

## ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum 2023: Elevating Collaboration in Science, Technology, and Innovation

(The 4th ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum in Langkawi, Malaysia, convened 200 participants from India and 10 ASEAN Member States, emphasizing collaboration in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) to showcase social innovations, strengthen grassroots governance, and pave the way for future initiatives.)



(Source: Department of Science and Technology)

The 4th edition of the annual ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum (AIGIF) unfolded in Langkawi, Malaysia, on November 28, 2023, marking a significant milestone in the collaboration between India and the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS). With a robust participation of 200 representatives, the event focused on fostering cooperation in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI), showcasing social innovations, and reinforcing governance in grassroots innovation ecosystems.

### AIGIF Overview

The AIGIF serves as a crucial annual program designed to deepen ties and collaboration in STI between India and AMS. Beyond being a platform for showcasing social innovations, it plays a pivotal role in fortifying governance in grassroots innovation ecosystems. The collaborative effort involves key stakeholders, including the ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI), the Department of Science & Technology (DST) of the Government of India, the National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India, and the host nation's Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MOSTI), represented by Yayasan Inovasi Malaysia (YIM) in 2023.

### Inauguration and Keynote Remarks

The AIGIF 2023 was inaugurated by Mr. YB Chang Lih Kang, the Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation, Government of Malaysia. In his keynote address, he underscored the significance of flagship programs like AIGIF, highlighting their role in showcasing and promoting innovations with the potential to significantly impact lives at the grassroots level. The minister urged participating nations to commit to social innovations, emphasizing cross-border mechanisms and information sharing.

## Perspectives from Indian Representatives



(Source: Department of Science and Technology)

Professor Abhay Karandikar, Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, delivered insights into the crucial role of innovators as the hope for the world. He advocated for unprecedented cooperation, suggesting possibilities like Joint Technology and Product Development, Cross-Border Technology Licensing, and infrastructure sharing to elevate new-age technologies in the region. Mr. B.N. Reddy, High Commissioner of India to Malaysia, highlighted India's emergence as a key nation for startups with a global presence, including several unicorns operating in Malaysia. He emphasized the potential of platforms like AIGIF to create opportunities for students and grassroots populations, urging industries to connect with grassroots innovations for sustainable solutions.

## International Participation and Collaboration

The AIGIF 2023 witnessed the active participation of 17 student innovators and grassroots innovators from India, along with representatives from 11 countries, totaling approximately 200 participants. This global representation signifies a commitment to collaborative efforts in addressing societal challenges through innovation.

## A Continuing Success Story



Building upon the successes of previous editions in Jakarta, Indonesia (2018), Davao, Philippines (2019), and Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2022), AIGIF 2023 reinforces its commitment to overcoming societal challenges through increased participation and collaboration in Langkawi, Malaysia.

### High-Level Discussions and Perspectives:

On the sidelines of the forum, the Indian delegation engaged in high-level discussions with Mr. B.N. Reddy, High Commissioner of India to Malaysia. These discussions provided valuable insights into the ASEAN-India relationship and highlighted the crucial role of STI in its strengthening. Emphasis was placed on the ongoing commitment to cross-border mechanisms, information sharing, and networking to enhance innovation and technology capabilities.

### 1. Importance of Cross-Border Mechanisms

The discussions underscored the importance of sustained commitment to cross-border mechanisms, emphasizing the need for countries to work collectively. The exchange of ideas and best practices facilitates a conducive environment for innovation, allowing nations to learn from each other's successes and challenges.

### 2. Information Sharing for Collective Growth

Information sharing emerged as a key theme, with participants recognizing the need to disseminate knowledge and best practices. This collaborative approach ensures that advancements in STI are not confined within national borders but contribute to the collective growth of the ASEAN-India partnership.

### 3. Networking for Innovation and Technology Enhancement

Networking was identified as a critical component in enhancing innovation and technology capabilities. The interconnectedness of nations allows for the establishment of a robust ecosystem where ideas can flow freely, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration.

### Strengthening Grassroots Governance:



(Source: Department of Science and Technology)

AIGIF not only serves as a platform for technological collaboration but also places a strong emphasis on strengthening grassroots governance. The event provides a unique opportunity for grassroots innovators to showcase their solutions and for policymakers to engage with these innovators, understanding the challenges faced at the community level.

## 1. Showcasing Social Innovations

One of the core objectives of AIGIF is to give exposure to social innovations from different countries. The event provides a stage for innovators to present their solutions that address local challenges, ranging from healthcare and education to sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation. This emphasis on social innovation aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development.

## 2. Fostering Governance in Innovation Ecosystems

Governance in grassroots innovation ecosystems is a critical aspect often overlooked. AIGIF acknowledges this by creating a platform where policymakers, innovators, and industry leaders come together to discuss not only the technical aspects of innovation but also the governance structures needed to support and scale these innovations. This holistic approach ensures the long-term impact of grassroots innovations.

### Future Directions: A Vision for Tomorrow:

As AIGIF 2023 comes to a close, it sets the stage for future collaborations and initiatives. The success of this edition further solidifies the commitment of India and AMS to work together in addressing global challenges through innovation. The discussions and insights gained during the forum pave the way for future joint ventures, research collaborations, and policy frameworks that promote innovation-driven sustainable development.

## 1. Embracing Joint Technology and Product Development

Professor Abhay Karandikar's call for unprecedented cooperation opens the door to joint technology and product development. Collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of multiple nations can lead to groundbreaking innovations with far-reaching impacts. A framework for joint development can facilitate the pooling of resources, expertise, and infrastructure.

## 2. Cross-Border Technology Licensing Opportunities

The idea of cross-border technology licensing opportunities presents a strategic avenue for nations to share advancements in technology. This approach can accelerate the adoption of innovative solutions by allowing countries to leverage each other's technological breakthroughs. It fosters a spirit of openness and collaboration in the global innovation landscape.

## 3. Infrastructure Sharing for Technological Advancement



The suggestion of infrastructure sharing addresses a common challenge faced by many nations – the availability of advanced technological infrastructure. By sharing infrastructure resources, countries can overcome these limitations and propel their innovation ecosystems forward. This can include access to research facilities, testing laboratories, and innovation hubs.

#### 4. Dissemination and Social Diffusion

Professor Karandikar's emphasis on dissemination and social diffusion highlights the importance of ensuring that innovations reach the broader population. It involves not only technological dissemination but also the integration of innovations into the social fabric. A concerted effort in this direction can lead to the widespread adoption of technologies that positively impact societies.

#### A Call for Industry Engagement:



(Source: X)

Mr. B.N. Reddy's emphasis on industry connecting with grassroots innovations brings attention to the role of the private sector in driving sustainable solutions. Platforms like AIGIF can act as a bridge between grassroots innovators and industries, facilitating collaborations that go beyond the event itself. This engagement can lead to the development of market-ready solutions with real-world applications.

#### 1. Opportunities for Start-ups and Unicorns

India's emergence as a key nation for startups resonates with the global presence of unicorns, some of which operate in Malaysia. AIGIF provides a fertile ground for startups to explore cross-border collaborations, access new markets, and forge partnerships. The international exposure gained at AIGIF can contribute to the global success of startups rooted in India.

#### 2. Sustainable Solutions through Industry-Grassroots Collaboration

Mr. Reddy's call for industry to connect with grassroots innovations underscores the potential for sustainable solutions to societal challenges. Industries can play a pivotal role in scaling grassroots innovations, turning them into viable and impactful solutions. This collaboration not only benefits industries by fostering innovation but also contributes to the well-being of communities.

### **AIGIF 2023 in Retrospect: Charting Achievements:**

As we reflect on AIGIF 2023, it becomes evident that the forum has not only met but exceeded expectations in several aspects. The achievements of this edition contribute to the overarching narrative of collaborative innovation and set the stage for future endeavors.

## **1. Unprecedented International Participation**

The participation of 200 representatives from 11 countries marks a significant increase, signifying the growing importance of AIGIF on the international stage. The diversity of perspectives and ideas exchanged during the forum enriches the collective pool of knowledge and sets the foundation for future cross-border collaborations.

## **2. Showcasing Grassroots Innovations**

The 17 student innovators and grassroots innovators from India showcased their solutions, providing a glimpse into the potential of grassroots innovation. These innovations, ranging from tech-driven solutions to community-centric approaches, offer tangible examples of how local challenges can be addressed with creativity and ingenuity.

## **3. Strengthening ASEAN-India Relations**

The discussions on the sidelines of the forum with Mr. B.N. Reddy, High Commissioner of India to Malaysia, highlighted the importance of AIGIF in strengthening ASEAN-India relations. The exchange of insights and perspectives fosters diplomatic ties and creates a foundation for future collaborations beyond the realm of STI.

## **4. Commitment to Social Innovations**

The continued commitment to social innovations showcased at AIGIF reinforces the idea that innovation, when directed towards societal challenges, can be a powerful catalyst for positive change. The emphasis on inclusivity and addressing grassroots issues aligns with the broader global agenda of sustainable development.

### **Looking Ahead: A Roadmap for AIGIF:**

As AIGIF becomes an integral part of the collaborative landscape between India and AMS, it is essential to outline a roadmap for the future editions. This roadmap encompasses key focus areas, strategies for deeper collaboration, and the integration of emerging trends in STI.





## 1. Expanding Collaborative Initiatives

Future editions of AIGIF should aim to expand collaborative initiatives beyond the forum itself. This could include joint research projects, academic exchanges, and collaborative funding mechanisms. The goal is to create a sustained ecosystem that thrives on continuous collaboration and shared innovation.

## 2. Leveraging Emerging Technologies

The integration of emerging technologies should be a focal point for future editions. Technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and advanced biotechnology hold the potential to revolutionize various sectors. A dedicated focus on these areas can position AIGIF as a frontrunner in shaping the future of STI collaboration.

## 3. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Alignment

Aligning AIGIF with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can provide a broader framework for collaborative efforts. By addressing challenges related to poverty, health, education, and environmental sustainability, AIGIF can contribute significantly to the global agenda of creating a more sustainable and equitable world.

In conclusion, the 4th edition of the ASEAN India Grassroots Innovation Forum in Langkawi, Malaysia, not only celebrated the achievements of collaborative innovation but also laid the groundwork for a future where STI plays a pivotal role in addressing global challenges. AIGIF 2023 showcased the commitment of India and AMS to working together, not just in the realm of technology but also in strengthening grassroots governance and addressing societal challenges. As the forum looks ahead, it carries the torch of innovation, lighting the way for a future where collaboration knows no borders, and the impact of technology resonates in the lives of communities worldwide.