

STUDIES IN TRADE, INVESTMENT AND INNOVATION NO. 92



ADVANCING ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENTS FOR INCLUSIVE BUSINESSES IN ASEAN



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Preface

This publication is an extract from the Report on Advancing Enabling Policy Environments for Inclusive Businesses in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was prepared as part of the work of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN) to support Governments enhance the policy environment for inclusive business. It also responded to a request of the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME) for policy guidance on inclusive business in ASEAN. Ms. Vivian Marcelino, international consultant, ESCAP, wrote the Report under the supervision of Ms. Marta Pérez Cusó, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP, and Mr. Markus Dietrich, Director for Policy and Asia, iBAN. It was issued on 1 November 2019.

The objective of this publication is to inform policymakers and other stakeholders on the development of new business models that support sustainable and inclusive development. The new forms of enterprises allow markets to channel investments to populations at the base of the economic pyramid and to promote more balanced growth. The publication focuses on business, policy and legal frameworks in ASEAN and it may be particularly useful for policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region while also providing valuable insights for policymakers globally.

This material, as an extract from the original Report, was prepared for publication by Michał Podolski and edited by Mary Ann Perkins, and it is issued as part of the Studies on Trade, Investment and Innovation.

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Furthermore, the original Report benefited from the guidance and contributions of Ms. Nora'in Ali, Assistant Director, Enterprise and Stakeholders Engagement, and Ms. Marisan Hartati Nadeak, Officer for Enterprise and Stakeholders Engagement, as well as the support of the ASEAN Secretariat and of the participants of the ASEAN Inclusive Business Policy Development Programme 2018–2019.

The following individuals also provided valuable technical advice: Mr. Armin Bauer, International Expert on Inclusive Business; Mr. Reginald Lee, Director of Partnerships, Grow Asia; and Ms. Sangeetha Yogendran, Inclusive Business Sector Expert and Manager, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network.

Executive summary

In 2017, the member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) endorsed the ASEAN Inclusive Business Framework (AIBF). Since then, they have made encouraging progress toward the development of enabling policy environments for inclusive business (IB), but they remain at very different stages in the promotion of IB. Most countries have only just begun exploring policy and support options, while others have not yet placed IB on their national agendas. Nevertheless, IB is increasingly important in the inclusive and sustainable development efforts in the region.

Inclusive businesses (IBs) are defined as providers of goods, services and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or scalable, to people at the base of the economic pyramid (BOP), making them part of the value chain of a business as suppliers, distributors, retailers or customers. Awareness of the potential of IBs to contribute to poverty reduction and inclusive and sustainable economic growth is increasing in the region. It is now the right time to scale support for IB within ASEAN and its member States.

As awareness of IB has increased, ASEAN member States have sought to understand how IBs can complement other efforts aimed at harnessing the potential of the private sector for development. Depending on the socioeconomic context of each country, the IB agenda has found synergies with the promotion of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME), social enterprises, including measures to promote impact investment, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

These synergies represent opportunities to further promote IB by building on existing policy frameworks focussing on MSMEs, social enterprises and CSR. Indeed, in several member States, the IB agenda has been linked to one or more of these frameworks, depending on the national development priorities. Leveraging the existing frameworks has allowed countries to move faster on the IB agenda.

The AIBF, however, specifically emphasizes promoting the growth of inclusive business models. In their efforts, it will be important for ASEAN member States to put in place measures that support companies with IB potential to shift from MSMEs, social enterprises and CSR models with limited economic and social impact towards becoming IBs with strong inclusive business models.

As highlighted in the AIBF, governments can encourage inclusive business models to emerge, expand and scale up by establishing conducive rules to spur an

enabling business environment, providing relevant information and raising awareness, building the capacities of the population at the base of the economic pyramid (BOP) and IBs, and enhancing access to finance.

Establishing conducive rules, regulations and definitions

In Myanmar, the Philippines, and most recently Cambodia, the IB agenda has advanced rapidly over the past two years, and national strategies and pilot support have been developed. Other countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam, have achieved significant progress with the launch of national studies on IB. Although progress has been made and awareness is increasing, few ASEAN member States have adopted concrete rules and regulations to support IB. The notable exception is the Philippines, which has piloted an accreditation and tax incentive system for IBs.

Providing information and raising awareness

The ASEAN secretariat, development partners and IB champions within national Governments have dedicated significant efforts to raising awareness around IB and its development potential. As a result, IB has featured in regional discussion forums and IB policy-oriented initiatives have advanced in several countries. Moving forward, efforts are needed to expand awareness among a broader range of stakeholders, creating a general understanding at the national level to sustain momentum and support strong policy development for IB.

Strengthening the capacity of BOP populations and IBs

Technical assistance for IB has mostly been driven by development partners in ASEAN with the support of donor countries. Directly targeting IBs, efforts have been focused on helping companies develop or strengthen lines of IB or supporting government actors to design IB policy measures. ASEAN member States have put in place several mechanisms, including strong private sector support institutions that can extend their technical assistance services to IR

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