



LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO ENGINEER INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION: HOW TO EFFECT A SUSTAINED GLOBAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The present paper analyses how the local legal systems can be used to enhance the process of institutional innovation that, in turn, makes the regulatory systems evolve in response to the changing social and economic demands.

METHODOLOGY: The doctrinal approach to legal research is used, supported by comparative analysis of national and regional legal tools.

FINDINGS: The research shows that legal structures should be flexible and responsive so that the institutions can be innovative whereas inflexible systems are barriers to adaptability. The most important enablers are well-defined governance systems, accountability measures, and the conformity with international best practices.

ORIGINALITY: The study is part of the sparse research literature that links legal reform with institutional innovation with respect to the role of domestic legal systems in promoting sustainable development.

CONCLUSIONS: The law should be re-engineered to ensure that balancing between stability and flexibility is achieved, and an environment that promotes innovation and institutional development is created.

KEYWORDS: Governance; Institutional Innovation; Legal Frameworks; Reform; Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Local legal frameworks are a key component for institutional innovation. By adapting or creating new institutions, they help organisations and societies respond flexibly and effectively to sudden and extraordinary changes or shocks. They therefore serve as a catalyst to hasten global change.

Local legal frameworks are defined as the legal rules, policies, or practices that any organisation or society creates and utilises at a local level. Like the city or regional level, the locality can be generalised according to particular demands. Successful examples of local legal frameworks include Open Commons Consortium, Kista Science City; Compagnia di San Paolo, Environment Park, and Sharing City U.S. (Odei, 2024). However, the way local innovation generates and sustains global change has not yet been clarified.

Local legal frameworks enable the engineering of institutional innovation when adopting suitable institutions for the environment, which can motivate organisations and societies to continue the practice. Nevertheless, this explanation still remains insufficient for realising sustained change (Cinar and Benneworth, 2021). Engineering institutional innovation requires a deeper understanding of local legal frameworks in supporting the engineering of global change.



UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION

Understanding institutional innovation is crucial for adapting organisations and societies to accelerated rates of change. Dubbed “the new normal”, this phenomenon coalesces various theories and practices that guide stakeholders in enhancing the effectiveness and supportiveness of their institutions (AlMalki and Durugbo, 2023). Defined as the recombination of existing institutional arrangements in response to higher-order goals, it plays a central role in governing, policy-making, and social identity. Distinct from ordinary “novelty and utility”, institutional innovation is also “legitimate, credible and appropriate” innovation that has garnered considerable attention across sectors such as healthcare and manufacturing (Bradley *et al.*, 2021). Its benefits include reducing uncertainty, co-ordinating knowledge, mediating conflict, and providing incentives. The literature identifies three principal perspectives: induced institutional innovation, driven by resource imbalances and institutional constraints; continuous institutional innovation, propelled by rapid technological advances that enhance governance; and collective institutional innovation, rooted in social movements and field-dependent exchanges among actors.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Institutions evolve. They become relevant to organisations and societies if they enable more effective responses to new challenges or obstacles. Differences between institutions can be cast as differences in their characteristics and, in particular, in their constraints on and enablement of associated organisational arrangements (Abimbola and Liu, 2022). Institutional innovation, then, is the invention, design, and implementation of new institutions to induce or support the creation and uptake of novel organisational arrangements, or vice versa, thereby enabling and constraining more effective collective action.

Where others have emphasised the role of multi-stakeholder networks in institutional innovation, it is concluded that the legal system is an overlooked factor. Local legal frameworks contain institutions, and there is empirical evidence over a century and across countries, sectors, and technologies that (1) linked local institutional innovations can mount the co-ordinated and sustained global change that more loosely coupled networks cannot; and (2) legal frameworks define the boundary conditions and constraints within which multi-stakeholder networks operate (Reypens *et al.*, 2021). Local legal frameworks therefore constitute a promising boundary mechanism to leverage institutional innovation for sustained global change.

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Case Studies of Successful Frameworks

Local legal frameworks currently shape access and control, facilitating or constraining activities. The operational environment, grounded in local legal rules, makes sense of the rules under which parties operate. Due to cognitive gaps, individuals often polarise their views, debating based on their personal logic rather than the logic of the operating environment (Abimbola and Liu, 2022). During transition periods, local governments frequently enhance the relevance of constitutional 'regime types' as frameworks for tertiary institutions, which exert considerable influence within society.

Several case studies illustrate the varied effectiveness of specific legal institutions and local and provincial governments in driving sustainable global change. In one scenario, a local legal framework aimed at increasing education accessibility led to heightened public sector concerns. Another instance involved institutional changes wrought by varied legal frameworks across regions with similar demographics and economic indicators, resulting in improved service delivery. When reforms did not reduce disaster risks, the underlying local legal framework limiting the scale of change was identified (Cvetković *et al.*, 2021). The extent of change achievable at the global scale appeared restricted by multiple local legal frameworks. In some cases, the challenge is not creating an innovative local legal framework but establishing a mechanism through which a viable framework can be introduced locally, thereby catalysing sustainable global institutional innovation (Vargas and Cooper, 2024).

GLOBAL CHANGE DYNAMICS

Although numerous analyses have examined global change, a consensus on its meaning remains elusive (Myint, 2011). As a reference point, global change denotes fundamental alterations in global structures and processes that can be initiated from various sources, including local-level innovations. Institutional and policy innovations introduced within local jurisdictions, if effective and adaptable, can influence global change patterns upon wider adoption.

Conceptualising Global Change

Global change has reconfigured institutions at every level of human governance, preempting new rules for human interaction. This punctuated the second industrial revolution and continues into a new epoch of globalisation and institutional innovation. It imposes four consequences on institutional architectures: institutional change, diversity and complexity, compatibility, and robustness (Abbott and Faude, 2022).



Institutional change can take the form of adaptation, transformation, hybridisation, and scale shifts. Hybridisation breeds institutions that evolve into new forms while retaining and maintaining core characteristics (Salgotra and Chauhan, 2023). For example, hybrid cuisines combine aspects of classical traditions and ethnic or indigenous ones, as in teriyaki pizza, Caesar salad, chili crab, and Por-Ba-Rha rice from the former Siam; the musical genre flamenco fuses cultures from Asia Minor, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula alongside the Roma gypsies; and the transition to automotive power has encountered the rise of hybrid vehicles that operate on both a conventional internal combustion engine and an electric battery.

Institutional architectures in environmental governance similarly reflect the hybridisation process from the 1870s to the early 21st century. The original Rhine river basin framework has been retained instead of replaced, while new challenges have been accommodated through concerted reform (Myint, 2011).

Mechanisms of Change

As noted earlier regarding the provision of local legal frameworks, institutional change encompasses a better explanation about the wider mechanisms of change (cf. Section 4.1). These mechanisms become significant regulatory levers only if understood with adequate precision. The central aim remains advancing the design of solutions and emphasising how local legal frameworks serve as an effective catalyst of institutional innovation (Abimbola and Liu, 2022).

Innovation in the context of institutions can be conceptualised as a process of change in their fundamental nature, an evolution triggered either by the application of a distinctive design or by a set of circumstances that induces such change. Provided the institutional innovation permeates successfully, the design becomes a persistent feature of the society.

INTERPLAY BETWEEN LOCAL AND GLOBAL

Local institutional innovations migrate into other locales. In turn, global forces give rise to institutions and organisations that operate at the global level (Feldman, 2005). Local innovations thus sometimes affect global institutional innovation, yet engagement in global systems concurrently increases the difficulty of effecting local institutional innovation. On the one hand, globalisation has created an environment that spreads ideas, resources, and people broadly; innovations thereby hold the potential to create a significant impact on a large scale. On the other hand, innovation within local legal frameworks, many of which remain loosely governed by global arrangements, has encountered increasing



implementation challenges. Factors in this regard include the enormous number of jurisdictions involved (which far surpasses the case with regard to local innovation that involves only a few), the heterogeneity of those jurisdictions, the nature of the global regulatory infrastructure, and the additional norms that govern global operations. Global systems consequently display modes of behaviour “far more intractable than a complex local system” (Mergel, 2021).

Local Innovations Impacting Global Systems

To illustrate this, where courts have reinterpreted existing principles in new ways to challenge the dominance of incumbent firms, such as the Microsoft case. This response to the innovation of multinational platform-based business models demonstrates how local legal frameworks can become a source of institutional innovation. However, the challenge remains to develop principles and approaches that allow such local innovation to sustain global change. While local frameworks can serve as catalysts, they often struggle to effect widespread change. A framework developed within the EU may not be adopted across Asia or the USA. Despite their adaptability and agility, local frameworks are not destined to become global innovators, perhaps due to their limited capacity to permeate wider systems. Successful institutional innovators at a global scale should be those with the ability to replicate globally. Local frameworks’ very local character restricts their scalability (Odei, 2024).

Challenges of Scaling Local Innovations

Local innovations often result in unsystematic changes that do not affect global systems and provoke unco-ordinated, unaligned change halting the emergence of a sustained new order. Even when institutions are configured to enable either local or global change, barriers to global institutional innovation persist. Current regulatory frameworks, for example, impede the scalability of general purpose technologies (GPTs) and the consequent institutional innovations they have already produced (Abimbola and Liu, 2022). Institutional innovation framed as the creative design of regulatory and legal arrangements directly addresses these barriers. Local legal frameworks, already deployed extensively with notable success, offer an effective means to initiate local change towards a sustained new order on a global scale (Chaminade *et al.*, 2009). Once established and operational, these frameworks provide a foundation for orchestrating and sustaining global change. Successfully leveraging local legal frameworks thus represents a promising approach for advancing institutional innovation and achieving enduring transformation at the global level.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In addition to the demand for scaling-up local innovations to amplify their impact on global systems, legal frameworks must themselves be revised, within and across jurisdictions, to support institutional innovation. Governance structures that facilitate distributed and adaptive policy-making stand out as particularly effective, provided they are also embedded within broader systems of regulatory alignment (Gregersen and Johnson, 2009). A policy-maker's perspective on institutional innovation originates from a position of interest and influence within existing rules and routines; as such, it must balance predictability with responsiveness to guidance from these durable structures.

Policy-makers need to reflect on three pivotal questions:

- Why is institutional innovation necessary in the first place?
- What types of reform are feasible under prevailing constraints?
- Which policy instruments are most likely to promote sustained, globally scaling-out change?



Best Practices for Policy-makers

Local legal frameworks represent a critical dimension of a society's legal system and constitute one of the most common means of engineering institutional innovation to trigger sustained global change. GNU/Linux illustrates this role: local legal frameworks provide a conducive environment in which institutions can experiment and evolve, with surviving



designs diffusing elsewhere to drive sustained global change. Today, societies view local legal frameworks as the primary means for crafting institutional innovation and nurturing transformation across multiple contexts, ranging from local communities to the world as a whole (Plantinga, 2021).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Legal innovation at the local level demands the engagement of significant stakeholders in the design and application of new legal frameworks, structures, and processes. These stakeholders may constitute a small group of unlikely collaborators or a large network of concerned parties who, when brought together and aligned, help to drive a process of sustained global change (Wachi, 2016).

Identifying Key Stakeholders

At the core of policy analysis lies a struggle with the form that legal innovation ultimately assumes, at least in the nanocosm of the law of nanotechnology, service, technology, or general business. At the latency phase of these growing legal landscapes, stakeholders can be counted on one hand. However, as the discourses on technology and capitalism accelerate, the roster of stakeholders burgeons, echoing the recent pandemic that not only killed many and gravely affected even more, but also illustrated the interplay between infection, capital, innovation, government, healthcare, international competition, co-operation, and more (Midttun, 2022). No policy is formulated in a vacuum, nor can institutional innovation be sustained without the support of a network that includes all necessary stakeholder groups.

Current stakeholders in the field work at the intersection of technology and capital, even if the focus falls more heavily on one or the other, as reflected in linked case studies. Stakeholder analysis seeks to capture both the current composition and the desired direction for long-term planning (Attah *et al.*, 2024). An overview of selected stakeholders sheds light on the operational rationale and practice of innovation for institutional innovation and establishes foundations for a long-term framework enabling such innovation. Research questions arise, including: Who is innovating the law? Who else might do so? Who approves or disapproves such developments? Who profits or loses from accelerating change? Finally, who supports or undermines the goal of sustained institutional innovation?



Building Collaborative Networks

Given the importance of appropriate legal mechanisms in enabling innovation, the process of institutional innovation must involve the identification of those frameworks that remain pertinent. Subsequently, it is necessary to outline a series of propositions that underscore the crucial role of local legal frameworks in all engineering endeavours aimed at fostering sustained global change. In this context, 'local' denotes institutions that enjoy exclusive jurisdiction within their respective regions and/or communities (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2025). Designed to facilitate coherent systems of organisation, co-ordination, control, integration, and direction within extensive collections of agents, legal frameworks emerge as paramount tools for transmuting innovative concepts into practical applications. This critical function is exemplified by historical instances such as the establishment of IBM's standard, the implementation of concurrent engineering practices by Raychem Industrial (now TE Connectivity), and the development of Toyota's parallel innovation system. These cases illuminate the vital role local legal frameworks play in the engineering of sustained global change as they provide essential support for innovation. A subsequent section identifies the primary agents invested in the ongoing project of legal innovation and prescribes strategic principles for fostering collaborative networks capable of sustaining enduring global transformation (Gregersen and Johnson, 2009).

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Technology distinctly functions as an enabling catalyst for change and a vital input for re-engineering institutional innovation. Its accompanying case studies, vocational tops with embedded RFID chips, collaborative platforms such as Wikipedia, open-data smart-cities initiatives, and multi-jurisdictional patenting strategies, exemplify this assertion. When local stakeholders harness technology to re-engineer institutional frameworks with an eye towards sustained global change, they not only adopt a potent accelerant that expedites development cycles and scales impact but also join a progressive vanguard shaping the contours of global institutional evolution (Gregersen and Johnson, 2009; Weckowska *et al.*, 2018).

Leveraging Technology for Change

Efficient objectives, timely decisions, and rapid reactions are the bestselling attributes of institutional innovation (Leibowitz *et al.*, 2015). Governments, corporations, and non-profits constantly seek to improve their qualities through new models, advanced technologies, revised rules, and innovative organisational formats. However, many





organisations are simply incapable of a breakthrough despite the measurable benefits associated with sustained global change. As the problem lies beyond the hundreds of well-documented cases, the key is an overall technology to engineer sustained change while enabling seemingly inconsistent scores for artificial systems. The strategy is to use local legal frameworks and explore how local frameworks could be transformed worldwide through the right configurations.

The challenge draws on two fundamentals: institutional innovation and global change, these describe the productive power of social technologies that govern the velocity of change. Human organisations are social ecosystems for collective learning, capable of evolving radically in search of efficiency. To capture the full scale of institutional innovation, the measure revolves around exogenous transformations becoming pervasive and unleashing momentum for sustained change. Technology follows the movement by streamlining continuous innovations while creating new opportunities for further institutional breakthroughs (Chen *et al.*, 2025). Case studies include Facebook's social-learning strategies, the United Kingdom's digital governance strategy, and the United States' competition policy.

Case Studies on Technological Innovations

Institutional innovation can be accelerated through positive local feedback. Local legal frameworks can create the enabling environments required to make qualitative changes to institutions, thereby deepening, rejuvenating, or extending institutional innovation internationally and globally.

Technological innovations provide a poignant illustration of institutional innovation. Kenya's Financial Sector Deepening Trust (FSD) has organised the local restructuring of Kenya's law and regulation to address fundamental technological trends such as the ubiquity of the mobile phone, the power of the mobile identity system, the growth of mobile money, and the entrepreneurship of third-party mobile application developers (Williams and Woodson, 2012).

Through such initiatives, the technological revolution enables a new model for institutional innovation. The primary inequality with greater consequences for Kenya is access to finance and, as such, the Kenyan government has put financial services for low-income people, directed by the FSD Trust, at the top of its priority list for institutional innovation. New institutional arrangements, processes, strategies, and beliefs must enable further qualitative changes such that the revolution can progress internationally on a scale far larger than Kenya in order to maintain the pace of the technological revolution.



Local feedback may even be positive enough that institutional innovation must be engineered at the local level without an international framework in order to address the barriers that prevent global diffusion, because when the relevance of local frameworks declines at the local level, the relevance of financial institutions and governments (FIGs) will also decline. The FSD Trust relies on local legal and governmental frameworks to enable qualitative changes to a technology that is capable of skipping the necessity of a mechanical device (a computer) to operate as a smart currency because of extraordinary system architectures that reduce the cost of managing cash and exchanges to nearly zero (Butt, 2023). Kenya has thus re-engineered its financial-system operations through the local shaping of formal, informal, semiformal, traditional, and customary institutional mechanisms in order to effect sustained global change. If Kenya had chosen a technology that required a computer or a mechanical cash register to operate, then the local local-legal-framework, FIG approach, would not have been effective.

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BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Barriers to institutional innovation are common, and many ideas never materialise (Gregersen and Johnson, 2009). Institutional conditions such as weak enforcement and low quality of property rights can constrain firm innovation (Odei, 2024). Societies, particularly developing countries, often rely on a mix of outdated institutions. A shift towards established capitalist-state institutions is typically insufficient, and detailed understanding of historical economy-specific institutional sets is essential. Consequently, ongoing mediation between indigenous and external institutional types must continue through processes of institutional innovation. Public agencies are understood as stable and embedded, shifting only gradually through the pressures of mimicry and regulation (Leibowitz *et al.*, 2015).

Identifying Common Barriers

Innovation ecosystems have become a central aspect of economic advancement. Institutional environments hold critical influence as both a constraint and an enabler for progress. Thorough assessment of institutional barriers can be achieved by analysing them through the lens of the organisational field in which they occur (Almpanopoulou *et al.*, 2019). Such fields collectively define an acknowledged domain of institutional life. Within this perspective, the precise identification of barriers can be reached at the level where innovation ecosystems are intended to develop.



Additionally, competition from informal firms introduces obstacles that diminish incentives for innovation activities. Informal market players exert pressure on formal enterprises by limiting the potential benefits linked to innovative efforts (Odei, 2024). The judicial sphere simultaneously functions as a dual agent, both permitting and hindering progress. By defining the boundaries of economic operations and endorsing business undertakings, the legal framework shapes the regulatory structure and operational conditions affecting firms.

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

A considerable body of work addresses the vanguard roles of local legal frameworks in spurring institutional innovation. For local innovations to influence global change, new strategies must circumvent persistent cultural and system-level barriers, as discussed previously.

While local legal frameworks have repeatedly generated institutional innovation at local and national levels in recent decades, the ensuing momentum frequently dissipates before pioneering ideas penetrate the global domain: narrow legal mandates or limited jurisdiction compromise avenues for broader dissemination. Complementary sectors, such as industry and administration, often overlook promising paradigms due to fragmented communication. An emerging legal orthodoxy dismisses radical innovation as untenable. The prevailing perception remains that institutional innovation constitutes a discretionary endeavour vulnerable to deterioration without sustained endorsement (Sattiraju *et al.*, 2023).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Further exploration of anticipated evolutions and emergent trends within legal and institutional domains will allow for the anticipation of future challenges to sustained worldwide adoption of novel structures. Outlining these dimensions can provide valuable trajectories for ensuing research and underline the pressing imperatives for ongoing transformation to uphold a resilient, scalable architecture for broad adoption (AlMalki and Durugbo, 2023).



Emerging Trends in Institutional Innovation

Institutional innovation relates to novelty, newness, or change in an institutional context, but it involves more than ideas, inventions, and creativity. It encompasses improvements from incremental to radical, and it concerns novelty and utility as well as legitimacy, generality, and value (AlMalki and Durugbo, 2023). Emerging trends concern local legal frameworks to engineer institutional innovation for sustained global change.

Local legal frameworks determine whether institutional innovation can be initiated, executed, and managed. Innovation divides into the creation of a new idea and the implementation of an existing one. Case illustrations highlight accreditation schemes that induce institutional innovation to accelerate transformations.

Global-change refers to collectively faced challenges whose scale and urgency require co-ordinated responses. Specifications define globally oriented contributions to sustainability transitions. Global-transformation refers to non-linear, abrupt, and deeply disruptive transitions that spread globally and describe a fundamental reconfiguration (Goniewicz *et al.*, 2025).

Local innovations significantly influence global systems, but propagation is difficult. Additional mechanisms increase the effectiveness of positive feedback and attenuate negative feedback, but many stop spreading. Focusing on institutional innovation clarifies the nature of the replacement problem; theoretical support, structural features, and external factors underpin the displacement process (Zastempowski, 2023).

Policy instruments are intermediate determinants that mediate institutional change, and supportive locations limit barriers to adoption. An additional issue concerns policy-making, with legislation and programmes reflecting effective enactment. Priority-setting and responsiveness can increase the degree to which policy benefits spread innovation.

Stakeholders such as regulators, operators, and citizens play a significant role, and policies can build communities of interest that initiate and reinforce institutional innovation. Co-ordinated development combines community building with designing resilient structures that preserve local interest and achieve sustained global change.

Technology is an effective catalyst, and efforts within a technology centre provide insights into the acceleration process. Case study approaches indicate that institutional innovation is hierarchically structured so that sub-ordinate initiatives align with mandated priorities.

Effectiveness depends on the strength of the innovation, and quantitative measures facilitate implementation. Longitudinal studies analyse major potential for application, while interview surveys provide additional insights into shaping sources and locations.





Anticipating Future Challenges

Engineering institutional change to sustain successful innovation that drives wider, global effects largely depends on building local legal frameworks that anticipate and address future challenges. Such frameworks harness the capacity of law to gather and amplify enormous amounts of self-reinforcing energy that can accelerate the process of institutional innovation on a consistent basis. The accumulation of stories that feature dramatic figures charts the development of new patterns of behaviour. Although the resultant change is pervasive, only a fraction may be visible. Since institutional settings operate as complex systems, anticipation becomes important.

The capability to anticipate change increases the capacity to take advantage of it. If periods of the greatest opportunity are to be exploited on a consistent basis, then structures designed to enable anticipation need to be implemented and linked in a cross-jurisdictional cycle of co-ordinated readiness. The strategic targets within local frameworks need preparation, not post-hoc justification. Recent action illustrates how local legal capacity, which encourages innovation, can be targeted in bigger systems to close the gap between readiness and revolutionary breakout.

CONCLUSIONS

The anticipation of rapid, sustained global transformation through enhanced institutional innovation motivates the overall goal of engineering such innovation at the scale of the local legal frameworks that determine the viability of alternative operating models. This indicates the urgency of focusing attention on such frameworks, including the legal constraints faced by a variety of organisations and individuals as they work to implement a new environment of more appropriate, trans-local operating models yielding consistently better solutions. Innovation at the scale of laws and regulations, and their practice and enforcement, thus represents a crucial area of concern. Indeed, many of the contemporary efforts with potentially transformative institutional innovation are confined either by their location or by their underlying legal infrastructure, highlighting the critical role of legal reform as a precondition for achieving sustained global institutional innovation (Odei, 2024).



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