Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)*

*3.2.1 BRDB SME Software*

BRDB is implementing SME loan disbursement and recovery program in the light of “Covid-19 Incentive: Rural Entrepreneurship Loan Fund Management Policy” for poverty alleviation and self-employment generation by providing credit assistance to rural communities. The initiative is being implemented across the country with the aim of making reporting and monitoring activities transparent and accountable.

*3.2.2 Online Reporting System*

“Online Reporting System” has been implemented to prevent delays in sending the data of loans disbursed and collected to the headquarters in the rural areas. The initiative is being implemented across the country to make reporting and monitoring activities related to debt collection/disbursement transparent and accountable.

*3.2.3 Facilitation of loan Disbursement Process*

One of the core programs of BRDB was to enroll a beneficiary here to take a loan. Facilitation of this loan disbursement process (in income management through a meeting on the same day which takes the

decision of the management committee of the association) from the Deputy Director's office so that the beneficiaries are getting timely time and disbursement is ensuring the correct utilization of the loan. Also the beneficiaries are working. And the money is not lying idly in the bank. As a result of this simplification, BRDB's debt reporting of pensioners is being done more easily on time and faster.

### *3.3 Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development Board (BARD)*

#### *3.3.1 Agricultural Mechanization and Collective Farming through Community Enterprise*

In order to ensure fair price of the crops as well as food security for the vast majority of the population. The action research project has been seeking to develop a farming model based on community participation and modern mechanized cultivation to meet the challenges of rice production. A total of 141 plots of land belonging to 68 landowners have been consolidated into 8 large blocks by removing the land demarcation through the digital land survey. The dependence on agricultural laborers has decreased through machine-based joint farming management through community enterprises and the cost of production of rice per acre has decreased significantly. Due to the removal of the aisle of the land, the total cultivable land has increased and it has been possible to prevent wastage of water through better irrigation management. The production of crops has increased due to the cultivation of similar crops on large lands. The adoption of participatory social business initiatives has opened a new door to an inclusive economy in the rural farming community. The commercial farming system has been introduced and the mechanized farming system has gained popularity. The development of farmers' leadership, decision-making capacity and institutional capacity has increased.

#### *3.3.2 Livelihood Improvement of Char Lands' People through Adaptation Practices*

As a means of improving the livelihood of the people in the Char region, project team set up a successful demonstration of the integrated method of farming fish and vegetables in the river 'IFCAS' (Integrated Floating Cage Aqua geonics System) or floating cages. In climatic conditions the IFCAS system can be a model for poverty alleviation and nutrition assurance of marginal farmers. This innovative work won the 'Innovation Award' in the current year

#### *3.3.3 Floating Bed*

5 floating beds were prepared in two chars by two farmers with the technical support of a team which consisted of one Deputy-Assistant Agriculture officer of Banaripara Upazila, Barishal and two traditional floating bed farmers of Umarerper, Bisherbandi, Banaripara, Barishal. Hybrid species seeds of red spinach, cucumber, bottle gourd, ash gourd, beans, pumpkin, tomato, brinjal, green chilli, bitter gourd, lemonade etc. were cultivated and the yield has been good.

#### *3.3.4 Floating Cage Fish Farming*

Fish and vegetables were cultivated in river through IFCAS (Integrated Floating Cage Aquageonics system) collective and participatory approach. In this system **three layers of production** were maintained. In the first layer telapia fish was cultured in the floating cage in the river. In the second layer leafy vegetables (Lettuce, peppermint etc.) were cultivated on the hanging plastic carets of GI pied frame of floating fish cage. In the third layer hanging vegetables (bottle gourd, ash gourd, pumpkin, bean etc.)

were cultivated on geo-bag and the vine of the vegetables tree were hanged on hanging bamboo loft.

### 3.3.5 Rural Development Academy (RDA)

#### **Cooperative based rural areas with modern civic amenities to improve the living standards of the rural population Method (Palli Janapad)**

In order to prevent the wastage of agricultural land and ensure the provision of “improved housing for rural dwellers”, the Rural Development Academy, Bogra is conducting a practical research project on “Improving the quality of life of the rural population and constructing cooperative multi-storied ‘rural townships’ with modern civic amenities”. The amount of agricultural land in populated Bangladesh is constantly decreasing due to various reasons. In this agriculture-dependent country, due to population, natural calamities, land erosion, etc., on the one hand, there is pressure on the arable land, on the other hand, due to the use of chemicals and harmful substances, the productive capacity of the land is decreasing day by day. It has become imperative to prevent this wastage of agricultural land. Long term planning is imperative to restore/prevent loss of agricultural land.

The specific objectives of the project are as follows:

- (a) Upgrading socio-economic and quality of life in rural areas through construction of multi-storied buildings with modern civic amenities;
- (b) Construction of 3 (Rangpur, Rajshahi and Dhaka Divisions) four-storied rural housing (total 272 x 3 = 816 families for 272 families each) at low-cost growth center level for rural cohabitation;
- (c) Ensuring solar energy dependent water supply, rainwater conservation and management;
- (d) Improving the quality of life through additional employment and income generation, including ensuring training of beneficiaries in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors under the RDA loan program.

#### **Poverty Alleviation of Marginalized Population of Kurigram and Jamalpur Districts**

The main objective of the project is to integrate the poor and marginalized people into the mainstream of society through poverty alleviation. The proposed project will play a helpful role in achieving the sustainable development goals of the Bangladesh government by graduating the backward sections of the society from poverty in the light of the “One House One Farm” scheme and Char Livelihood Program (CLP).

Construction of engine driven boats and floating wharves, construction of char cars has been completed for transfer of agricultural technology suitable for char areas. Because of these constructions, during the monsoon season, travel facilities and connectivity with the mainland, travel facilities in the char areas and communication with other regions have been established. The introduction of modern farming and increase in agricultural production have been ensured.

#### **Bangabandhu Academy for Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (BAPARD)**

##### **Facilitate fish farming by setting up fish disease clinics**

The establishment of Fish Disease Clinic has brought unimaginable success in the field of fisheries to the farmers through which fish farming has become easier and more profitable and has brought smiles

on the faces of the farmers. Since July 2019-20, the mobile Fish Disease Clinic team has visited 320 fish farmers on the spot and provided various services related to fish diagnosis and immediate remediation.

### **Facilitate agricultural work of farmers through setting up of BAPARD Agricultural Counseling Center**

Beneficiary farmers from BAPARD Agricultural Counseling Center have availed various services related to agriculture. Farmers have received hands-on services on crop diseases, pesticides, seasonal crops, soil quality. If necessary, the BAPARD Agricultural Counseling Center team has brought mobile services to the doorsteps of the farmers. This service has resulted in unimaginable success in the field of agriculture which has made it easier and more profitable for the farmers to smile.

### **Production of chicks from eggs through low cost incubators**

The idea of producing chicks from eggs through low cost incubators has enabled livestock, especially poultry farmers, to produce the chicks they need. It has been possible to provide the service in a very short time through the incubator. Since July 2019-20, the service has been provided to 630 poultry farms and about 1200 chicks have been produced through incubators.

### **Prevent communicable diseases by conducting primary health care programs for school-going children.**

Innovative Ideas for Preventing Communicable Diseases by Conducting Primary Health Care Programs for School-going Children Initially, primary health care was provided to children at BAPARD Laboratory School. As a result, school-going children have become more aware and able to take precautions against various diseases. Since July of the 2019-20 financial year, primary health care has been provided to 462 school-going children and about 20 diseases and various urgent matters have been taught by hand.

### **Bangladesh Milk Producer's Co-Operative Union Ltd. (Milkvita)**

#### **Milk Vita Bmpcul**

A Facebook page called "Milk Vita Bmpcul" has been launched. A mobile app with the same name has been created. Demand is collected at One-Stop Service Center. Shopkeepers or individuals in different zones can provide their demand through those pages or apps. Can pay its price through bKash or mobile banking. To make arrangements for the proper delivery of products in the respective zones. Milk Vita products are ordered at [www.chaildal.com](http://www.chaildal.com) and delivered to the consumer's home.

### **Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation (PDBF)**

#### **Poverty will win -Joy mobile app**

All the office addresses and mobile numbers are available through the 'Poverty Will Win' mobile app and calls can be made directly to the mobile with a single click from the app so that the users of this app no longer have to carry telephone index or diary. Besides, PDBF staff at various levels are now receiving PDBF related news and other latest information on mobile. This app has become an alternative to paper newsletters and it is also possible to reduce the cost of paper newsletters. A

beneficiary or interested person can easily find the office and phone number of the nearest Poverty Alleviation Officer through this app and follow the instructions given in the app and receive services from PDBF for poverty alleviation. This app has a complaint/feedback box, where app users can provide any complaints or feedback/suggestions. The Complaints / Feedback Box may establish connectivity and interaction of the executives with the beneficiaries receiving the marginal services or the PDBF staff.

#### **Small Farmer Development Foundation (SFDF)**

##### **Distribution of seasonal loans to farmers**

The Foundation's Small and Marginal Foundation has adopted seasonal credit schemes among small and marginal farmers for the benefit of small and marginal farmers. Small, marginal farmers, land square farmers and other farmers in a simple manner. Agricultural loans is being disbursed collectively.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that there were many innovative activities in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The innovation activities support to change the livelihoods of the rural areas. In this way, the people can come forward with confidence and took part in economic activities along with their counterparts. From this point of view, Govt. had an optimistic role to foster innovation. But the innovation activities are not so much satisfactory for rural development or better livelihood. Besides innovation status of Bangladesh remain unchanged for many years. Bangladesh's ranking in the Global Innovation Index has remained unchanged at 116th out of 132 countries. The country's score stood at 20.2, according to the ranking prepared by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/innovation-index-bangladesh-still-116th-2180716>). There might have different factors or reasons behind it. However, the question has come regarding the role of current innovation activities. The study also critically analyzed this question based on seven organizations under ministry of LGRD&C. It was found that the innovative ideas have been generating income for the people of the village level as well as leadership has been developed. Peoples are benefitting in many ways through these innovative activities. It was also found from the study that many people have been coming out and taking part in the economic activities for their family, which led them to contribute to the country as a national economy as well. Besides people are getting citizen services through these innovations. Therefore, the role of the ongoing innovation activities could be termed as moderately encouraging. It is clear from the study that Govt. has been working to improve the innovation activities. The government has a vision for Digital Bangladesh with promising policies, and regulations but inefficient implementation hinders progress.

As the world progresses and we adapt to newer technologies for innovation, there still remains many areas for improvement. However, with the combined effort of the Government, academia, and public and private sector, Bangladesh can very well be on the path to becoming a country that fosters the 'culture of innovation' to its core.

Digital Bangladesh plays a key role in ensuring service continuity in healthcare, education, commerce, trade, social safety net payments for the new poor, grievance redress, and many others. With the current speed at which the world is developing, Bangladesh envisions its road to 2041 to be dominated by advancements in technology such as artificial intelligence. Expected developments include achieving the Sustainable Development Goals such as No Poverty, full digitization and other technological advancements, quantum computing, rural development and access to global markets. Thus like mentioned organizations in this study all govt. organizations could generate more innovative ideas considering the factors of rural communities. Thus Digital Bangladesh and developed Bangladesh can be ensured by 2041.

The results of the study led to the following specific recommendations:

1. Govt of Bangladesh should take pragmatic plan to foster the innovation activities in the rural areas.
2. All the ministries have lot of scope to encourage innovative works towards rural development.
3. ICT division can take specific plan to cover all villages of BD.
4. Intensive can be distributed among the personnel those who are involved with innovative ideas.
5. Counseling and motivation should be given to the general people of the rural areas.

This paper and collected data will be shared in the Ministry of ICT as well as the A2I (Access to Information) at PM office and suggested reforms that could be incorporated in the upcoming new Innovation scheme for rural development. The findings of the study extend the existing knowledge and it will be helpful for the concerned persons including the policymakers, NGO personnel, academicians to work on this issue.

Bangladesh has not too many innovation project at present. The study has found only seven organizations, which are directly related to innovation in rural development. Among the ten organizations of RDCD only seven are involved with innovative works in rural areas. However, the others have scopes for rural development through innovation. Besides the mentioned organizations especially BARD, RDA, BRDB, Cooperatives and BAPARD have lot of scopes for adopting innovation for rural development. The current activities of those organizations have been creating a congenial atmosphere to do some changes in rural areas.

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### Note

Note 1. which has been the dominant catchword in the last few decades. It usually happens with the development of a totally novel idea, or around the alteration of existing ones, and is sometimes enough to disrupt the whole system. However, pursuing innovative ideas is about balancing opportunities against risks. There is always a chance that innovation might not work out but there are also ways to address that.