

Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

Social enterprises have emerged and are recognized as key actors in addressing many of the complex issues of the world. Social enterprises focus on creating benefits to society as a whole, rather than generating wealth for the owners of the enterprises. As drivers of positive social change, social enterprises support causes around poverty alleviation, equality, education, health, clean water, sanitation, the environment, and sustainable development, among others.

Central to social enterprise practice is innovation. Defined as introducing new ideas to products, services, processes, markets or systems, innovations are often viewed as the development of impactful, sustainable solutions to pre-existing challenges and problems in society. And in recent years, the social enterprise sector has paid increasing attention to the intersections between technological innovations and sustainable development.

When the platform was initially presented during the 3rd Social Enterprise and Leveraging (SEAL) Asia Conference co-convened with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in 2020, it featured technological and frugal innovations towards adoption and diffusion among social enterprises and other stakeholders in Asia.

In 2022, through the interest of the Association of Progressive Communications as a co-convener, building and strengthening community networks as social enterprises and creating and enabling ecosystem for such became the focus of the platform. ISEA and APC jointly organized a series of learning sessions on community networks: (1) Models of Community Networks: Bridging the Digital Divide and Enabling Last Mile Connectivity; (2) Community Networks: Issues, Challenges and Prospects; and (3) Bridging the Gap: Addressing Policy, Regulation and Governance of Community Networks. Resulting from these learning sessions, ISEA partners from Bangladesh, China and the Philippines expressed interest to pursue community networks linked to social enterprise and local economic development.

In 2023, Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development was formally launched at the 4th Social Enterprise and Leveraging (SEAL) Asia Conference at the United Nations Conference Center in Bangkok, Thailand. This was accredited as a pre-event to the 10th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in 2023.

Overall Concept and Objectives

The Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development seeks to gather social entrepreneurs, social enterprise resource institutions and other stakeholders who are interested in community networks and complementary connectivity initiatives. The platform aims to achieve four objectives:

1. To facilitate learning and exchange of experiences and best practices of community networks and complementary connectivity initiatives;

2. To facilitate cooperation among community networks, complementary connectivity initiatives, social enterprises and other key stakeholders, so that they can project their collective impact in harnessing and mobilizing technological innovations to achieve the SDGs;
3. To facilitate cooperation among community networks, complementary connectivity initiatives, social enterprises and other key stakeholders, so that they can collectively develop and advocate changes in government policies and programs which would encourage and support the community networks, complementary connectivity initiatives and technological innovations;
4. To facilitate cooperation among community networks, complementary connectivity initiatives, social enterprises and other key stakeholders, so that they can collectively attract and generate resources and support from the business sector, national agencies and intergovernmental agencies for the adoption and diffusion of technological innovations in the social enterprise ecosystem.

Outputs and Milestones

The **Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development** was envisioned to concretize collaboration in the following areas:

1. Building a learning community among social enterprises, community networks, resource institutions and other stakeholders to share experiences and best practices and to evolve models and benchmarks on the practice and advocacy of community networks for sustainable development;
2. Harnessing and projecting the collective impact of community networks in the region, in the process promoting models of community networks and complementary connectivity initiatives linked to social enterprise and local economic development towards building back fairer and contributing to the acceleration of the SDGs;
3. Developing and advocating changes in government policies and programs so that community networks and complementary connectivity initiatives linked to social enterprise and local economic development may be better supported towards mainstreaming them as solutions to bridge the digital divide; and,
4. Generating resources and support from the business sector, national agencies and intergovernmental bodies so that community networks and complementary connectivity initiatives linked to social enterprise and local economic development can be supported towards scaling up, sustainability and mainstreaming.