This document provides an overview of the Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation Policy Forum. It contains an account of the forum with highlights from the policy exchanges, examples of good practices, key opportunity areas identified, and a collection of requests for support to promote inclusive innovation in policymaking.

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About the Policy Forum

Since 2018, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has been supporting governments across the Asia-Pacific region to formulate more inclusive technology and innovation policies.

ESCAP’s new report on *Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation: Formulating technology and innovation policies that leave no one behind*, explores how inclusivity was addressed in several innovation policies: national science, technology, and innovation (STI) policies; digital economy strategies; initiatives supporting grassroots innovations; and policies promoting inclusive business. The analysis provided in the report was based on the experience of ESCAP and on the insights of stakeholders engaged in these policy formulation processes.

The *Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation Policy Forum*, held from November to December 2021, gathered policymakers, experts and practitioners in digital transformation, inclusive innovation, and governance to explore best practices, remaining challenges, and further opportunities to promote inclusive technology and innovation policies.

Purpose

The forum’s purpose was to share and explore possible technology and innovation policies that champion inclusion and offer pathways that benefit society, the environment, and the bottom of the economic pyramid. The forum explored technology and innovation policies that have more inclusive outcomes through a series of policy discussions. The discussions focused on good practices and lessons learned in promoting inclusive technology and innovation policies and opportunities to expand the frontiers of inclusive innovation.

To help support governments formulate more inclusive technology and innovation policies, the forum centred on four themes:

1. **Inclusive science, technology, and innovation policies.** These policies have specific social and environmental goals without neglecting economic growth. They aim to provide benefits for all, enable broader participation in the STI policymaking process and innovation activities, and strive for broader governance of STI.
2. **Inclusive digital economy policies.** These policies seek to ensure that citizens partake in the digital transformation of economies.
3. **The promotion of grassroots innovation.** In other words, strategies to identify, disseminate and scale up innovative solutions developed by innovators to address local problems.
4. **Promoting inclusive business models.** That is, promoting business innovation to deliver solutions for low-income people.
Program

Two open policy discussions bookended the forum and provided an opportunity for representatives from governments, development agencies, and civil society organizations to share key insights on promoting inclusive technology and innovation policies:

- *Inclusion: The Next Frontier of Innovation*, presented good practices and lessons learnt in promoting inclusive technology and innovation policies based on the published ESCAP report on Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation.¹
- *Expanding Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation: The Way Forward*, presented opportunities, key recommendations and suggestions for promoting inclusive technology and innovation policies based on the four policy exchanges.

In between the open policy discussions were four focused policy exchanges, where government officials and select stakeholders (by invitation only) had the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, and knowledge of approaches to promote inclusive technology and innovation policies.

These policy exchanges focused on four areas:

- *Designing inclusive national digital strategies.*
- *Introducing an inclusive lens in the formulation of national science, technology and innovation policies.*
- *Supporting policies that promote grassroots innovations.*
- *Promoting inclusive business.*

Participation

The policy forum was attended by senior policymakers (including Ministers and Secretaries of State, Director Generals and CEOs of government agencies) and representatives from the private sector, civil society, and academia.

- 412 participants from 55 countries²
- 27 Speakers
- 12 breakout discussions
- 6 virtual sessions

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² Australia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Ecuador, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Laos, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Saint Lucia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, and Zambia.
Chart 1. Participants count by country

![Map showing participants count by country](image1)

Chart 2. Gender representation per session

![Bar chart showing gender representation per session](image2)

Note: Data is only available for the four focused policy exchanges. The two policy discussions were open to the public and no data was gathered from the participants.
Strategic Opportunities for Inclusive Innovation

Five opportunity areas were identified to support inclusive innovation at the policy level. These opportunities surfaced from the policy exchanges and are anchored on four key dimensions to pursuing inclusive innovation (aiming for social and environmental goals alongside economic goals; promoting participatory policy processes; enabling different groups and sectors to conduct innovation activities; broadening engagement in policy decisions and evaluation).

1. **Bringing together multiple existing policies for greater impact**
   Converging existing policies and creating referral pathways for inclusive innovators would play a significant role in supporting inclusive innovation. These would lead to lower duplication of policy instruments, effective work in resource-constrained environments, and amplified impacts for inclusive innovation policies.

2. **Adopting decentralized, community-centred approaches to inclusive innovation policy**
   Inclusive innovation policies, as other policies, normally follow a top-down model, but inclusive innovation is highly contextual, and interventions must be adapted to local environments. Policy processes and instruments need to be flexible and adaptable to different circumstances and encourage community-centred and decentralized approaches.

3. **Uncovering channels to reach people at the margins**
   Policymakers have adopted a variety of approaches to reach the people they are looking to include, from using social media to working with community-based universities to making use of government centres in rural areas.

4. **Leveraging the private sector for inclusive innovation**
   The private sector plays an important role in determining research and development agendas, and what gets scaled up. They have also been helping finance and incubate inclusive innovations. Inclusive innovators and policymakers should pose considerable interest in finding models of engaging the private sector.

5. **Innovating finance mechanisms**
   Sustainable and self-reliant finance mechanisms must be in place to guarantee the resources needed to implement and enact initiatives in policymaking. Larger corporations should be involved by taking an impact investor role in creating a vibrant impact investment ecosystem.
Policy Insights and Key Messages

During the two open policy discussions and four focused policy exchange sessions, participants had the opportunity to network and exchange experiences, ideas, and approaches on how to promote inclusive innovation policies in their own countries. Keynote speakers and panellists provided country-specific insights and case studies. Facilitated breakout group discussions enabled conversations to dig deeper on remaining inclusion gaps and approaches to address such gaps.

01 Nov 2021 - Inclusion: The Next Frontier to Innovation

The opening session noted the urgency to develop more inclusive science, technology, and innovation policies. The discussion explored good practices and lessons learnt in promoting inclusive technology and innovation policies with governments, development agencies, and civil society organizations.

Opening Session Leads and Speakers

"Innovation can increase the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of efforts to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It has been a major source of dynamism in the Asia Pacific region, contributing to economic growth and helping lift millions of people out of poverty."

_Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division of United Nations ESCAP_

Key Messages

1. Harnessing technologies and innovation to leave no one behind requires integrating an inclusive lens in the design of technology and innovation policies. For instance, technology companies and online platforms have seen rising stock prices in the past two years. However, due to limited access to the internet and quality online education, 463 million students continue to be out of school due to closures of school campuses. This calls forth key players
to integrate inclusion at the core of technology and innovation policies to leave no one behind.

2. **Everyone, including persons with disabilities, women, marginalized communities, and low-income groups, can contribute creative solutions, particularly to address their own local challenges.** Everyone has the potential to drive positive change and impact, and should be provided with the opportunity to innovate. The present challenge is to include them in regional and national discussions on innovation to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are incorporated.

3. **Inclusive technology and innovation policies** are concerned not only with economic growth, but also with supporting social development and environmental sustainability. Such policies consider the impact of innovations on a wide range of people, sectors, and places, including minorities and excluded groups.

**Examples of good practices**

- In **Bangladesh** and **Mongolia**, Digital Pathways at Oxford and ESCAP supported the design of digital economy strategies that support inclusive growth. Introducing an inclusive lens resulted in policies with a greater focus on and support for using digital platforms to connect those in the informal economy, to financial and social protection services, delivering last-mile digital connectivity and addressing gender disparities.

- In **Cambodia**, the government is encouraging the development of inclusive business models that address the needs of low-income populations. The Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation has developed a comprehensive strategy to support inclusive business enabling environment for Cambodia. This includes providing accreditation to inclusive business models, providing coaching to firms to develop inclusive business models, among others.

**Moving Forward**

It will be critical to develop better ways of anticipating and thinking about how new technologies and social processes might play out in different situations. That is, there is a need to anticipate how they might be exclusive, as well as inclusive, and how this should be considered in the design and implementation of policies.
03 Nov 2021 - Designing policies for inclusive digital economies

This first policy exchange emphasized the importance of introducing inclusive dimensions in the process of formulating digital economy strategies. It also identified challenges and opportunities that governments face in promoting these strategies.

Session 1 Leads and Speakers

"The world is becoming digital […] if you're not making a deliberate choice, design choice, policy choice to include the otherwise excluded, then they will be left out."

Anir Chowdhury, Policy Advisor, UNDP/Government of Bangladesh

Key Messages

Beyond just guaranteeing that policies and regulatory metrics and frameworks cover women and the youth, policymakers must consider the systemic challenges marginalized groups face when accessing digital innovations. Digitalization – of processes, for instance – can often create difficulties for excluded people. As one participant policymaker pointed out, “[The] pandemic actually showed us […] very stark examples of how we have excluded a lot of people because we did not pay attention. So, policy choices are changing to make deliberate decisions on inclusion.”

1. **Metrics and frameworks to measure and promote the inclusiveness of the digital economy are welcome but need refinement.** Standardized tools to measure digital inclusion, such as the UNCDF’s Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecard, are very valuable to provide guidance and remove subjectivity on promoting inclusion. Nevertheless, further information and interpretation would be needed to ensure that the indicators are relevant to various stakeholders in different countries.

2. **Data collection processes that inform digital inclusion policymaking need to be representative.** The fact that those excluded from the digital economy do not provide digital data must be considered to avoid widening the digital divide. Digital (real-time data from telecommunication groups and other data providers) and traditional (focus group
discussions and surveys) methods can complement each other to ensure inclusive data collection processes.

3. **An intersectoral approach to digital inclusion requires buy-in from all stakeholders.** This is especially true regarding incumbents who have benefited from the older, non-digital norms. To promote buy-in, stakeholders have used data and other analytics to build a case for why digital inclusion is a necessary step and have formed coalitions with various agencies.

**Examples of good practices**

- **Bangladesh** set up digital centres in rural areas and has developed a unique public-private partnership model operated by entrepreneurs connecting citizens to ICT services.³

- In the **Philippines**, the newly enacted Philippine Innovation Act mandates a whole-of-government approach to addressing the lack of access to digital technologies.⁴ This will enable the government to promote innovation from a broader perspective and enable solutions relevant to the local context.

- **Indonesia** has launched the Digital Talent Scholarship to increase productivity in the digital ecosystem, which aims to benefit 400,000 students per year, and the Digital Leadership Academy Program for those in senior positions in the public and private industries. Partnerships with different prestigious universities have been made to provide local leaders with access to training.⁵

**Moving forward**

A participatory and multi-stakeholder process in formulating an encompassing framework for digital inclusion would enhance the inclusive dimension of digital policies, increase representation from excluded sectors, and expand incentives for different agencies and stakeholders to engage.

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16 Nov 2021 - Formulating inclusive science, technology and innovation policies

The second policy exchange discussed how different countries are formulating inclusive science, technology, and innovation policies. It highlighted the various dimensions of inclusive STI policies and how to design for inclusion.

**Session 2 Leads and Speakers**

"We want to explore how governments across this region are formulating inclusive science, technology and innovation policies that go beyond seeking increases in productivity and economic growth [...] we want to make sure that we also see social benefits."

*Marta Pérez Cusó, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations ESCAP*

**Key Messages**

Formulating inclusive STI policies is essential to shift from a perspective that centres on economic gains to one that also aims to bring social and environmental benefits. Only inclusive innovation policy is good innovation policy as inclusiveness is critical for long-term economic and social development, promoting fairness and equality and broadening the talent base.

1. **Ensure inclusivity by institutionalizing multi-sectoral policymaking processes.** An inclusive STI policy starts by having an inclusive policymaking process, engaging women, indigenous groups, the youth, and other marginalized communities. It also includes a broader range of public organizations (from ministerial departments to local administration) as well as representatives from academia, grassroots innovators, social enterprises, local start-ups, civil society organizations, media, international development organizations, and the private sector.

2. **Bring innovation closer to the people.** There are many opportunities to bring innovation closer to the people – from building innovation hubs at provincial and regional levels, especially in poorer areas, to partnering with local and research-oriented universities, private
sector, and civil society organizations in building the capacities of local innovators. Promoting science, technology, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) in schools remains essential to harness the skills of future innovators. Traditional media and social media platforms can help build community awareness on innovative practices relevant to their communities.

3. **Accountability of the innovation ecosystem must be ensured through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.** To assure inclusivity, it is essential to track outcomes of innovation policies to ensure that the target communities and groups have reaped economic, social, and environmental gains from them. Moreover, establishing specific inclusion targets and indicators and regularly collecting and reporting disaggregated data is essential to measure inclusivity and enhance accountability.

**Examples of good practices**

- In the **Philippines**, the Philippine Innovation Act was approved in 2019 to harness innovation efforts to help the poor and marginalized, women, and to enable MSMEs to be part of the domestic and global supply chains. The Act also includes specific provisions to support the innovation of indigenous cultural communities, encouraging them to preserve and make sustainable use of traditional knowledge. One of the achievements of this law is the consolidation of innovation efforts of the government in one platform, the national innovation agenda, and sustainable plan.⁶

- In **Thailand**, the Social Innovation Driving Unit of the National Innovation Agency selects community-based and local-oriented provincial universities to partner on developing social innovation projects.⁷

**Moving forward**

To effectively promote inclusive technology and innovation, it is essential to ensure sustainable funding not just from the government budget but also from the private sector, including from corporations and impact investors. Hence, there is an opportunity to include impact investors and venture capitalists in future policy discussions on STI.

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17 Nov 2021 - Promoting grassroots innovation at the policy level

The third policy exchange focused on promoting grassroots innovation at the policy level. It presented experiences of promoting grassroots innovations in India, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It also explored how to support more inclusive processes and outcomes in this field.

Session 3 Leads and Speakers

"We must also demonstrate that even without help from policymakers, they [grassroots innovators] will have done something. [...] If they could get help from the government, they can do much more."

*Prof. Anil K. Gupta, Founder and Coordinator, Honey Bee Network*

Key Messages

Innovation policies must go beyond promoting entrepreneurship and start-ups – they should also encourage grassroots innovations and innovation in the public sector. Policymakers must understand grassroots innovations so that policies can give these initiatives an opportunity to create impact at the local and national levels.

1. **Bring grassroots innovations into mainstream discussions in national and global spaces to help link grassroots innovations to resources.** Developing a larger platform for existing grassroots innovators to share their projects may spark curiosity in others and help give grassroots innovators access to networks and resources.

2. **Grassroots innovations should be included in national innovation ecosystems to be sustainable.** Grassroots innovations operate with limited resources and are highly vulnerable to shocks. Ensuring linkages between these innovators and the formal innovation ecosystem would help increase support, resources, and recognition.

3. **Localized and community-based grassroots innovations should not be standardized.** Funding and support for grassroots innovators should respect the processes and
perspectives of grassroots innovators. For instance, they should not pressure grassroots innovators into developing high-quality standardized products, as these may not be relevant to address local needs with local resources.

Examples of good practices

- **India**'s Promoting Innovations in Individuals, Start-ups and MSMEs (PRISM) scheme seeks to support individuals to translate their ideas from concept to prototype no matter their level of literacy or knowledge of English. A multi-language database has also been created by the Honey Bee Network to showcase grassroots innovations.

- The **Philippines**' Department of Science and Technology has formulated the Grassroots Innovation for Inclusive Development (GRIND) Framework Plan 2019–2022 to promote grassroots innovations based on four pillars: learning, leveraging, linking and legitimizing. It aims to develop communities of practice that are resilient and agile in addressing economic and environmental stresses relying on their local resources.

- Supported by the Department of Science and Technology, **Malaysia** has drafted the Social Innovation Policy which aims to create larger spaces for community innovation centres. A new program has also been developed to identify and support dying arts.

Moving forward

Steps to appropriately recognize and position grassroots innovations within national innovation policies and innovation frameworks are required. This will enable the development of linkages between grassroots innovators and the formal innovation system and more consistent and coherent support for grassroots innovators. Innovation groups and policymakers could also look into opportunities for creating a country or global fund to further harness grassroots innovations' potential.

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29 Nov 2021 - Inclusive business: innovation to deliver solutions for low-income people

The final policy exchange explored how to promote inclusive businesses based on the experiences and mechanisms used by ASEAN countries. It specifically explored opportunities to build synergies among efforts that promote inclusive businesses, social enterprises, and impact investments.

Session 4 Leads and Speakers

"The toolbox for traditional economics is there. When we talk about the impact and social economy, in which inclusive business play a key role, it is not clear if we have yet the right tools"

Jonathan Wong, Chief, Technology and Innovation Section, United Nations ESCAP

Key Messages

The practice and principles of inclusive business are gaining recognition in many regions of the world. Governments and policymakers have begun to recognize the relevance of inclusive businesses in aiding post-pandemic recovery for low-income people. The present challenge, however, is in mainstreaming inclusive business models and situating them as a central element of the larger economic ecosystem.

1. **Secure government support in promoting inclusive business.** It is critical to garner the support of national policymakers and local policy implementers to promote inclusive businesses. A national strategy for promoting inclusive business should come along with the necessary funding support.

2. **Synergize existing policies on inclusive business promotion, SME development, and impact investment to scale up grassroots level initiatives for national adoption.** Support should be given both to the supply and demand sides of inclusive business. This may include developing a national strategy for inclusive business and guidelines for impact investing...
while connecting SMEs with impact investors. Working closely with impact investors will provide additional financial resources.

3. **Design suitable tools and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of inclusive business.** Policy toolkits can provide metrics and standards to measure the impacts of different inclusive business models or approaches. Standardized measurements provide reliable data and evidence on what is effective or not, which helps to inform policies and activities designed to promote inclusive business.

**Examples of good practices**

- **Viet Nam’s** Ministry of Planning and Investment conducted a national landscape study of inclusive business in Viet Nam. Based on this study and the Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN, Viet Nam has developed a program to promote sustainable businesses, which includes inclusive businesses.\(^{11}\) This programme will develop an inclusive business ecosystem through the accreditation of inclusive business, establishing a data platform, raising financial resources and investment, and providing training and coaching services, especially for SMEs.

- In **Sri Lanka**, Lanka Social Ventures is partnering with the British Council to provide training on promoting social enterprises to more than 400 government officials responsible for entrepreneurship development and support.

- Several **ASEAN member states** have conducted studies on the national landscape of inclusive business. ASEAN member states have adopted the Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN.\(^{12}\) The annual ASEAN IB summit is an opportunity to share good practices and identify collaborations between the countries.\(^{13}\) The ASEAN IB Awards recognize inclusive business models. In addition, ASEAN has published several reports on the promotion of inclusive businesses.\(^{14}\)

**Moving forward**

Inclusive businesses must become part of mainstream economic development conversations at the national, regional, and global levels. The documentation and dissemination of experiences from ASEAN in promoting inclusive business can catalyze the adoption of policies to support inclusive business models in other subregions.

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03 Dec 2021 - Expanding Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation: The Way Forward

The closing session discussed the opportunities to expand and move forward on promoting inclusive innovation policies. It summarised the key messages from the previous sessions and put forward key recommendations for promoting technology and innovation policies that leave no one behind.

Closing Session Leads and Speakers

"What we have learned is that promoting inclusive innovation requires hard choices and long-term commitment. Hard choices because it requires dealing with opposing priorities. [...] A commitment because ensuring that the very poorest of rural communities can benefit from innovation is much tougher than creating innovations for, for example, high-income urban populations."

Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations ESCAP

Key Messages

While many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have adopted, to different degrees, national strategies and policies to encourage inclusive technology and innovation, several gaps need to be addressed to maximize the impact of inclusive technology and innovation policies.

1. **Digital illiteracy needs to be addressed.** The investments in inclusive digital infrastructures are increasing, but digital illiteracy remains an issue in both rural and urban areas.

2. **Create a better platform for promoting grassroots innovation.** More collaboration is needed to create a supportive environment for grassroots innovators, including collaboration with universities and funders. Regional collaboration is also key to nurture a better understanding
of inclusive innovation policies – what works and what does not work. Efforts to educate the public on grassroots innovation to further promote sustainable solutions should be encouraged. These include adding lessons on innovation in textbooks and leveraging public media platforms for knowledge dissemination. Furthermore, there must be a provision of a network-based entrepreneurship model where multiple stakeholders can collaborate on ideas and assist each other on challenges.

3. **Mainstreaming inclusive innovation.** A key challenge is to introduce an inclusive lens throughout the design of innovation policies as well as in their implementation, given the resource constraints. Another obstacle is scaling up or supporting the replication of grassroots innovations.

**Examples of good practices**

- In **Indonesia**, the government has been working to deploy 4G Internet networks in more than 12,500 uncovered villages, which is expected to be completed by 2022.\(^\text{15}\)

- In **Cambodia**, the government is seeking to transform Cambodia into a digital economy and society by 2035. To do so, it has adopted a strategic framework to promote digital infrastructure, foster digital trust, develop digital citizens, build a digital government and promote digital businesses.\(^\text{16}\)

- In the **Philippines**, the Department of Science and Technology has adopted the Grassroots for Inclusive Development 2019 to 2022 Framework Plan. This plan promotes the use of community-led solutions that support sustainable development among Filipinos. The Department supports marginalized communities, including indigenous peoples and those living in geographically isolated areas, through STI-based interventions.

- The Government of **Fiji** is adopting digital technologies to enable financially excluded citizens to make payments, receive money, and access finance safely.\(^\text{17}\) Mobile money has enabled the government to reach vulnerable individuals who would otherwise have no access to government assistance and benefits, especially in the aftermath of natural disasters and in the face of the current pandemic.

**Moving Forward**

More regional exchanges and dialogues about inclusive innovation policies and practices in Asia and the Pacific can provide a valuable platform for sharing knowledge and supporting inclusive innovation.

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Where support is needed

Participants have identified three key areas where further support is required to enhance inclusive technology and innovation policies:

**Access to expert policy guidance and advice.**

- Organize more discussions with policymakers to enhance their understanding of inclusive innovation.
- Develop a coaching/mentorship program where innovation specialists and policymakers can exchange good practices in inclusive innovation policy.
- Establish a fund to support and train more region-based experts and inclusive innovation champions.
- Provide a platform for dialogue on promoting systemic approaches, instruments and governance that support inclusive innovation development processes, structures, and policies.
- Create pathways to a dynamic, evidence-based, and proactive stakeholders consultation strategy, and a decentralized institutional mechanism that balances top-down and bottom-up efforts.
- Develop a fellowship program where fellows can support inclusive innovation at the grassroots level.
- Set up a community of practice that maps out existing good practices at the country level.
- Facilitate programs for innovators and policymakers to understand the regulatory and institutional environment for better collaboration.

**Invest in inclusive innovation research, infrastructure, and activities.**

- Invest more on digital infrastructure to improve digital inclusion.
- Forge collaborative cross-country policy research efforts.
- Involve economic and planning ministries in these dialogues, as they play an important role on budget allocation.
- Increase public support for seed funding, pilot production, and testing/validation of grassroots innovations.
- Craft a regional risk fund to support grassroots innovations.

**Increase recognition for inclusive and grassroots innovations on a country/regional level.**

- Implement a pilot project to provide evidence on grassroots innovations, to help raise recognition for these innovations.
- Help gain political recognition for the knowledge systems and creative potential of marginalized communities and individuals.