Innovating through Competition

Root Change's unique contestation models facilitate the discovery and promotion of innovative and powerful responses to major development challenges. Competitions have turned traditional development models upside-down by outsourcing innovation to the masses. Root Change's model takes this approach one step further by fostering deep participation in the judging process, allowing continuous input on a global scale to surface and support innovative ideas and effective models for significant change.

Competitions provide a transparent platform for democratic exchange and discovery, which is particularly important in the development field. By asking a broader community to assist in judging candidates, we create an open, questioning, and collaborative environment where divergent fields, cultures, and disciplines can meet and *innovation* can seed and flourish. Additionally, competitions are a simple and effective way of discovering what's happening in your sector.

Root Change provides two complementary services that facilitate innovation through contestation and participation:

- Our **Innovation Marketplace** methodology provides a forum where participants come together to present their best ideas for responding to a particular development challenge. Modeled on the World Bank's Development Marketplace, participants are given space to present their ideas each other as well as to a large group of visiting stakeholders. The interactions in the marketplace, and at concurrent discussion sessions, represent an opportunity to seek information, share ideas, pose questions, and network. At the end of the two day event, visitors to the marketplace vote on the most promising innovations, which are awarded small grants for scale-up.

  Our team's most recent Innovation Marketplace in Zambia brought together close to 30 NGOs all responding to HIV/AIDS in the country. Over 200 visitors, from government, civil society and the private sector, attended the two day marketplace which showcased innovative ideas from across the spectrum HIV/AIDS response.

- Our **Online Idea Markets** employ Web 2.0 technology to take contestation models to the global level**.** Powered by Inkling Markets™, Root Change's web-based idea markets encourage social entrepreneurs to post their solutions to development challenges. Over the course of a market, relevant stakeholders are invited to review the posted solutions, pose questions to entrepreneurs, and buy or sell shares in ideas that they believe have the greatest potential for impact.

  Root Change's online idea markets are highly customizable and can be used either internally, within an organization, or with a broad external audience. We have experience offering both types of market, and can assist you to get the maximum benefit from your own idea markets. Root Change maintains an internal idea market website that we update frequently with new questions and challenges (www.rootchange.inklingmarkets.com).

In August 2007, Our team partnered with GlobalGiving, in running an open competition aimed at identifying promising grassroots organizations in developing countries. Twenty-two project leaders broadcast their successes and struggles to an audience of more than 700 people from 59 countries spanning 6 continents. This global panel of judges shared its knowledge, suggested ways participants could improve, and ultimately decided on which projects would best be able to utilize GlobalGiving's online platform to help fundraise for their work. The event was the first widespread application of prediction markets in the development community and a huge success—all of the projects, having shown significant engagement throughout the competition, were invited by GlobalGiving to post their projects and fundraise.

For more information on how you and your partner organizations can take advantage of Root Change's Innovation Marketplace and Online Idea Market services, please contact Jacob Gray at jgray@rootchange.org.