

# A Reflection on Strengthening Social Innovation in Colombia

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# Foreword

by Geoff Mulgan

The global social innovation field is developing very fast. Now around the world there are social innovation funds, incubators, laboratories and prizes. India is creating a \$1bn inclusive innovation fund. The US has an office of social innovation in the White House. The European Union is reshaping its big programmes for R&D and economic growth to encompass social innovation. Business is talking the language of corporate social innovation, and the major consultancies are setting up teams using the label.

Ten years ago very little of this existed. Then innovation meant business, new hardware and new stuff. Now there is much better understanding that innovation is as much about nutrition for the poor as it is about nanotechnology or aerospace. Social challenges too need active experimentation, measurement to find out what works, and mechanisms to spread the best ideas.

Colombia is one of the countries where the pace of change is fastest. Necessity may be the mother of invention – and the extraordinary recent transformation of Colombia’s economy and society; and the great improvements in everyday security, have clearly helped to create an environment propitious for social creativity.

But the country also benefits from great strengths: cultures of entrepreneurship, strong universities and energetic NGOs. These provide the context for the work being done within government (notably in ANSPE in the Department of Social Prosperity), by social welfare organisations such as Confama and Socialab, as well as famous social entrepreneurs such as Vicky Colbert, creator of Escuela Nueva. The scope of creativity is striking – from ambitious national programmes to urban infrastructure projects like the Metrocable, and Bogota’s many moves to change civic behavior and bring welfare to the poorest communities.



Colombia still faces acute challenges. But it is full of both talent and enthusiasm – ultra smart people using their talents to make their country a model of 21st century creativity rather than late 20th century chaos. Those of us involved in the global social innovation movement have high hopes for what will be achieved, and are keen both to share and to learn.

The next steps as in many other countries will involve building stronger capacities and more effective institutions. Innovation is much easier to talk about than to do. In science a century of experience provides guidance on how to run labs, how to spend money, and how to test what works. Social innovation is catching up fast, but there's still a lot of hard work to be done to improve the chances that good ideas will turn into sustainable business models and public services. Everywhere the people involved in social change need to get smarter at adopting and adapting the best ideas from around of the world, and canner in mobilising new technological tools for social impact.

Above all we need better lines of sight from the promising pilots and small projects to big scale. Around the world there are now plenty of examples of social innovations that are benefitting tens of millions rather than tens of thousands. We need to turn their insights and experiences into a new common sense - above all perhaps, the lesson that the biggest impacts come when government, business and civil society can work in alignment with each other.

# 1. Introduction

The field of innovation for social purposes is developing rapidly all over the world; with new institutions, methods and confidence. Social innovators are changing the way governments work, the way civil society achieves impact, and the actions of business.

Across the world millions of people are creating better ways to tackle some of the most challenging social problems of our time including climate change, chronic disease, social exclusion, and material poverty. Often their ideas come to life through collaborations that cut across the public and private sectors, civil society, and the household. Some of their successes are now part of everyday life - from microcredit in rural communities to web platforms linking teachers and learners; as well as banking services using mobile phones, community land trusts, and restorative justice programmes.

The field of social innovation in Colombia is rapidly developing and achieving international recognition, with significant investment of resources and capacity from the national government, foundations, and the social and private sectors.

It is in this context that The Young Foundation and Social Innovation Exchange (SIX) were invited by the Colombian Centre for Social Innovation of ANSPE (Agency for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty) to draw on our combined experience and expertise in the field of social innovation and user-led design processes, to develop and deliver a collaborative programme of events to build momentum, and grow capacity for social innovation in Colombia.

## Programme of events

**Social Innovation in Practice workshops:** We conducted two workshops, in Medellín and Bogotá, with more than 140 participants involved in social innovation across the private, public, community and social sectors in Colombia. The workshops were designed to facilitate a process in which participants would gain an increased understanding of social innovation tools and methods, and how these tools are being used in various contexts around the world.



**A public event on building momentum for social innovation in Colombia**

hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá, aimed to raise the visibility of social innovation and the work that the government is undertaking in this realm. Geoff Mulgan, CEO of Nesta and Board member of SIX, spoke on how social innovation can be used to tackle extreme poverty in Colombia; Louise Pulford, Director of SIX, spoke on how to build community for social innovation; and Patricia Gonzalez, from the Chamber of Commerce, spoke on Shared Value. A panel, moderated by Vicky Colbert of Escuela Nueva, provided a lively forum for debate on these topics.

**Meeting stakeholders:** We had the opportunity to meet with people from the public, private and communities sectors who are working in, thinking about and driving forward social innovation practice around the country. These conversations influenced our thinking on emerging recommendations for the field of social innovation in Colombia (see section 6).

## 1.2 Aim of this report

In this report, we share some of the key learnings we drew from the workshops and stakeholders meetings, as well as our view on the trends that are shaping social innovation globally. The report offers three high level recommendations for strengthening the increasingly active social innovation field in Colombia.

## 1.3 Social Innovation Exchange (SIX)

SIX is the world's primary network for social innovation and a reputable source of research, action and intelligence. With more than 6,000 members across six continents, SIX connects, inspires and supports individuals and organisations, including small NGOs and global firms, public agencies, and academics, committed to promoting social innovation. Through SIX, we can improve the methods with which our societies find better solutions to challenges such as ageing, climate change, inequality and healthcare.

## 1.4 The Young Foundation

Based in east London, The Young Foundation is a leading independent centre for disruptive social innovation. We create new movements, institutions and companies that tackle the structural causes of inequality. We work to create a more equal and just society, where each individual can be fulfilled in their own terms. We believe that little about the future of society is inevitable. Bound by our shared humanity, we believe we collectively have the power to shape the societies and communities we want to live in.

## 1.5 About the authors

**Louise Pulford** is an expert in networks and community building and is the Director of Social Innovation Exchange (SIX), a global network of social innovation. She was responsible for the SIX network whilst it was being incubated at the Young Foundation (2009 - 2012). Louise co-wrote a Study on Social Innovation for the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (2009) which led to the creation of the flagship network for social innovation for the European Commission: Social Innovation Europe (SIE). Louise manages the European consortium responsible for running SIE.

**Tricia Hackett** is an experienced urban development professional and social innovation practitioner with expertise in participatory methods and user-led design. She has led action research in a range of international contexts including India, the UK, the US and several countries in Latin America. Currently she is leading Realising Ambition for the Young Foundation, a major programme on scaling evidence-based practice and has recently been appointed a lecturer at Danube University Krems Masters of Arts in Social Innovation.

**Diana Daste** is a political scientist with professional experience in project planning and management, journalism and community development with a MSc in Social Development Practice at UCL. Her academic experience at the Development Planning Unit equipped her with comprehensive knowledge of the different dimensions of development; pointing out the need to plan, investigate and evaluate different forms of sustainable development while understanding the responses and implications of different paradigms, particularly in the South.





# 2. Social Innovation Globally

## 2.1 From the margins to the mainstream

Around the world millions of people are innovating better ways to tackle some of the most challenging social problems of our time: climate change, chronic disease, social exclusion and material poverty are all being addressed by social innovation.

High profile successes range from the Grameen Bank's example of microcredit in rural communities<sup>1</sup>, to new models of schools like Escuela Nueva, as well as banking services like M-Pesa<sup>2</sup>, which use mobile phones to enable those who were previously outside the system to access banking services. Crowd funding, bottom-up business models using local resources and knowhow, and the use of technology to enable communities to share resources are now everyday ways of living.

But social innovation is not new. For years, people have been coming up with better ways to solve the challenges of their everyday lives, from the first schools to the first hospitals. Many of the most successful innovations are fully integrated into society, and may not appear 'new', such as the Open University, consumer cooperatives, or the fair trade movement. In the last 10 years, however, social innovation has come to the fore. More and more people are aware of the term and there are an increasing number of individuals and organisations who are supporting it.

Today, social innovation is no longer understood as the task of the third sector, the social economy, NGOs, and community organisations. It is fields of philanthropy and businesses who now talk about 'Shared Value'; investors who now talk about impact and social investment; and large technology institutions who are talking about social technology and digital social innovation. Universities all over the world have social innovation curricula, based in departments of Science and Technology, Design and Business, as well as in the social sciences where such a subject would usually sit. Forging ahead in

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1 [http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=114](http://www.grameen-info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=114)  
2 <http://www.mpesa.in/>

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supporting social innovation are governments; from city level where Mayors are transforming their communities with new and innovative approaches, to larger cross-national institutions like the European Union.

Definitions for social innovations vary according to the focus of the institutions that support it. For example, some interpret social innovation as social entrepreneurship (such as INSEAD<sup>3</sup>) or as design studies like the DESIS network<sup>4</sup>; others see it as non-profit management (for example the Stanford Social Innovation Review<sup>5</sup>) or Public Administration (such as the Harvard Kennedy School of Government<sup>6</sup>). Social innovation can be used as a term to think about social change and transformation, social cohesion and empowerment, social enterprise or entrepreneurship, business strategy and organisational management, or in terms of new products services and programmes.

At SIX and The Young Foundation, we use the following definition when referring to social innovation:

*Social innovations can be understood as “new solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more efficiently and effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities, assets and/or relationships. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”*

## 2.2 Social innovation trends around the world

Influential social innovation trends are emerging globally. With this emergence is a broader understanding of the concept, which now encompasses the work of private and public sector actors, and a desire for a deeper and better understanding of how social innovation works. Below are six areas of issues where we have identified significant activity in several countries around the world.

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3 <http://centres.insead.edu/social-innovation/who-we-are/index.cfm>

4 <http://www.desis-network.org/>

5 <http://www.ssireview.org/>

6 <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/>

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## 1. New ways to get new ideas

Increasingly, new ideas are surfaced through Challenge Prizes. All over the world, governments; companies; and traditional funders and foundations are harnessing the power of the crowd and general public to come up with new ideas to solve pressing social challenges. Prizes range from Nesta's Centre for Challenge Prizes<sup>7</sup> in the UK, which has experimented with several models and challenges from finding new ways to improve the lives of older people and reduce social isolation to finding new ways to encourage cycling and stop bike theft across the UK, to the European Commission's Social Innovation competition<sup>8</sup>, which is a Challenge Prize to find better ways to get unemployed people back into work. There are now dozens of these prizes around the world including in South America, where Socialab<sup>9</sup> has several prizes open at the moment. All of the competitions vary in their models, processes and rewards. A big challenge for all of these prizes is how the ideas that are selected are implemented successfully.

## 2. Increasing support infrastructures for start-ups

Hubs, labs, incubators and accelerators are cropping up all over the world. From co-working spaces like the Hub Network<sup>10</sup>, to design labs, change labs and solutions labs<sup>11</sup> for experimenting and prototyping, to incubation of new organisations and the acceleration models of new ventures like Bethnal Green Ventures<sup>12</sup> to name a few. There has been an exponential growth of this kind of organisations over the last five years. Some are inside or attached to governments (such as Mindlab<sup>13</sup> in Denmark) or in universities (like the Lien Centre for Social Innovation<sup>14</sup> in Singapore Management University); some are publicly funded, others are entirely independent. Each of these support models have very different focuses - the challenge for all of them is getting the right model for the right purpose.

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7 <http://www.nesta.org.uk/our-projects/centre-challenge-prizes>  
8 <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/social-innovation/competition/>  
9 <http://www.socialab.com/>  
10 <http://www.impacthub.net/>  
11 <http://www.sig.uwaterloo.ca/feature/social-innovation-labs>  
12 <http://bethnalgreenventures.com/>  
13 <http://www.mind-lab.dk/en>  
14 <http://lcsi.smu.edu.sg/>

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### 3. Innovative finance tools for social innovation

Whilst there is generally more attention paid to the whole ecology of finance across the social innovation process, there are three key developments which we highlight in the field of finance for social innovation which are relevant to this collaboration. One is the spread of models like UnLtd<sup>15</sup>, which has provided staged finance from Money for Ideas, through to seed capital in the UK for many years. The UnLtd model has now spread to India, Hong Kong and China. The other is the increased interest in payment by results models like the Social Impact Bonds model<sup>16</sup>, which was first trialed in the UK, and is now running in the US, Australia and is being developed in Canada and Colombia.

A third innovative approach to financing innovation is the formation of novel financial institutions focused on supporting the social sector. The UK's Big Society Bank<sup>17</sup>, which pools money from dormant bank accounts in the UK to create a fund with a social purpose, is one such model.

### 4. A move towards sharing

The term the 'sharing economy' began to appear in the mid to late 2000s following the global financial crisis, enabled by increasingly powerful technology which allows citizens to share resources more effectively. The power of shared social and economic activity to address worldwide resource depletion and create new models was popularized by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers in *What's Mine is Yours* (2010); Lisa Gansky in *The Mesh: Why the Future of Business is Sharing*; and the online magazine and community, Shareable.net. Online market places vary from the globally recognised Airbnb to community book swaps. Around the world, there are loads of crowd funding platforms, innovation market places and online collaborations between governments and citizens such as the White House Open Government initiative and Iceland's crowd-sourced constitution.

### 5. Frameworks for scaling

It is increasingly recognised that for social innovation to reach the impact that is necessary to address the pressing social needs we face, small proven initiatives need to scale to reach more people and have more impact.

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15 <http://unltd.org.uk/>  
16 <http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/work/sibs>  
17 <http://www.bigsocietycapital.com/>

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There is much attention, therefore, all over the world from people who are trying to understand the various strategies, dynamics and models that can be used to help a project grow. The University of Waterloo in Canada is leading on researching various routes to scale (further details on this work are outlined later in this report) and the International Centre for Social Franchising, based in the UK, are coming into this discussion internationally. Other bodies, like the European Commission, are examining how projects can be scaled transnationally.

## **6. Systemic innovation**

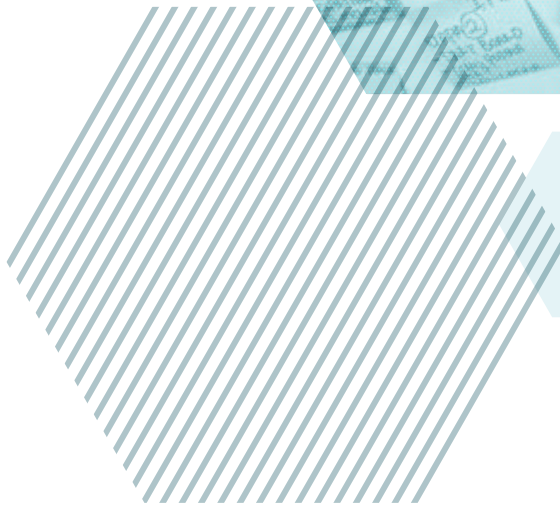
It is clear that there is no shortage of social innovations around the world. Every day, ingenious people are developing new projects, ideas, organisations, products and enterprises to address social problems and needs. While often successful in their own right, the overall impact of most of these innovations is limited, as they usually remain small and locally focused. In addition, even if scaled up, social enterprises and new products and services alone cannot effect the wide scale change that is so urgently needed.

Taking a more systemic approach is an emerging trend on which several organisations are beginning to focus their efforts. Increasingly there is an emphasis on how to create ecosystems of support and attention is being paid to policies, legal structures and other supports; which will enable social innovations to be more sustainable. Innovation across entire systems is required and more work is being done in this area. The 2012 report on Systemic Innovation, prepared by the Social Innovation Europe initiative<sup>18</sup>, summarizes the current understanding in this area.

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18 [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/files/social-innovation/systemic-innovation-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/files/social-innovation/systemic-innovation-report_en.pdf)

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# 3. Why Social Innovation in Colombia?

The World Bank reports that it is the seventh most unequal country in the world. Colombia has a strong imperative to innovate, and the traditional approach to innovation described in the 2013 OECD *Reviews of Innovation Policy for Colombia*<sup>19</sup> reinforces the need to develop new approaches to innovation. New approaches are beginning to develop. President Juan Manuel Santos ran for office on a campaign of “Prosperity for all” and when elected in 2010 established the Department for Social Prosperity to address and alleviate extreme poverty. The current government views economic and social innovation as the key drivers to prosperity.

The prominence of social innovation in Colombia in both national policy and on-the-ground practice has received global attention. The April 2013 World Economic Forum report *Breaking the Binary: Policy Guide to Scaling Social Innovation*<sup>20</sup> listed Colombia’s Department for Social Prosperity as a leading global example of public sector, stating that the “...department plays a critical role in strategically introducing concepts of social innovation and entrepreneurship.”

## 3.1 The key public sector actors include...

The Department for Social Prosperity (DPS) was created to develop, coordinate and enact all governmental policies which compensate victims of conflict and reduce poverty under the framework of the National Development Plan. The DPS is collaborating with the National Planning Department (DNP) and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colciencias) to deliver the National Development Plan, which includes a framework for social innovation.

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19 <http://www.oecd.org/sti/inno/colombia-innovation-review-assessment-and-recommendations-english.pdf>  
20 [http://www.weforum.org/pdf/schwabfound/PolicyGuide\\_to\\_ScalingSocial%20Innovation.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/schwabfound/PolicyGuide_to_ScalingSocial%20Innovation.pdf)

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Why Social Innovation in Colombia?



The DPS provides a central hub for private-sector activities that help to reduce poverty and strategically introduces concepts of social innovation and entrepreneurship across government initiatives in Colombia. While the DPS is still in its infancy, the department's initial reform efforts demonstrate important operating principles, including providing public services with a private-sector approach and addressing macro problems through micro strategies.

The key DSP agency for poverty eradication is ANSPE which aims to help 1,500,000 families out of extreme poverty by 2020.

In 2011, the Centre for Social Innovation (CIS), which sits within ANSPE, was set up to generate innovative, scalable and sustainable solutions to improve the quality of life for people living in extreme poverty in Colombia. The aims of the CIS include gaining insights into the social innovation capability in the country, building a community around social innovation, and promoting it as a key issue in the country's public agenda.

CIS also aims to connect key stakeholders who don't usually work together. CIS envisages its role as a visible champion for innovation capabilities for the social sector and promotes social innovation as a key issue in the country's public agenda. And concurrently, CIS has the ambition to increase recognition on a global scale.





### Guest Contributors

Alina Cardenas, Ivan Montenegro and Nazly Frias

## 3.2 A view from the National Node of Social Innovation

For this report, we asked a series of questions to the coordinators from each of the national three agencies - the National Planning Department, Colciencias and the Centre for Social Innovation at ANSPE - that comprise the National Node of Social Innovation.

Below are the questions and their collective responses.

### 1. Why is a public policy so important in strengthening social innovation in Colombia?

The concept of Social Innovation (SI) in Colombia's public policy is relatively new, even though practices of SI have always existed; the concept of SI was incorporated for the first time in a public policy document in National Development Plan 2010-2014 Prosperity for All. The plan acknowledges the role of innovation as a fundamental axis of all development spheres that guarantee social progress and environmental sustainability, as well economic growth and competitiveness. Furthermore the plan understands SI as a tool to respond to the needs and demands of citizens, communities and families. The explicit inclusion of SI in the Plan created the conditions for the development of a more robust policy development around this subject. In this sense, the creation of a specific SI policy can be explained by various reasons:

- Colombia faces the great challenge of aligning its economic development to its social development as the basis to achieve an equitable, inclusive, prosperous and peaceful society. The complexity of current challenges in terms of poverty eradication, reduction of inequality and reinforcement of democracy, among others, require the incorporation of new policy approaches in order to overcome them in a more effective and sustainable way.
- Given the fact that the current basis of innovation policy, both from the strategic and the instrumental perspective, is mainly focused on addressing the need of companies in terms of productivity and competitiveness, a new policy stream was needed in order to emphasize the social contribution of innovation and develop specific instruments and institutional arrangements that could foster it. Similarly, despite the efforts to implement different articulation instances, social policies are not well articulated with Science, Technology and Innovation policies.
- The development of social innovation in Colombia faces multiple barriers in terms of knowledge management, support services - financial and non-financial, institutional framework, social capital, etc. Since SI is gaining a growing importance in the public agenda as tool to achieve Colombia's social goals, these barriers need to be addressed by Government institutions in order to create favorable conditions for SI to develop.

**2. The three of you come from different government departments - how do you see social innovation from your different perspectives? What are key differences? What are the similarities?**

Over the past few years, Colombia's government started to incorporate SI as an alternative and supplementary instrument of social policy. The most outstanding example of this process is the creation of the Centre for Social Innovation (CIS) within the National Agency to Overcome Extreme poverty. Set up in 2011, as a node of actors that generates solutions to improve the wellbeing of the population living in extreme poverty, the Centre's approach to SI is framed in the UNIDOS strategy for extreme poverty eradication. In this sense, SI is understood as innovative solutions that are pertinent, sustainable, scalable and complementary to public instruments to eradicate poverty. In the framework of Social Innovation National Node a comprehensive definition was created: "Social Innovation is a process through which value is created for society through practices, management models, and innovative products or services that satisfy a need, take advantage of an opportunity and resolve a social problem in a more efficient and effective way than the existing solutions, producing a favorable and sustainable change in the system in which they operate. Social Innovation is characterized by having scalability and replicability potential; being sustainable and promoting greater levels of community empowerment and generating partnerships across different actors".

This definition is meant to be a conceptual framework so that other government entities can develop their own working definitions of SI. Currently, the approach taken by each government entity depends on their competences and field of work: in the case of the CIS-ANSPE the definition is focusing on overcoming extreme poverty, Colciencias have an emphasis in ST&I and the DNP approach is more related to general public policy development. Nonetheless, given that on the one hand, the policy design is not already finished, and the crucial times we live on the other, more precise domains tuned to local territorial particularities should be accorded with and between another actors.

**3. You have done many workshops with stakeholders across the country, but did you learn anything new about your own work from the practitioners you met at the workshops we hosted?**

The main learning we took from the workshop was the importance of developing a shared measurement scheme for the policy implementation. In this sense, to identify long lasting SI on the ground level will be key to better understand the impact of these processes and the way in which regional policies can help to foster them in their territories.



### Guest Contributors

Natalia Currea, Francisco Noguera

## 3.3 Views from the CIS, CCC and the Pioneros

Natalia Currea from the Centre for Social Innovation and Francisco Noguera from Compartamos con Colombia (CCC) and Pioneros social innovation alliance share the following thoughts on the key institutions working in Social Innovation in Colombia and the main learning from the collaboration with the Young Foundation and SIX:

The Centre for Social Innovation is one of the four units at ANSPE – the National Agency to Overcome Extreme Poverty, which leads the strategy to overcome extreme poverty in Colombia. The Centre works to enable a favorable environment for social innovation as a tool to promote prosperity and overcome extreme poverty in Colombia. It conducts research in key sectors, which ensures that the initiatives are relevant and pertinent to vulnerable communities. It also provides tools and mechanisms for social innovations to be implemented (mainly financing and public policy advocacy), generating and sharing knowledge that highlights key insights and international best practices that are appropriate for the local context.

Documenting and transferring skills to the local innovation ecosystem is central to the mission of the Centre for Social Innovation, as is the creation and dissemination of critical knowledge. This is the context in which ANSPE started a conversation with the Young Foundation and SIX, focused on the opportunity to develop a conference and a set of in Colombia, in order to highlight some of the key tools and areas of opportunity in the practice of social innovation. ANSPE partnered with Compartamos con Colombia and Pioneros for the execution of the agenda during The Young Foundation and SIX's visit to the country. Such a partnership was coherent with the goals of the workshops and conference, since Pioneros articulates the public-private partnerships that are critical for the growth and scaling of social initiative.

The conference and workshops left three main takeaways:

**Government involvement in social innovation is rising, but still relatively**

**new:** The participation of public agencies in social innovation is a rising phenomenon, and it's critical to follow it closely. Efforts like those carried out by the government of Hong Kong and Spanish Pais Vasco allowed us to acknowledge that the road is long, and that Colombia is effectively leading the way in the promotion of social innovation and the articulation of actors from different sectors around private-public partnerships.

**Systemic change is a goal worth chasing:** Working on the spiral reminded us of the multidimensional character of social innovation, and underscored the importance of the last stage in it – systemic change. One of the challenges ahead for the Centre and its allies is to effectively influence public policy as a mechanism that can help grow, or scale proven solutions that have gone through the rest of the spiral.

**Building networks and tapping into networks is key:** As a relatively new institution, ANSPE, the Center comprehends the value of being able to understand international tendencies and initiatives on social innovation, as an important resource to benchmark its work. This whole experience in Medellin allowed the Center to give a more detailed explanation of its nature, areas of work and the barriers that it is facing, together with its projects and challenges.

In sum, developing resilience and encouraging connections and networks are key factors on developing social innovation. Without connections and the possibility of learning from others, processes turn ineffective and slow.

This was an extremely significant experience for the Center and its private sector partners, not only in terms of having access to pertinent knowledge, but also in terms of emphasizing the importance of developing this kind of exercise and recognizing the value of collaborative work.

### **3.4 Some key social innovation actors in Colombia**

We had the opportunity to meet some inspirational and dynamic organisations and people working directly in the field of social innovation including ConVerGentes, a creative, effective and big-hearted community organisation in one of the toughest neighbourhoods in Medellín; Comfama, one of the largest social welfare organisations in the country working towards embedding social innovation methods; Socialab, clever, innovative social designers helping to surface new ideas for poverty alleviation; RutaN, created by Medellín 's public sector institutions to channel resources of the municipality in science, technology and innovation; Somos Mas whose mission is to generate social and economic value of social networking initiatives by mobilising civil society around social initiatives, participating effectively in the different nodes of a social network, making visible the work and development of social networking initiatives and articulating the different actors that make up a social network; and the Impact Hub Bogotá, the first shared workspace for social entrepreneurs and innovators in Bogotá co-created by the community of La Arenera, Somos Mas and Fabrica which aims to become the benchmark ecosystem social, environmental and cultural innovation in the city.



# 4. Social Innovation in Practice

## 4.1 Design and objectives

*The Social Innovation in Practice* workshops aimed to offer participants an increased understanding of social innovation tools and methods and actively begin the process of documenting, embedding and promoting social innovation practices.

Our thinking on the workshop design was influenced by the work of Christian Bason of MindLab in Denmark, who believes that the public sector can become a social innovation enabler by shifting “from random innovation to a conscious and systematic approach to public sector renewal; from managing human resources to building innovation capacity at all levels of government; from running tasks and projects to orchestrating processes of co-creation, creating new solutions with people, not for them; from administering public organisations to courageously leading innovation across and beyond the public sector”.<sup>21</sup>

The learning objectives included participants gaining knowledge of the field of global social innovation including current trends and future trajectory; understanding the key strategies, processes and tools of social innovation; and improving their ability to work with diverse stakeholders.

## 4.2 The social innovation framework

The workshops used a social innovation framework as a methodology to guide the participants' thinking. There are many different ways of mapping innovation processes – some look at stage gates, funnels, processes of divergence and then convergence – but nearly all of them are about how you move in stages from a need for innovation, through the generation of ideas to testing, and then the implementation of the ideas and finally scaling.

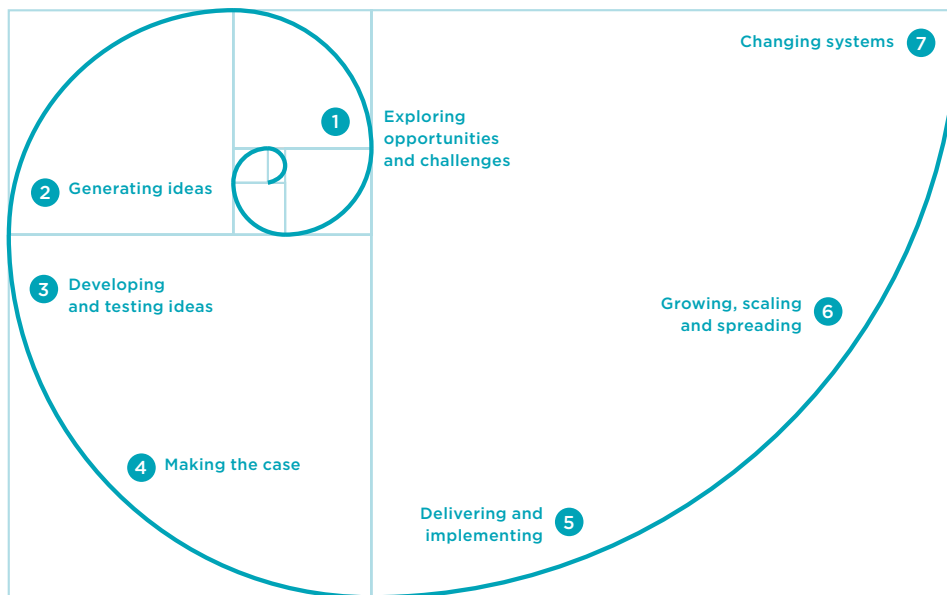
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21 Bason, Christian (2010). *Leading Public Sector Innovation*. The Policy Press, UK.

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Below:  
Diagram of the  
innovation framework



The framework we used during the workshops to better understand the process of social innovation was the ‘Social Innovation Spiral’, which was first developed by The Young Foundation in 2010 in *The Open Book of Social Innovation*, and has since been developed further. The version we use above was developed by Nesta in the UK in 2013 as part of the online Open Workshop<sup>22</sup>.

The framework outlines seven stages of developing a social innovation. These stages are not always sequential (some innovations jump straight into practice or even scale) and there are feedback loops between them. They can also be thought of as overlapping spaces, with distinct cultures and skills. They provide a useful framework for thinking about the different kinds of support that innovators and innovations need in order to grow.

### 4.3 Understanding the social innovation process

The first part of each workshop was dedicated to understanding the social innovation spiral framework and how it could be useful for the participants in their own work. We used two methodologies during this part of the workshop:

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22 <https://openworkshop.nesta.org.uk/>

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**1. The first part of the session explored each of the stages in more detail.**

We looked at the various methods and tools that are being used around the world at each stage, and some of the challenges associated with each of these tools. For example, at the stage of generating ideas, we outlined several different ways of ideas generation. These included:

- a. The first set of tools harnesses the power of the crowd. This includes new methods of open innovation, in particular using new digital platforms which make possible large scale participation in idea generation, and the possibility of crowd sourcing ideas.
- b. The second set of tools that can be used to generate ideas focus on the process of co-design. In particular Challenge Prizes are a great way to generate lots of ideas for solving a problem. Some organisations find that innovation camps and festivals are a good way to generate significantly more ideas. Innovation camps might bring together groups of 50-200 people over 2-3 days of intensive activity to generate new ideas and to work up real examples of how they could be solved. For example, Social Innovation Camps do this with web designers and social innovators to generate new web tools to meet social needs. Companies such as IBM and P&G also use camps as a way to generate viable new ideas, taking groups of colleagues out of their day job and into a protected thinking space for a short period of intensive work.
- c. Another way to generate ideas is to bring different perspectives into a team or organisation through the creation of specialised roles, such as entrepreneurs, artists or thinkers in residence.

At each stage of the process, we examined the various methods in detail. The purpose was to understand the tools participants used and were familiar with already, and to introduce several new tools which are being used in different parts of the world, explain how they work and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.

**2. During the second part of this session, participants mapped their own projects onto the spiral.**

The spiral is intended to guide and support the practice of all those who are working in this field. This includes policy makers who can help to create the right conditions; foundations and philanthropists who can fund and support; social organisations trying to meet needs more effectively; and of course entrepreneurs and innovators themselves. The participants at the workshop

worked across all of these areas, so each of them described their project or organisation and mapped themselves onto the appropriate stage of the spiral, defining a clear phase of their activity. Participants then described what they needed to move to the next stage of the spiral. This enabled a discussion about non-linear nature of innovation – with specific focus on the personal challenges of many false starts at the ideas stage; on how to convince others of the value of a project; and on proving that a project is having the impact it intended.

#### 4.4 Knowing what works

The debate of how to know what works<sup>23</sup> goes beyond the realms of social innovation and places itself in the core discussions of measurement. For this reason, we aimed to dig deeper into the assumptions and elements, guiding measurement processes and outcomes, with the objective to understand its complexities in both conceptual and applied terms.

Three key issues were unpacked to explore this:

##### **What do we understand by social value and how does this guide measurement processes and outcomes?**

The session began with an activity to co-create a definition of “Social Value”. We opened the discussion to the floor seeking to gather the different concepts underpinning this widely used notion. A critical point was the concept of value itself and whether it should be understood in social or monetary terms. The main ideas in building the definition stated that it had to have a positive impact on wellbeing, to be cost-effective and to be inclusive, while allowing some kind of process to allocate resources in the most effective manner. A key lesson from this process was identifying how a conceptual alignment with the idea of social value impacts further strategies for measurement, reporting and scaling up. A crosscutting problem in the social value debate was around stakeholder expectations. This led on to another key issue about accountability.

##### **Dilemmas for accountability with multiple and diverse stakeholders**

The key concepts guiding this discussion were accountability and reporting. In practical terms, the idea was to understand the nature and relationship

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23 <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/socialinnovationeurope/magazine/methods-and-tools/articles-reports/strengthening-social-innovation-europe>

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among different stakeholders and to identify how this relationship (and conceived model of society) can determine the decision making process inside organisations and in project implementation and evaluations.

Some examples illustrating this were how some stakeholders advocate for the promotion of inclusive business, while others would establish social programmes within their profit-driven organisations and others would prefer to promote fair practices within the company. From a grassroots perspective there was a question of how much participation could really be stimulated and from the donor's side there was a concern regarding tools to report to international guidelines with context specific indicators.

**Traditional and new approaches to measurement - Learning over reporting**

We also presented and opened a discussion on the widely used approaches and tools to measure impact and offered analysis on the difficulties of applying "one size fit all" models to measure context specific projects and programmes.

The discussion also covered the new contextual conditions in ways of gathering and disseminating information; and reflected on the opportunities and

challenges this offered, to measure impact and to design impact measurement tools. A facilitated dialogue between participants from different backgrounds challenged the idea of mainstreaming evaluation and offered that knowing what works is a constant learning process that must include stakeholders at all levels in the design and analysis of evaluation methods; developing shared measurement tools that enrich, increase impact and reduce risk throughout the project cycle.

#### 4.5 Growing what works

Following on from the innovation spiral framework discussion, we explored some of the necessary conditions and models for taking innovative solutions to scale, with the ultimate objective of systemic change. What we mean by 'growing what works' refers to the efforts of the organisations and statutory institutions to disseminate and grow their programmes, products, ideas and approaches that have been proven to be effective.

Whilst there are countless discussions, practices and theories on scaling social innovation, we chose to present a recent working paper *'Pathways to System Change'*<sup>24</sup> as an accessible and thoroughly researched take on the different pathways to system change. This paper suggests that the pathways depend on the initial conditions, opportunities and barriers, as well as the motivation behind the decision to grow what works or scale up.

We also referenced the work that the Young Foundation is doing as part of TEPsie<sup>25</sup> which is a research collaboration between six European institutions aimed at understanding the theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for developing the field of social innovation in Europe. The project explores the barriers to innovation, as well as the structures and resources that are required to support social innovation at the European level. The Young Foundation is leading the work package aimed at identifying what works in terms of measuring and scaling innovation, engaging citizens and using online networks to maximum effect in order to assist policy makers, researchers and

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24 Westley et al, Pathways to System Change, University of Waterloo, Working Paper Currently Under Review by Publisher.

25 <http://www.tepsie.eu/>

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practitioners working in the field of social innovation. It will do this by providing a theoretical and empirical informed analysis of how social innovations and enterprises spread and grow, drawing on evidence from around the world to understand the educational and training infrastructure required to grow social innovation and increase the numbers and skills of social entrepreneurs in Europe.

Realising Ambition<sup>26</sup> was presented as a case study on scaling social innovation. This is a five year £25 million pound investment from the Big Lottery Fund to grow the field of evidence-based practice in the UK. The programme is replicating 25 evidence-based and promising interventions designed to help children and young people avoid the criminal justice system and give them a better chance to realise their ambitions and potential.

The portfolio comprises a mix of universal school-based prevention, family and parenting early intervention, mentoring a community-based and therapeutic interventions underpinned by the highest quality experimental evaluations. Ten of the 25 projects are internationally renowned evidence-based programmes and the remaining 15 interventions have a strong track record of implementation and for the most part, preliminary evidence of impact. Realising Ambition is a bold and ambitious effort to scale innovation; it is the first of its kind in the UK.

The programme will help move science to practice by transporting proven models and replicating them, and practice to science, by nudging promising innovations towards becoming more tightly defined and ready for replication and rigorous evaluation. The aspiration is both a greater understating of what works whilst moving to impact at scale.<sup>27</sup>

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26 <http://youngfoundation.org/projects/realising-ambition/>

27 <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Realising-Ambition.pdf>

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## Feedback from workshop participants

The majority of positive feedback on the workshops related to people's appreciation for having the opportunity to share experiences, knowledge, and expertise with new people and people from different organisations, sectors, and fields.

Others appreciated the opportunity to have a better understanding of the concept and processes of social innovation.

Many participants felt that there wasn't sufficient time to cover all of the topics in the workshop and would have liked more have had more specific examples and case studies.





**Guest Contributor**

Fabiola Fuentes

## 5. Reflections from a Social Innovator

Considering that social innovation in Colombia is in a period of transition, in my view, this could be an opportunity to create a fairer and sustainable society.

That will only happen if the process is done with real empathy, connecting to what citizens are thinking and needing, and with a call for co-creation - it will lead to rebuilding trust between our government and our citizens, to collectively and creatively respond to the challenges we all face.

All of this needs to be held within an infrastructure that allows wide participation, education that fosters sustainable social innovation, provides funding, and generates win-win situations for all involved in social projects and businesses.



It is obvious that this requires a process of cultural, political and economic transformation; a profound shift in consciousness and a realisation that we are interconnected; and what we do to others, or to nature, in reality we do to ourselves. With this understanding we can see the challenges we are facing with different perspective; and that to act together, collectively, is a must. Being aware of everyone`s needs and acting as one we have the power to create the life we want.

The workshops with The Young Foundation and the Social Innovation Exchange helped me put the work we are doing with communities, where citizens are taking action and getting involved in their own development, into a framework that helps me see it in a wider context, and how it can have an impact globally.

It was also an opportunity to build community and to move forward together with a group of people that have the same interest, so we are more in tune and connected to each other.

It was interesting for me to see how, after the workshops there was an increasing interest, within public and private sectors, of how it is crucial for SI projects to involve communities; and of the need to measure social innovation projects with a different frame of mind than the one we have been using in the past. It was obvious that “We can´t measure the new with the old”.

I think the existing social innovation structure could support the development and scaling of our project, and others projects, by:

- Finding mechanisms to effectively partner government with social innovators and social innovation projects;
- Creating linkages between the citizens, the state, academics, and NGOs;
- Focusing resources to develop social innovation projects, and good practices.

This reflection was written by Fabiola Fuentes who is Manager Director of Project Minguero, a replicable model for sustainability with a pilot project in Colombia that aims to support displaced and impoverished communities towards self-reliance and sustainability.



# 6. Emerging recommendations for strengthening Social Innovation in Colombia

There are common struggles which people working in this field face all over the world including finding ways to incentivise innovation, encouraging greater experimentation and developing better measuring tools to know what works.

It is possible to strengthen the social innovation in Colombia and globally.

Based on this collaboration, and from our wider experience of working in social innovation globally, we have highlighted just three ways that we believe actors in Colombia could work together to begin to enable social innovation to have wider and more effective impact on Colombian society.

## 6.1 Growing capacity and skills

As the process of social innovation is better understood, so is the acceptance that great ideas do not only come from the most creative people who have a moment of genius. Rather, there are a set of skills and capacities that can be learnt. A lack of this capacity (skills, resources for social innovation) is one part that is currently constraining effective innovation globally.

There is an increasingly shared understanding about what constitutes a rigorous and valid process to conceptualize, test, assess and scale potential solutions to social challenges and several practical tool kits, of different levels of engagement and intensity, are being developed around the world.



Above: Social Innovation in Practice illustration drawn during 'building momentum for social innovation in Colombia' event

Key examples include Innoweave<sup>28</sup> in Canada, which supports front line staff and practitioners; to the toolkit<sup>29</sup> being developed by Nesta in the UK and Rockefeller Foundation in the US, which brings together effective practical tools for development agencies and organisations who work in this field to use.

A concrete effort is needed to develop social innovation literacy for a variety of players at every stage of the innovation lifecycle; from developing ideas to growing what works. It is not that a range of tools isn't available, but there is a lack of channels for spreading them, and a lack of organisations around the world that are providing practical ways to experience them.

28 <http://www.innoweave.ca/>

29 <http://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/standby-rockefeller-nestas-social-innovation-toolkit>

Networks of stakeholders, investors and promoters of social innovation, as well as the innovators themselves, also need to understand this process better in order to more effectively support it. A forum or shared learning of how to innovate, with access to the tools that exist already, would be helpful.

## **6.2 Facilitating rapid learning and creating a shared intelligence**

In order for social innovation to achieve the impact that is necessary, social innovators need to pool their learning and coordinate their actions. Rapid learning from small experiments is required, and the resulting knowledge must then be spread widely and quickly across all levels and infrastructures. National and international policy makers risk developing under-informed policies without access to the collective intelligence of social innovation communities. Effective and real time lines of communication between grassroots innovators and policy makers are needed if social innovation is to be successfully deployed to address the major social challenges that the country is facing.

This learning will lead towards developing a common narrative and vision around specific issues to enable this. Institutions must work together to develop an overarching narrative and vision for social innovation; what it is, how it can best be enabled and supported, and what its impact can and should be is necessary.

An interwoven and inclusive community of people involved in social innovation, from from grassroots community initiatives to larger corporations within Colombia, should be developed.

## **6.3 Supporting and growing networks and learning beyond borders**

Networks are essential for learning and exchanging nationally, regionally and globally. They hold ecosystems together.

We live in a globalised world and it is now recognised that many of the solutions for our social problems lie outside country borders. It is as important to know how other countries are developing infrastructures to support social innovation in different contexts, as it is to know about the projects themselves. A global network is necessary to access the latest thinking, research, debates and discussions on this emerging field. Colombia must be part of a global support system for social innovators, which is based on the best available knowledge from practice and academia around the world.

Whilst having connections to what is happening across the globe is important for broadening horizons and expanding the field, social innovations are often time and place specific, as are resources. Local contexts and culture are important, and what is innovative in Asia may not be in Latin America. Regional networks therefore play a key role in ensuring local resources, skills, techniques, tools, information and knowledge are shared; and best and worst practice are effectively accessed and shared within a geographical region.

Within a country context, networks are essential tools for learning and exchange; and for creating the shared intelligence described above. It is important to engage in existing networks, which are already playing a critical role in convening communities.



# Appendix

## List of workshops participants organisations and institutions

### Bogotá

Exxon Mobil, ANSPE, Colombia para el future, Fundación Bolívar Davivienda, SENA - FONDO EMPRENDER, Deloitte, Corporación Somos Más, Fundación Telefónica, Ecovivir, Observatorio Colombiano de Ciencia y Tecnología, Fundación Telefónica Colombia, Instituto de Altos Estudios para la Gestión Pública, Departamento para la Prosperidad Social, AYP, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Corporación Kairos, CERREJON, Fundación un Litro de Luz Colombia, ALPINA (2), Fundación Acesco, Fundación Juligon, UNIVERSIDAD EAN, E-Kulki, PCIS - Uniminuto, Compartamos con Colombia Filantropía Transformadora, DNP, Independiente - Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Programa Presidencial Colombia Joven, SENA, Architecture for Humanity Bogota, Ahmsa Colombia, Equion, Independiente, U. Sabama (2), Creative lab, MINTIC, Universidad de Los Andes, Acesco Alianzas por Colombia, La Arenera, Impact Hub, Independiente, Fundación Diego y Lia, Buitrago (2), Rubikey sas, Qualnob sas.

### Medellín

Microempresas de Colombia, RUTA N (4), Medellín Ciudad Inteligente, Comfama, Fundación Corona Corpoemprende, Católica del Norte, Universidad de Medellín, Universidad EAFIT, Mopa Mopa, Fundación Mi Sangre, Corporación Makaia, Comfenalco Antioquia, Fundación NUTRIAMOR, Independiente, Celsia S.A., E.S.P., Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano, Parque explora (3), El Techo, Fundación Diego Echavarría Misas, centro Cultural y Educativo, Secretaría de las Mujeres, Gobernación de Antioquia, Corpoemprende, Microempresas de Colombia, Fundación Diego Echavarría Misas, Itm, Fundación Familia, Medellín Ciudad Inteligente (2), Fundación mi Sangre (2), to design to, DECORACIONES PEL, árbol de manzanas, i+I, Gobernación de Antioquia, Bancolombia (2), ANSPE CIS, ACI, Comfenalco Antioquia, Uniminuto.

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