



Frontier Incubators Interim Results and Learning



FEBRUARY 2020





About this Report

Commissioned in December 2019 by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s innnovationXchange, this interim review was prepared by Moonshot Global (Moonshot), the Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning partner.

This report has the dual purpose of measuring the interim results of Frontier Incubators, a component of the SFI Program, against the SFI Performance Framework (see page 8) and capturing lessons learned from the implementation of capacity building support to incubators and accelerators to date.

The intent is to help DFAT understand the value of its investment in Frontier Incubators and to surface considerations and recommendations for future work. Another review of the SFI Program, including Frontier Incubators, will be conducted in 2020.

A series of surveys and interviews conducted with key stakeholders as well as observations by Moonshot and reflection sessions with DFAT and the Frontier Incubators Consortium (SecondMuse, ygap, and Conveners.org) informed these findings.

This is the second Interim Review of the SFI program conducted by Moonshot; the first review focused on results achieved under Frontier Innovators. Both reviews consider how DFAT funding has improved the capacity, performance, and connectedness of participating organisations and contributed to ecosystem building across the entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems in the region.

Many contributors offered input, guidance, and feedback. Special thanks are extended to Janka Geckova, Stephanie Kimber, Luke Marston, Will Scott-Kemmis, Stephanie Arrowsmith, Avary Kent, Manita Ray, Audrey Jean-Baptiste, Simon Lee, and Bijon Islam. We appreciate your contributions.

If you have any questions or comments about this review, please contact Claire Daley at claire@moonshotglobal.com.

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01/ Introduction

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About Frontier Incubators

Frontier Incubators, an AUD 3.5 million project, which was implemented from early 2018 to the end of 2019, is part of the Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) program. The SFI program is an AUD 15 million initiative of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s innovationXchange (iXc) that supports social enterprises to scale their development impact in the Asia-Pacific region. The SFI's program's three components focus on different but interconnected parts of the ecosystem that supports social enterprises, including entrepreneurs, incubators and accelerators, and brokers. Incubators and accelerators are structured support programs for entrepreneurs, typically aimed at helping them to develop their business model, prepare for growth, and secure investment.¹

While the terms are used interchangeably, typically, incubators help early-stage startups establish strong business models with support programs operating on flexible time frames. At the same time, accelerators expedite the growth of existing companies with existing business models and a minimum viable product (MVP) within a set period, usually lasting a few months.

Research suggests that access to quality support services can strengthen enterprises and help them scale their impact. However, support for social enterprises is a critical gap in the Asia-Pacific region where the incubation and acceleration space is relatively nascent, inaccessible to many, and programming rarely applies a gender lens.^{2,3}

THE SCALING FRONTIER INNOVATION PROGRAM'S THREE COMPONENTS

	Frontier Innovators	Frontier Incubators	Frontier Brokers
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Support social entrepreneurs/innovators + Understand and address challenges + Build networks + Highlight successful models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Support incubators and accelerators + Understand and address challenges + Strengthen networks + Learn about, test, and share good practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Catalyse/broker deals + Understand and remove barriers to accessing capital + Connect and promote learning between intermediaries
ACTIVITIES	Provided grants and technical assistance to 14 social enterprises to scale their development impact	Funded capacity building support for 31 incubators and accelerators through custom support partnerships, thematic webinars, virtual mentoring, and peer learning	Support peer learning and implementation of four projects to test solutions to better meet the capital needs of social enterprises across the region while applying a gender lens

Adapted from Frontier Incubators Consortium, 'FI Close and Next Steps', November 2019

1. Mapping and Analysis of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Incubators and Accelerators in the Asia-Pacific p. 4

2. <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/resources/ANDE%20I-DEV%20INCUBATOR%20REPORT%2011-21-14%20FINAL%20FOR%20DISTRIBUTION.pdf>

3. Results for Development (R4D) in August 2016

Frontier Incubators Timeline

Frontier Incubators was designed to support the capacity development of incubators and accelerators in the region to strengthen the quality and stability of support accessible to entrepreneurs. This was done by establishing partnerships between a cohort of regional incubators and accelerators (Cohort Partners) and global leaders in the field (Program Partners) to test and share global and regional good practices. Frontier Incubators was designed and implemented by SecondMuse, Conveners.org, and ygap.

DID YOU KNOW?

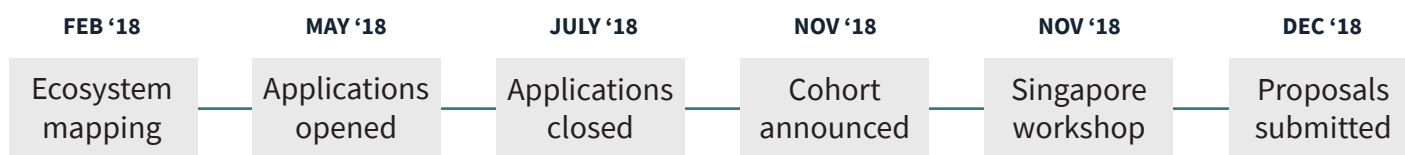
Frontier Incubators supported 31 incubators and accelerators in partnership with 11 Program Partners.

“[Incubators and accelerators] in the Asia-Pacific have contributed enormously to the growth of entrepreneurship in the region. They increase awareness of entrepreneurial pathways, provide vital early stage support, and facilitate engagement between key stakeholders (i.e. entrepreneurs, investors, corporations, and government). Through these efforts [incubators and accelerators] develop ‘pipeline’ (i.e. a supply of investible ventures) but also convene and coordinate a wide range of individuals and organisations, thus nurturing the ecosystem (the vibrancy of which is determined largely by connectivity and cohesion).”

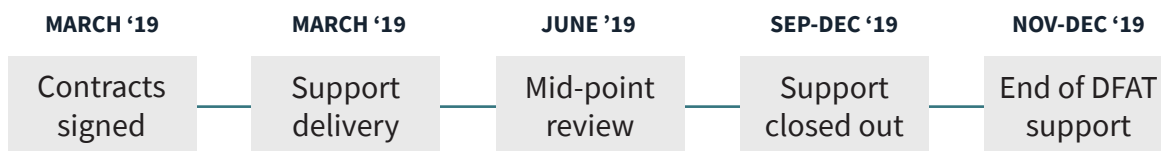
- Frontier Incubators Learning Report p. 5 2019

TIMELINE

2018



2019



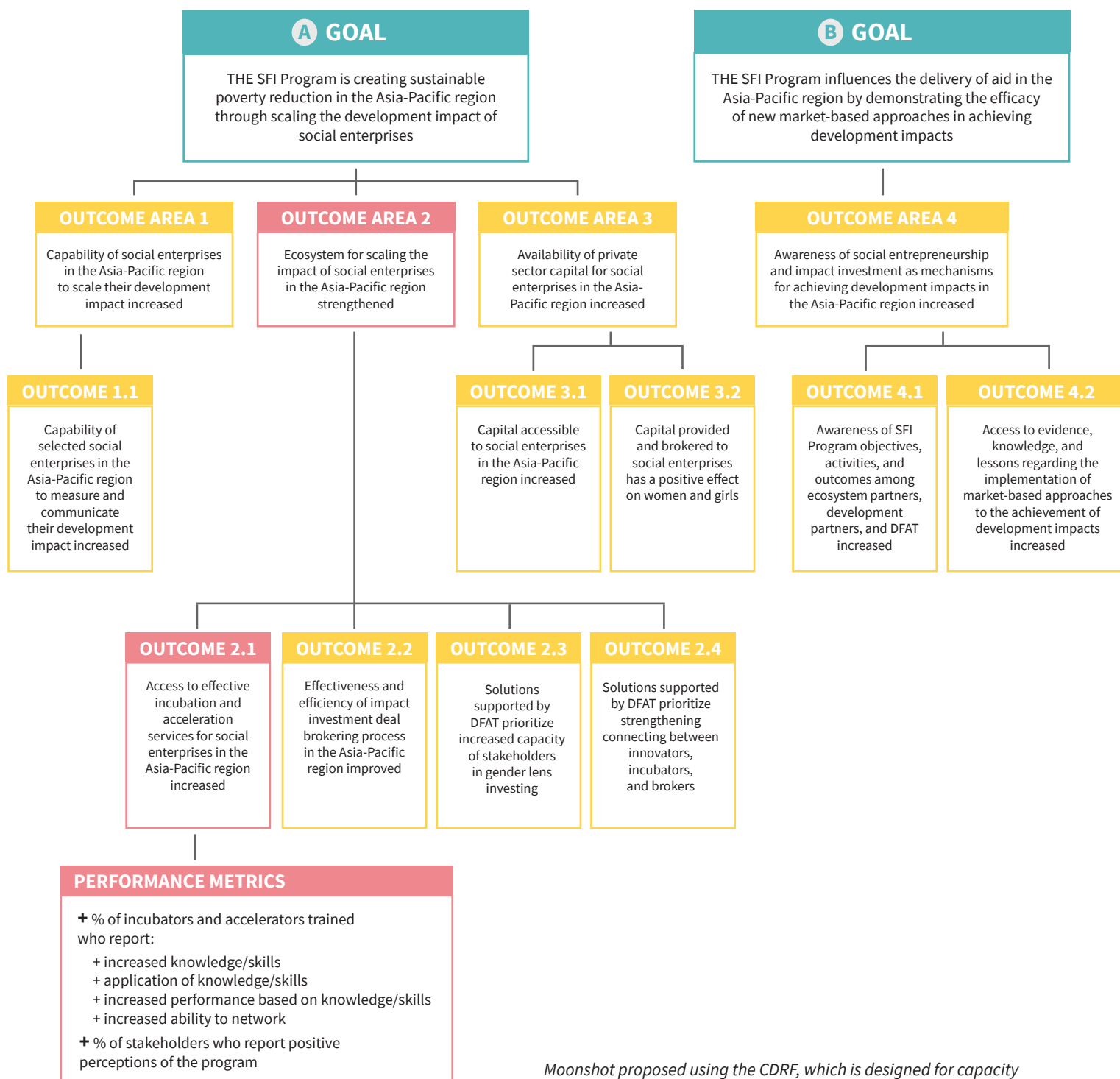
02/

Interim Results

+ SFI Performance Framework / **07**

+ Interim Results / **08**

SFI Performance Framework



Moonshot proposed using the CDRF, which is designed for capacity building initiatives, as a foundational model for evaluating capability development under the SFI Program. Customisation and application of the CDRF facilitates the review of how innovators receiving assistance are able to drive development impact and scale through increased capacity that comes from learning they experience from participating in Frontier Innovators activities.

Interim Results

These results were measured in November–December 2019, immediately after the capacity building component of the program. Follow up is required to determine longer-term results, especially related to improved performance of participating organisations.

The next sections (Design and Delivery) will explain the model that was applied to achieve these results and discuss process learning from each stage of design and implementation.

31 INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS RECEIVED SUPPORT

11 PROGRAM PARTNERS MOBILIZED



INCREASED CAPABILITIES OF PARTICIPANTS

100% of incubators and accelerators reported:

- + Increased knowledge/skills
- + Application of knowledge/skills
- + Increased ability to network with others in the entrepreneurship ecosystem

94% of incubators and accelerators said:

- + They were satisfied with partners / right partners

88% of incubators and accelerators:

- + Fully fulfilled their objectives
- + Cited that Program Partners had facilitated one or more new network connections for them beyond participants in Frontier Incubators

75% of incubators and accelerators reported:

- + Increased performance immediately after Frontier Incubators

ADDED VALUE

The Frontier Incubator's Model went beyond typical support contracts by creating a network where Program Partners were able to collaborate with one another and Cohort Partners via multiple formats to develop and test of content that can be used by other incubators and accelerators across the region. Frontier Incubators has already achieved results beyond the program's intended outcomes above, including:

15 Masterclass Videos Produced with +503 views

07 Thematic Webinar Series Supported

40+ Thematic Webinars Delivered

01 Guide to Impact Incubation and Acceleration: Collaborative Insights and Strategies in the Asia-Pacific developed for regional dissemination

01 Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit developed for regional dissemination as a result of the introducing of a Gender Lens for Incubators and Accelerators*

*The toolkit was funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation



\$3.1

million AUD raised using strategies developed under Frontier Incubators



05

Formal Partnerships Formed Between Program Partners and Cohort Partners for Ongoing Work



01

Cohort Partner scaled to 3 new cities

03/ Design

- + Implementing Consortium / **10**
- + Ecosystem Mapping / **11**
- + Ecosystem Engagement / **12**
- + Convening: Capacity and Partnership Building Workshop / **15**
- + Designing and Contracting Custom Support Programs / **18**

Implementing Consortium

A consortium of three partners (SecondMuse, Conveners.org, and ygap) were chosen through an open selection process to design and implement Frontier Incubators. The consortium was formed to leverage the complementary technical and regional expertise and deep network connections of each organisation to meet the program's needs effectively.

01 SecondMuse Australia

<https://www.secondmuse.com>

SecondMuse collaborates with visionary cities, countries, nonprofits and startups, to develop the communities and networks that help drive social, environmental, and economic innovation.

Expertise:

- + Network Centric Innovation
- + Community Building and Management
- + Client Engagement
- + Understanding of Asian social innovation space

02 Conveners.org United States

<https://www.conveners.org>

Conveners.org has built a community of mission-driven conveners and accelerators to convene and learn from each other, build the larger capacity of the field, and construct pathways to more efficiently realise positive change.

Expertise:

- + Convening stakeholders in the incubation and acceleration space
- + Field building
- + Designing and delivering acceleration and incubation support

03 ygap Australia

<https://ygap.org>

ygap backs early-stage impact ventures in emerging markets as a means to support economic and social development, and currently runs programs in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and Australia.

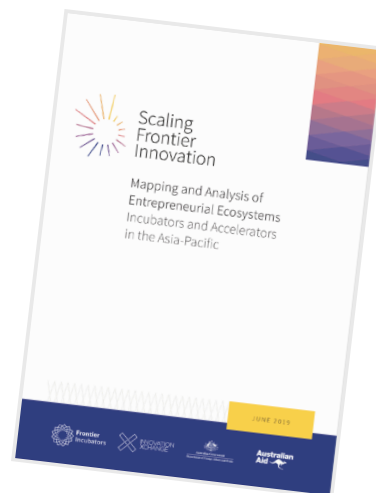
Expertise:

- + Designing and running accelerator programs for impact ventures
- + Supporting the growth of locally-run impact ventures in emerging markets
- + Understanding of the Asia-Pacific social innovation space

Ecosystem Mapping

The Implementing Consortium conducted a detailed ecosystem mapping activity through primary and secondary research to inform program design and implementation and provide recommendations for additional support needed at the country and regional levels in the Asia-Pacific.

This process identified over 500 organisations in target countries that provide some form of support to enterprises and resulted in assessments of 30 countries in the region. The framework for these assessments drew on previous work from the Kauffman Foundation, Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, Seedstars, World Bank Group, World Economic Forum, and many others. While similar, many frameworks look at either entrepreneurship or innovation ecosystems/enabling environments. So the Implementing Consortium chose to layer assessment frameworks that look at both entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems.



REGIONAL CHALLENGES FACING INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS



Access to Capital and
Financial Sustainability



Lack of Regional and
Local Connectivity



Entrepreneurial Mindsets,
Culture, and Perception

Source: Mapping and Analysis of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Incubators and Accelerators in the Asia-Pacific.

While the final analysis was developed for internal audiences, the findings are captured in a report titled Mapping and Analysis of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Incubators and Accelerators in the Asia-Pacific that has been made publically available. The document lays out the specific framework used to assess each of the target countries, looking at what they call the ‘fundamental pillars’ of entrepreneurial ecosystems: policy and regulation, human capital, market access and connectivity, culture, and support and infrastructure. This framework can be used by others interested in assessing their ecosystems.

The initial intent was to inform program design; however, the implementation timeline resulted in the mapping happening parallel to the selection process. Ideally, ecosystem mapping should be conducted early on to program design, serve as a reference throughout implementation (e.g., or benchmarking in specific ecosystems) and be accessible to other program participants to validate findings and share feedback.

Ecosystem Engagement

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Starting in February 2018, the Implementing Consortium began a global search to identify and interview incubation and acceleration experts. More than 20 experts were engaged directly to help identify potential Program Partners (mature incubators and accelerators with valuable skills and experience, and a willingness to assist with the development of other organisations)⁴ and test the Frontier Incubators program design.

Frontier Incubators selected 11 Program Partners based on experience incubating /accelerating impact ventures, training or setting up incubators/ accelerators, and working in emerging markets, as well as their willingness to adapt their approaches to new contexts and ability to work within the program's budget.⁵ For a full list of Program Partners, See Annex 1.

Once selected, the Program Partners played a critical role in contributing to the program's Selection Criteria and reviewing applications.

COHORT PARTNERS

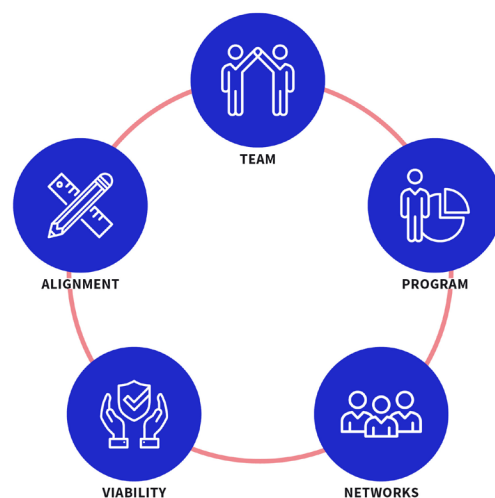
In May 2018, Frontier Incubators issued a call for emerging incubators and accelerators in Asia-Pacific with an emphasis on social impact and received 112 applications to the program.⁶

The applicants underwent an intensive review process with input from the Program Partners, DFAT, and the Implementing Consortium. Nineteen organisations from seventeen countries were chosen to participate in Frontier Incubators (See Annex 2, Frontier Incubator Cohort Partners, for a complete list of participating organisations). Participating organisations varied in focus and structure—ranging from co-working hubs and education-based accelerator platforms to private sector organisations and gender-specific business incubators.⁷

SELECTION CRITERIA

The Frontier Incubators Selection Criteria

**For future programming, the Consortium recommends considering the ability for senior leadership to commit to participating in the program and ability for staff to prioritise engagement, openness and willingness to accommodate change, and emphasising organisational stability as important in weighting the selection criteria. (Frontier Incubators Learning Report, p. 18, 2019)*



4. <https://www.frontierincubators.org/home>

5. Frontier Incubators Close and Next Steps, Consortium, November, 2019

6. For information on applicants, check out Frontier Incubator's blog 'Who Applied to Frontier Incubators' here:

<https://medium.com/@frontierincu/who-applied-to-frontier-incubators-b76a5d672c60>

7. <https://www.frontierincubators.org/home>

Ecosystem Engagement

VIRTUAL COHORT

During the review process for the Cohort Partners, a number of organisations that had not yet run cohort-based incubation and acceleration programs or had more unique business models were identified as having potential to benefit from lighter touch capacity building mentoring support. These organisations were referred to more broadly as ‘entrepreneurship support organisations’ (ESOs). As a result, the Frontier Incubators Virtual Support Program was designed as a shorter-term, primarily remotely delivered, capacity building and mentoring program to experiment with delivering virtual support that had less of an emphasis on running incubators and accelerator cohorts. Twelve organisations from eleven countries were invited to participate in the program and were directly matched to existing Program Partners.



Source: Accountability Lab
Virtual Cohort Participants Accountability Lab with their Program Partner i2i

FRONTIER INCUBATORS APPLICATION DATA



GEOGRAPHY

53 applicants from Southeast and East Asia

46 applicants from South and West Asia

13 applicants from the Pacific

92% of employees across all applicants were local to the country of operation



ORGANISATION TYPE

34 for-profit organisations applied

48 hybrid organisations applied

37 not-for-profit organisations applied



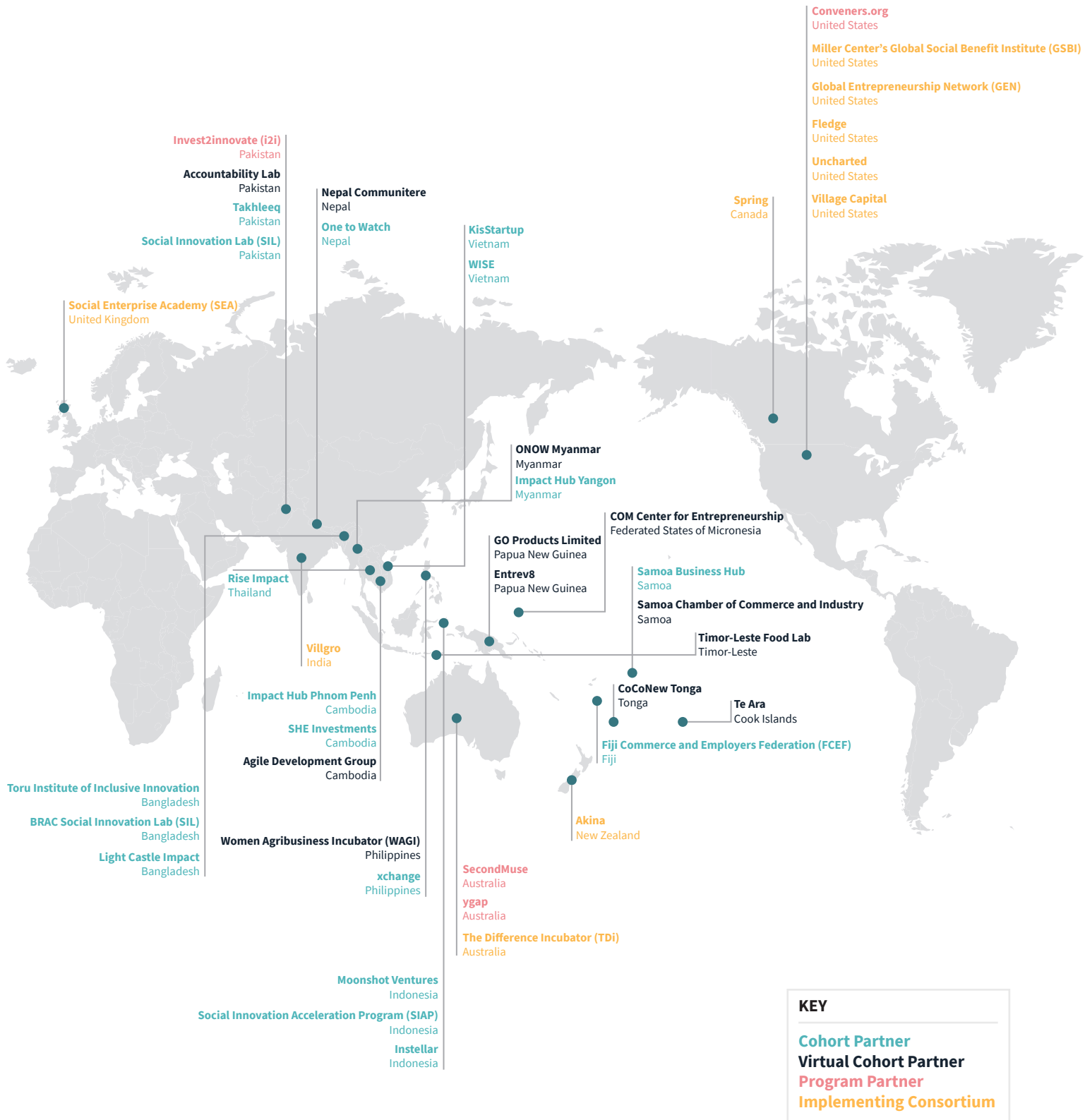
KEY CHALLENGES

68% of applicants cited Investor Relations as a key challenge

60% of applicants cited Business Model Sustainability as a key challenge

50% of applicants cited Building Networks / Partnerships as a key challenge

Frontier Incubators Participants



Convening: Capacity and Partnership Building Workshop

In November 2018, Program Partners and Cohort Partners convened in Singapore for an intensive five-day workshop to make connections, build capacity, and identify partnerships for capacity building that were fit-for-purpose. Rather than assigning Cohort Partners to a single Program Partner, they were given agency to identify and create custom capacity building partnerships, based on understanding of each others' needs, experience, expertise, and personalities. The Convening also created a space to introduce and test the concept of applying a gender lens to incubation and acceleration (see page 44).

The Convening has consistently been cited as a highlight of the overall program by Cohort Partners and Program Partners and acknowledged as critical to forming strong connections across the network.

During the Convening, the Frontier Incubators:

- + Convened **70** individuals from **38** organisations
- + Designed and delivered **15** thematic sessions (plenaries and masterclasses)
- + Produced **15** publically available Masterclasses videos, which have received **+530** views to date
- + **Introduced and tested** the gender lens approach for incubators and accelerators
- + **Brokered matches** between Cohort Partners and Program Partners
- + Decided to introduce **Thematic Webinars** based on shared interest in specific topic areas



8. The Masterclasses were parallel group sessions run by the Program Partners in smaller breakout rooms, and usually had around 20-30 people in attendance. These smaller groups allowed for more interactive activity-based sessions, where people could ask specific questions.

What we Learned about Convening⁹



WHAT WORKED WELL

SESSION DESIGN

The Masterclass sessions, where Program Partners **shared and debated different perspectives on good practices related to specific topics**, were especially well received. Particularly when compared to standard classroom or lecture formats.

Cohort Partners felt this format provided a unique chance to hear from multiple organisations coming from differing perspectives.



WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Cohort Partners felt that **having too many parallel Masterclass sessions left some with a sense of missing out and cognitive overload**.

Cohort Partners suggested that **allowing more time for organisations to reflect, discuss their takeaways, and prioritise their needs between sessions** would have helped them get more out of the week.

IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

Allowing participants the **opportunity to remove themselves from their daily roles and responsibilities** to focus solely on Frontier Incubators enabled deeper engagement with the work.

And **funding travel** for two participants per organisation to attend the in-person workshop enabled organisations and individuals who may not otherwise have the funding to attend to be equally engaged in the program.

Not all of the Cohort Partners had senior leadership represented at the Singapore Design Workshop. Of the six organisations that did not have senior leadership in attendance, all later noted that obtaining buy-in was a barrier to implementation later in the program.

In the future, **mandatory involvement of senior leadership should be encouraged**.

PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

An emphasis on relationship building - between and amongst the Cohort and Program Partners set up partnerships for success when virtual work was required later in the program.

Cohort Partners wished they had a **better understanding of the matchmaking process (e.g., partners tools and expertise, how they'd be matched, contracting requirements, etc.) upfront**. Some only understood the amount of say they had in the process mid-week.

PEER LEARNING

Regional Guide Circles were convened at the end of each day to allow for smaller group feedback, discussion, and reflection amongst Cohort Partners from sub-regions.

The Program Partners and Cohort Partners felt it would be valuable to **integrate more opportunities for peer learning and sharing amongst the Cohort**, allowing them to share their experiences, challenges, good practices, etc. with one another.

9. These lessons learned are based on interviews during the Singapore Workshop and the post-workshop survey distributed to Program Partners and Cohort Partners.

Participant Reflections on the Convening



SHARED STRUGGLES/CHALLENGES

“I learned that I am not alone in the struggles I face in running a program and that others in the region also deal with similar challenges (e.g. building a mentor network, selecting the right cohort, etc.). The tools that were shared were what I found most useful - practical tools that we can use to produce better results!”

— Cohort Partner



LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICE

“I tuned in to the needs of the cohort in various countries, benchmarked facilitation techniques and observation of excellent practice; observed service design co-production and innovation in practice - a blend of increased awareness of context in Asia-Pacific, with technique practice improvement, giving confidence for delivery of mentoring and facilitation to shared standards within and beyond Frontier Incubators.”

— Program Partner



SUSTAINABILITY

“The most significant thing we learned was that there are many ways of creating a financially sustainable incubator/accelerator. We are looking at changing our future business model as a result of this week and all we learned, which is quite significant!”

— Cohort Partner



IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

“I learned how important collaboration was in continuing to support these programs moving forward - it can't just be the work of one partner.”

— Cohort Partner

Design and Contracting of Custom Support Plans

At the end of the week in Singapore, Cohort Partners and Program Partners shared their partnership preferences and priority areas for capacity building support and were matched based on need, expertise, and availability.

“We made a choice during the design workshop to align preferences and not to push for matches. This emerged from discussions with partners about a) how they wanted to work with each other, and b) what would work best for cohorts.”

– Frontier Incubators Learning Report, p. 19, 2019

Reflections from the Contracts Manager

The Innovation Resource Facility (IRF), led by DT Global, is a contracting mechanism that was set up to support DFAT in engaging new, diverse partners and private sector organisations. Through the Frontier Incubators process, the contracts manager learned that:

“It comes back around to trust, having relationships, meeting people face-to-face and building genuine relationships... we’re explicitly writing [flexible, outcome-focused] contracts which can accommodate adaptation; which carries risks for everyone. But relationship management then becomes important, so you’ve got to be aware of what’s going on and where.”

- Luke Marston, Contracts and Program Manager, DT Global



In many cases, this meant that multiple Program Partners worked to deliver different forms of custom support to each of the Cohort Partner organisations. In fact, only five of the Cohort Partner organisations received custom support from just one Program Partner. The rest of the Cohort Partners worked with two or three Program Partners to complete their Custom Support Plans.

Program Partners and Cohort Partners collaborated after being matched during the Singapore Workshop to finalise their support plans together, with Cohort Partners required to sign off on the Custom Support Plans before they could be finalised. When multiple Program Partners were collaborating to complete a support plan, there was some confusion about contract formatting and requirements. In the future, providing clear templates can help streamline the contracting process.

Contracting was intended to be flexible to adapt to Cohort Partners’ evolving needs (e.g., priorities and timelines were adapted) and mid-program check-ins were facilitated to surface any challenges that needed to be addressed. Yet, there was “no recourse for rematching” with different partners once implementation had begun.

04/ Delivery

- + Delivery of Capacity Building Support to Incubators and Accelerators / **20**
- + Custom Support Partnerships / **21**
- + Thematic Webinars / **36**
- + Case Study: A Deeper Look at Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration / **44**
- + Virtual Support / **49**
- + Peer Network / **51**

Delivery of Capacity Building Support to Incubators and Accelerators

Given the diverse contexts of Cohort Partners and varying expertise of Program Partners, a hybrid approach to delivering capacity building support was utilised to deliver under Frontier Incubators. This section explains each component of the Frontier Incubators model, highlights key results and lessons learned, and provides recommendations for future work delivering capacity-building support to emerging incubators and accelerators.



The Frontier Incubators model is unique as it is one of the first programs focused on delivering capacity building support exclusively to a time-bound cohort of incubators and accelerators with the intentional application of a gender lens across the program (see page 44 for more on how a gender lens was applied to Frontier Incubators). Frontier Incubators went beyond simply delivering one-off contracts and built a global network. Program Partners collaborated with one another, and Cohort Partners, to deliver support in multiple formats (including webinars, seminars, study tours, mentoring calls, etc.) while also contributing to the development and testing of content that has been made accessible to other incubators and accelerators in the region. Testing this model surfaced insights on how to effectively provide capacity-building support to incubators and accelerators through Custom Support Partnerships, Thematic Webinars, a Virtual Cohort, and creating a Peer Network. The following section features highlights from each of the Custom Support Partnerships.

While capacity building support is commonly provided to social enterprises either in the form of mentorship, discrete technical assistance, or through time-bound incubator and accelerator programs, few organisations provide comprehensive capacity building support to incubators and accelerators themselves. What's more, there are no other existing programs that explicitly embedded a gender lens in their programs.

Custom Support Partnerships

Each of the 19 Cohort Partners was paired with one or more of the 11 Program Partners to receive custom capacity building support in priority areas to best suit their needs, location, and stage of development.



AREAS OF SUPPORT

- 16 Program/Curriculum Design
- 10 Financial Sustainability
- 08 Impact Measurement
- 05 Operations and Organisational Management
- 03 Branding and Marketing
- 03 Scaling
- 03 Coaching
- 03 Building Investor Networks
- 03 Ecosystem Building
- 02 Fund Design/Fundraising



CUSTOM SUPPORT MODALITIES

- 5 Study Tours
- 17 Program Partner Visits
- 100% Hybrid Delivery (virtual and in-person)
- 87% Modalities appropriate for support needed

FEEDBACK AND FINDINGS

- + 100% of incubators and accelerators reported increased knowledge/skills, application of knowledge/skills, and increased ability to network with others
- + 94% of incubators and accelerators said they were satisfied with partners/right partners
- + 88% of incubators and accelerators fully fulfilled their objectives and cited that program partners facilitated one or more new network connections for them beyond participants in Frontier Incubators
- + 75% of incubators and accelerators reported increased performance immediately after Frontier Incubators



BRAC Social Innovation Lab



Photo Credit: BRAC Social Innovation Lab

Program Partners:

Uncharted

Villgro

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Financial Sustainability

Impact Measurement

Scaling

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Increased knowledge of incubation and impact investing ecosystems, systems thinking, and incubator design and management.
- + **Designed BRAC's first Social Impact Incubator program** with plans to launch a 5-year program by the end of 2020.
- + Applied learning to increase the quality of intensive support to a cohort of three social enterprises.
- + Developed an impact measurement tool and **built capacity of seven social enterprises** in their existing cohorts.

"[The] content and approach was very holistic. From our point-of-view, we needed a holistic understanding as we were designing the incubator from scratch."

"We've applied many tangible and intangible learning into our regular interactions with our cohort members as well as designing our next interventions around social enterprise incubator...From selecting speakers to designing curriculums to designing exercises, the learning from Frontier Incubators always supported us to produce better outputs for our incubatees."

Centre for Social Initiatives Promotion (CSIP)



Photo Credit: Centre for Social Initiatives Promotion

Program Partners:

Miller Center

Spring

Villgro

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Investment Readiness

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Improved integration of online and offline components to deliver CSIP's incubation program.
- + Revised CSIP's business model and five-year strategy to ensure financial sustainability.
- + Development of a tailored investment readiness curriculum to meet the needs of Vietnamese social enterprises.

"The [areas of support] were the right areas for our organization as they were rooted in our actual needs... all three partners tailored their program as per our requested to best fit our time and human resource budget. They are also willing to continue their support beyond the program's timeframe."

Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF)



Program Partners:

TDi

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Coaching

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + **Trained four local small business coaches** and improved their confidence in providing support to local enterprises
- + Adapted existing curriculum to better suit local needs and introduced feedback mechanisms to promote continuous program adaptation.
- + **Used the adapted curriculum to support 15 social enterprises**, 12 of which have already graduated from the program and reported an average of 27% growth \$200,000 in increased revenue, \$10,000 cost savings, and \$70,000 in new salary generation.
- + **Introduced pitching sessions for participants.** One organisation, TraSeable Solutions, went on to pitch at and win the SeedStars Suva with their pitch and were invited to represent Fiji by pitching at the SeedStars Asia Summit.

"The training of our business coaches helped us really understand how to take our existing curriculum and make it even more relevant to the context of small businesses in Fiji. We also use feedback forms after every session to adapt delivery before the following sessions."

"The level of content and learning was easy to take on board and integrate - at the right level for us."

Impact Hub Phnom Penh



Photo Credit: Impact Hub Phnom Penh

Program Partners:

Spring

Uncharted

i2i

Areas of Support:

Financial Sustainability

Ecosystem Building

Operations & Organisational Management

Impact Measurement

Building a Mentor Network

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Supported the leadership team with strategy and leadership development during a time of founder transition.
- + **Improved the design of IHPP's Accelerate 2030 program**, which has gone on to support seven social enterprises.
- + **Redesigned IHPP's mentoring program** and put together a proposal and secured funding for the Cambodian Ministry of Economy and Finance to fund 75% of the IHPP Mentoring Program that hopes to support 20-30 Cambodian social enterprises in 2020.
- + Improved internal impact measurement processes and capabilities to work with social enterprises on their impact measurement and management processes. Since Frontier Incubators, IHPP has **supported an additional 15 social enterprises with their impact measurement.**

"It was great to be connected with more experienced people who have already been through it, we can trust them and their wisdom... [their] openness and generosity with their time and knowledge, genuine care and commitment to IHPP and each individual were enabling factors."

"Our [Program Partners] are very supportive and great personal mentors to the team. They took care with their mentoring and showed care, led on the mentoring relationship where necessary and always followed up and recapped. [They] are leaders in the sector and have a good understanding of the reality of emerging markets."

Impact Hub Yangon



Photo Credit: Impact Hub Yangon

Program Partners:

Miller Center

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

+ Designed and ran IHY's Social Startup Incubation Program, in collaboration with UNDP and Ooredoo, which supported three social enterprises in 2019.

+ Secured \$120,000+ in funding and support from UNDP and Ooredoo to replicate the program in 2020 where they have further adapted the curriculum to the Myanmar context and are currently supporting 15 social enterprises.

+ IHY also used what they learned from Frontier Incubators to support a pre-incubation program for forty farmers and producers in partnership with the World Wildlife Foundation, two of Myanmar's biggest tech hackathons, and partnering with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation on three Myanmar Digital Innovation and Development Series involving more than 150 stakeholders.

"IHY had never run an incubation program before Frontier Incubators. It was our ultimate goal to run a program in 2019 and we did."

Instellar



Photo Credit: Instellar

Program Partners:

Akina

Spring

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Impact Measurement

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

+ Development of an organizational impact framework and a one-page impact plan and accompanying goals and indicators, including key resources needed to build future financial sustainability plans.

+ Improved program processes and the curriculum for Instellar's incubation program, Rise Inc., including curriculum materials, mentoring methods, alumni engagement, and their recruitment processes. **Rise Inc. will be running their first cohort with the new curriculum in April 2020.**

"Learning best practices from organisations with similar business models and challenges were enabling factors... we are in the process of implementing what have been learned and are eager to see improvements."

"We think the in-person visit was very valuable since we had the chance to meet everyone in person, we were able to directly discuss our program, and we had a longer time to discuss and go deeper than the virtual calls. This helped us to commit more fully to the work."

KisStartup



Program Partners:

Spring

i2i

Areas of Support:

Building Investor Networks

Impact Measurement

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Co-developed and launched the **Center for Food & Beverage Innovation** in partnership with the Restaurant Association of Vietnam. CBFI Vietnam's first program that offers food and beverage-related projects, startups, and existing enterprises a unique resource to accelerate their companies.
- + Developed an impact measurement framework and clarified the organisation's vision, mission and values. **Trained eight social enterprise teams in impact measurement** as part of UNDP's SDG Challenge 2019.
- + Framework and tools to better understand the current landscape of existing angels and begin developing a local angel network in Vietnam.
- + Partnering with a small Hanoi-based angel fund to **deliver a pilot Angels Conference in March 2020** to test the model in Vietnam.

"For a small and new organization like us, every support counts. Before the FI program, we take really small steps to build our plan for growth. Sometimes we wondered whether or not we were going in the right direction. Thanks to the Singapore trip and post-Singapore trip, we are now clarifying our vision, mission and values. And step by step we have a clearer plan for our growth and impact. Above all, we strongly believe that we are going the right way to have a better impact on the startup community in Vietnam."

"Spring has experience in building startup ecosystems and investor networks and also understands the situation in Vietnamese and Asian startup community. As for i2i, we recognize that Vietnam somehow has the same condition as Pakistan at the time i2i launched. Therefore, with experience from Spring and i2i, we can begin to enhance our capabilities and develop our current community."

LightCastle Partners



Photo Credit: Light Castle Impact

Program Partners:

Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN)

i2i

Areas of Support:

Scaling

Branding and Marketing

Fund Design/Fundraising

Ecosystem Building

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Produced Bangladesh's seminal [Startup Ecosystem Report](#).
- + Refined fundraising strategy for their alternative investment company, including structuring their position, making connections to investor ecosystems, developing pitch decks, etc.
- + LightCastle has gone on to **raise AUD 2.3 million for their fund Velocity Asia**.
- + **Secured funding from UN Women to run four Gender Focused Accelerator Programs** focused on women entrepreneurs supporting 40 impact enterprises. One has gone on to secure \$100,000 in funding.
- + Light Castle has **run six other cohorts** applying learning from Frontier Incubators, supporting enterprises.

"Our branding pieces, mission, vision and values combined with intense workshops, online mentoring and practical experiences with market stakeholders were the right areas. Since we have built a strong foundation and are now getting ready to accelerate. To give an idea post support for 2019 we have run 10 acceleration programs and have launched a USD 6 million fund to invest in Startups and small businesses."

One to Watch



Photo Credit: One to Watch

Program Partners:

Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN)

Villgro

Areas of Support:

Fund Design/Fundraising

Financial Sustainability

Ecosystem Building

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Designed a model for a One to Watch impact fund in Myanmar.
- + On ecosystem building, networking and providing them with a portfolio management online tool.
- + Redesigned Nepal's accelerator program and overall business development support.

"The support we received was the right match especially as One to Watch is endeavoring to set up multiple impact investment funds in multiple frontier economies. Also, the fact that we have been running accelerators for the past 5 years, to stress test these ideas with industry veterans was quite helpful!"

"What was particularly invaluable was their experience spanning over decades in India which provided us with insights on how these programs-- especially incubators and accelerators evolve over time and how funds could evolve to cater to the changing market needs as well."

Rise Impact



Photo Credit: Rise Impact

Program Partners:

Akina

Spring

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Access to concrete tools for team management and strategy development.
- + Improved understanding of organisational management and approaches to financial sustainability.
- + Designed and launched their six-month long Snowball Incubation program in May 2019 which supported six social enterprises.

"We now have a broader view of how to manage our organisation in ways we had not thought of before. We are applying these techniques in a really exploratory manner to see what works"

"After launching our program other intermediaries asked to observe and serve as mentors. They were very impressed and our funder wants to run the program again. We are planning to scale the program to areas outside of Bangkok."

Moonshot Ventures



Program Partners:

Villgro

Uncharted

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Identified sectors on which to focus the program.
- + Feedback on Moonshot's incubation model and venture builder approach.
- + Perpetual license to the Uncharted Playbook to use for building their curriculum.
- + Attendance at the Unconvention Conference and training in India.
- + Moonshot is **currently raising funding and hopes to launch programming in 2020.**

"Having access to these materials and people who have been through this process before and having a choice to have multiple partners has been a positive aspect."

SHE Investments



Photo Credit: SHE Investments

Program Partners:

TDi

Areas of Support:

Operations & Organisational Management

Financial Sustainability

Scaling

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + **Developed a strategy and refined business model to support their growth.** TDi helped SHE shift their mindset to put greater value on their staff and their time. For the first time, they calculated and quantified the actual cost of delivering their programs. SHE realized the actual cost was twice what they anticipated or were charging. SHE was able to use this information to secure resources to fund future projects at actual cost.
- + SHE has secured \$80,000 in funding for new incubator / accelerator programs to support 30 women in 2020 to scale their businesses.
- + Secured first licensing contracts to license the SHE Incubator Program to be delivered across 8 provinces of Cambodia, with 2 different partners. More than 100 people to receive first trainings from 2020.
- + Secured first international contract to license the SHE Incubator Program to be delivered in Myanmar.
- + Since Frontier Incubators, TDi has joined SHE's new advisory board. SHE has **gone on to support 80 social enterprises across six programs.**

"TDi said to us: you've just doubled in size you need to step back and focus on building your culture and team before you continue to grow. We did a number of activities based around that for a three month period and that has made a huge difference straight away. Coming out of that now but built into our way forward."

Samoa Business Hub



Photo Credit: International Labour Organisation

Program Partners:

Akina

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Branding and Marketing

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Rebranded their organisation from the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) to the Samoa Business Hub.
- + **Design of the new programs that will include a ten month Business Growth Program, five month Accelerator Pilot, and Masterclasses** allowing social enterprises to complete specific units rather than a longer-term program. All activities seek to support Samoan startups and small and medium enterprises achieve growth. **SBH will be launching their new programs in February 2020.**

"We have a better program design now. Akina helped us identify topics for Samoa's context and how to sell the program, generate revenue etc. We ended up doing it in a totally different way than we planned."

Social Innovation Accelerator Program (SIAP)



Program Partners:

Social Enterprise Academy

Uncharted

Areas of Support:

Operations & Organisational Management

Program/Curriculum Design

Scaling

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + **Development of a scaling strategy that helped SIAP expand their programming into three new cities outside of Jakarta** (Solo, Malang, and Makasar). SIAP is using their new scoping strategies as they continue to expand to other areas in Indonesia.
- + Perpetual license to the Uncharted Playbook to use for building their curriculum and strengthening internal operational processes.
- + To date, SIAP has run and applied learning to four programs since Frontier Incubators, **supporting 105 social enterprises.**

"With the knowledge we gained from our partners, we were able to formulate experimental strategies to test in new cities. Their range of expertise in scaling their program to many different regions and countries was the right match for us."

Social Innovation Lab (SIL)



Photo Credit: Social Innovation Lab

Program Partners:

Akina

Areas of Support:

Operations & Organisational Management

Program/Curriculum Design

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

+ Participated in a field-visit in New Zealand to re-strategize SIL's mission and vision and connect with local Maori organisations to explore regenerative business models.

+ **Developed workshops around regenerative design and development to integrate into their curriculum** and working to identify partners to build a network in Pakistan of organisations interested in further exploring and **collaborating around the concept of regenerative design and development.**

+ Designed new processes for internal team management and reflection and established an impact measurement framework.

"With the support of Akina we were able to come up with a new theory of change for the organization which has helped us build local and international partnerships."

"[W]ith all these invaluable learnings from New Zealand we can draw parallels with the Pakistani Ecosystem as well. We have seen few models in our enterprise community such as those of community building and regeneration. But the regenerative lens are yet to be applied at systems level and these insights are just a great start for SIL as an ecosystem developer to sow the seeds for the future. We are all set to take our mission forward and embark upon the trail to make the world a better place!"

Takhleeq



Program Partners:

i2i

Spring

Uncharted

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Impact Measurement

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

+ **Developed an impact management framework** that included creating a theory of change, defining underlying indicators and creating an action plan around how to collect data from ventures.

+ **Development of a complete program roadmap**, including a detailed schedule of sessions to be delivered, specific objectives, customised content, and access to support resources (e.g., assessment outlines, feedback form templates and exit interview questions)

+ Perpetual license to the Uncharted Playbook to use for building their curriculum.

+ Integration of impact measurement, mentorship and financial sustainability into content and training sessions.

+ Takhleeq has gone on to **run two cohorts supporting 17 social enterprises** since Frontier Incubators and is currently seeking applicants for their fourth cohort.

"We are a small team trying to figure out the role of a university accelerator to develop the skills of entrepreneurs... for our first cohort we had a curriculum but it was very loose and not as effective as it could have been. [Our Program Partners] shared their curricula and helped customize it to a university context. It has been very helpful and we are now confident that our curriculum meets the needs of the university entrepreneurs we hope to support"

Toru Institute of Inclusive Innovation



Photo Credit: Toru Institute of Inclusive Innovation

Program Partners:

Global Entrepreneurship Network

i2i

Uncharted

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Coaching

Building a Mentor Network

Branding and Marketing

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + Perpetual license to the Uncharted Playbook to use for building their curriculum.
- + **Strengthened Toru's incubation program** including processes for selection of entrepreneurs, defining milestones for entrepreneurs, contextualizing curriculum, and validating how to run a cohort-based program.
- + **Developed a pipeline of mentors and ran a speed-mentoring day**, which served to make relationships between entrepreneurs and mentors.
- + **Toru ran one cohort with support from Frontier Incubators with ten social enterprises.**

"Everyone has been generous in giving their insights to us. The mentoring has been very organic support, especially in helping as we go through a transition."

Women's Initiative for Startup and Entrepreneurship (WISE)



Photo Credit: Women's Initiative for Startup and Entrepreneurship

Program Partners:

Akina

Spring

Uncharted

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Impact Measurement

Financial Sustainability

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

- + **Developed a network engagement strategy** and have begun exploring local partnerships.
- + Developed a short-term strategy to formally spin off from Mekong Business Initiative which is currently being implemented and **helping WISE become more financially independent.**
- + Perpetual license to the Uncharted Playbook and fundraising materials from Spring to use for building the curriculum for WISE's annual accelerator programs.
- + Contextualised and **applied learning and materials to run one cohort with nine women-led enterprises** of which four have gone on to secure AUD277,000 in funding to date.

"WISE now has the ability to effectively run our accelerator programs annually for female startups in Viet Nam, so we will be able to disseminate the knowledge and expertise we learned from Frontier Incubators with others interested in promoting female entrepreneurship."

xchange



Program Partners:

Villgro

Areas of Support:

Program/Curriculum Design

Ecosystem Building

Operations & Organisational Management

Results from the Custom Support Partnerships:

+ **Improved xchange's approach to incubation, including focusing in on a few (3-4) sectors**, rather than being sector agnostic, to create more impact and introduced structured, incentivised mentoring and Diagnostic Panels.

+ **Developed a new organisational strategy** currently being implemented and tested.

+ **Co-designed an Angel Investor Network concept** in the Philippines that Villgro and xchange will implement together in the Philippines to address key gaps in the local ecosystem.

"We absolutely increased our in skills in three priority areas and discussed things we hadn't even thought about ourselves... We completely incorporated everything into our new [organisational] strategy which we are now testing."

"We have seen a change, performance and excitement! Previous to the program we were stuck and trying to figure out 'how do we evolve as an organization?'. This process has allowed us is to think and learn from others and their experience. Frontier Incubators opened our world and blew our minds from day one."

ADDED VALUE OF CUSTOM SUPPORT PARTNERSHIPS

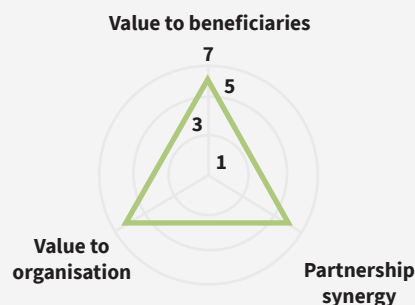
Partnerships have become an essential feature of international development program implementation. However, measurement of partnerships is not ubiquitous.

The MEL Partner conducted an investigative study to evaluate partnerships across the SFI program. The Partnerships Investigative Study evaluated SFI program partnerships along three dimensions: (1) setup, design, and daily operations, (2) collaborative mindsets and skills, and (3) added value. Frontier Incubator participants surveyed for the Study reported strong added value across three sub-dimensions: value to their beneficiaries, value to their organisations, and value in partnership synergies.

The figure below shows the measurement framework sub dimensions under the Added Value dimension.



The type of added value differed for Cohort and Program Partners. Cohort Partners reported that ‘Learning, knowledge and expertise’ was of significant added value, while Program Partners, cited maccess to a ‘Network of valuable relations’ as a key added value from their engagement. . Though the type of added value differed across groups, the results indicate a high level of added value was realised from the partnerships. This chart shows the average scores across the full set of respondents, for the indicators for Added Value.¹⁰



Average score: 6.1/7

Added value for entrepreneurs and the ecosystem = 6.26/7
 Benefits to their own organisation = 6/7
 Partnership synergy = 6.05/7

What we Learned about Custom Support Partnerships

01/ In-person engagement was the preferred modality for delivering support. While 87 percent of Cohort Partners reported that the modalities (100 percent of which were a combination of virtual and in-person support) for providing support were appropriate, 100 percent of respondents also noted that they would have preferred more in-person support if possible. In-person support was viewed as especially valuable as it helped Program Partners understand the broader teams and Cohort Partner organisations and allowed Cohort Partners to focus specifically on the Frontier Incubators program for an extended period.

“We found self-guided learning most challenging as the amount of materials shared by partners was huge to absorb. Mentorship was most valuable for us, especially with in-person sessions.”

– Cohort Partner

02/ When in-person support isn't available, time and effort to develop skills for remote collaboration are required. Logistical issues often constrained communication, including issues with time differences and internet connectivity. While remote working can be valuable (see Lessons Learned About Virtual Support Program p.50), time to ensure that everyone is comfortable using the required platforms that they will be expected to use should be built into program design. This is important, as global programs like Frontier Incubators that have limited resources but seek to derive value from many different stakeholders around the world often rely on a mix of in-person and remote collaboration.

“Being able to work virtually with partners and collaborators is an acquired skill that I hadn't experienced in my work before. This expectation should be set clearly and practiced early on.”

– Cohort Partner

03/ Creating space for adaptive management within custom support partnerships is necessary to respond to emergent ideas and needs and adapt to contextual changes. Almost all of the custom support plans (89%) made some sort of significant adaptation during implementation. As Program Partners and Cohort Partners began to understand needs and opportunities better, new ideas and ambitions emerged. However, there wasn't always space to fully benefit from the support available. Limited bandwidth was a challenge for both Cohort Partners and Program Partners, who all had to manage competing demands during the program. Overload and inability to prioritise the work that needed to be done in the appropriate time frame were cited as crucial program constraints. One Program Partner described the overwhelming amount of support as 'trying to drink from a firehose,' with Cohort Partners trying to absorb a massive amount of information coming at them all at once. This challenge became apparent midway through Frontier Incubators. While adaptations were made, parameters limited the ability to make specific changes related to timing, partnership matching, and bandwidth. Introducing stronger feedback loops to address capacity issues, structuring the program differently, by extending the program timeline, offering financial incentives or stipends for engagement, narrowing the focus of support, or providing rolling support through milestone-based contracts may help mitigate these challenges.



04/ Opportunities for direct and immediate application of concepts helped Cohort Partners retain information and allowed them the chance to ask follow up questions and tailor support. The ability for this to happen often related to where organisations were in implementing their programs and team readiness to apply learnings during their incubation and acceleration program cycles (e.g., onboarding of appropriate staff to lead specific roles and immediate organisational priorities).

“**More consistent, flexible and responsive support—which is often hard to manage in time-bound programs—ensures practical issues are addressed, and constraints navigated, while capacity is being built.**”

– Frontier Incubators Learning Report, 2019

05/ The provision of support by multiple Program Partners had benefits and challenges.

These partnerships enabled Cohort Partners to benefit from the diverse types of support they needed from organisations with different types of expertise. However, coordination was required between Program Partners to ensure their work was building off of each other and not redundant or contradictory. Having consistent and open coordination was viewed as key to Program Partners, with one organisation serving as the primary lead.

06/ Future programs should build case study development into work plans and funding to help fill this gap. The ability of Program Partners to draw on their own similar experiences (e.g., in other emerging markets) and support contextualise content to the Asia-Pacific context was viewed as extremely valuable. Across Frontier Incubators, there was a strong demand for regional case studies. Based on these insights, Frontier Incubators worked with some of the Cohort Partners to source Asia-Pacific case studies for the Guide to Impact Incubation and Acceleration.

07/ Program Partners and Cohort Partners see the value in partnering with one another beyond contractual and transactional relationships. The findings from the Partnerships Investigative Study highlight that there was perceived added value in engaging in these partnerships across participant types. Beyond that, several of the Program Partners and Cohort Partners have decided to form ongoing partnerships for continued collaboration, including Villgro and xchange and SEA and SIAP. In total, five new partnerships have emerged from Frontier Incubators. Cohort Partners and Program Partners have formalised partnerships to continue to work together on learning exchanges, new proposals, and building scaling strategies.

“xchange and Villgro have been strategic in the collaboration and used the FI platform as an opportunity to create specific interventions in the Philippine ecosystem. The synergy and flexibility of the program allowed this collaboration to take place.”

– Program Partner



08/ Contextualisation to local realities needs to be kept in mind when transferring ‘good practices’ and experience across countries and regions. This is especially important when attempting to build global knowledge sharing programs with stakeholders coming from varying cultural, political, social, and economic contexts. The results achieved through Frontier Incubators demonstrates the value of and demand for building capacity of Asia-Pacific incubators and accelerators in good practices from global ecosystems. However, throughout Frontier Incubators, there was a strong demand from Cohort Partners for support in tailoring content to their contexts and access to regional case studies. Meaningful engagement between Program Partners and Cohort Partners (i.e., where Program Partners build an understanding of Cohort Partner organisations and the context in which they operate) and piloting content can help organisations begin to adapt good practices to meet their needs. Further, sourcing case studies from the region can make these good practices more approachable and relevant to other Asia-Pacific incubators and accelerators.

“Having more varied case studies can help us understand good practices from different perspectives. Ideally, we could source more case studies from developing countries to help understand their relevance in our context. And we are in dire need of help better understanding the impact ecosystems here.”

– Cohort Partner

Thematic Webinars



Seven thematic webinars took place from January –November 2019. The idea for the optional thematic webinars emerged during the Singapore Capacity and Partnership Building Workshop, where it became clear that many Cohort Partners had similar needs and that some of the Program Partners would be better placed to address these collectively, building on the positive response to the Masterclass format. The Thematic Webinars accounted for 8% of the total Frontier Incubators program budget.

The content from the thematic webinars fed into the development of two comprehensive, online, publicly available resources (the Guide to Impact Incubation and Acceleration: Collaborative Insights and Strategies in the Asia-Pacific and the Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit). Developing content for Thematic Webinars first allowed Program Partners to iteratively develop and test the content with incubators and accelerators in the Asia-Pacific region to create enduring content that can be accessed by the Cohort and other incubators and accelerators in emerging markets now and in the future.¹¹

FEEDBACK AND FINDINGS

- + **58%** of thematic participants cited a mixture of attending live and watching recordings.
- + **6** = Average content of the thematic programs on a scale of 1 (poor) to 7 (excellent)
- + **6.2** = Average ability of the thematic program to achieve Cohort Partners' objectives
- + **100%** of respondents felt that participating in this thematic program was worth their time
- + **100%** of respondents felt that the thematic programs were relevant to their organisations' current needs

Note: The thematic webinars were optional and not all Cohort Partners participated in them. This likely skews the results based on selection bias.

“These recordings were helpful in learning about the common problems incubators around the world face and how they tackle them. These masterclasses provided standardised protocols for all the participants, which had been perfected over time by experienced founders of well run incubation and acceleration programs from around the world. These standardised protocols helped us to adopt and implement some of the language used around incubation programs, and were easy for us to adapt for use in our own context in Pakistan.”

- Cohort Partner

¹¹ Spring Frontier Incubators MEL Toolkit

Frontier Incubators Thematic Webinars

ANGEL ACCELERATOR

The Angel Accelerator thematic, designed by Fledge, introduced participants to a collection of content that covers critical concepts for setting up a successful Angel Investor Network, from identifying high-net-worth individuals and other potential investors to building effective accelerators for angel investors. The content was originally designed where Angel Investors high- net-worth individuals exist and are active. The existence of Angel Investors is less common in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, although there are unique nuances in each country. Where they exist, they do not often support social enterprises. One-on-one mentoring was provided to participants interested in adapting the approach to their own contexts and examples were provided from setting up Angel Networks in other emerging markets.

“ I now have a vibrant up and running fundraising funnel that has been really helpful. I now have a long list of pipelines for the year ahead to plan my cash flow. I have plans to trial new revenue generating activities, and I understand better how to write proposals.”

— Cohort Partner

“ It helped us to have a better knowledge of financial sources for an organisation and can probably diversify our current financial sources for sustainable growth.. As a 4-year-old organisation, it is time for a more sustainable model, focusing on 2-3 key products and services. And the thematic program somehow helped us with that.”

— Cohort Partner

“ Our goal is to build an angel investor network in Vietnam. It turned out that we were allowed to translate some content for attracting and validating the angel investors in our network. Through the program, we have had a clear definition of angel investor and identified a suitable model for the Vietnamese market.”

— Cohort Partner

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Spring delivered a series of webinars and seminars, with support from TDi, for the Financial Sustainability thematic. The goal was to help participants develop and begin to implement financial sustainability plans to ensure long term sustainability and impact. This was done by understanding their current financial state, providing participants with the knowledge and tools to leverage their existing capabilities, supporting the development of plans to optimise business models, and creating an environment to share learnings and ideas.

IMPACT ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

The aim of this thematic, led by Spring, was to support incubators and accelerators in measuring and managing their impact by building their skills and confidence. This was achieved by understanding the key challenges facing Cohort Partners, enhancing their understanding of varied impact management frameworks, tools and approaches, and empowering them with the tools and know-how of how to identify, measure and collect meaningful impact data, and setting their plans to create impact measurement frameworks in motion.¹²

“I did not have much expectation going into this module as we didn’t already do much on supporting ventures with their impact measurement. But having participated and with the practical homework tasks to practice with entrepreneurs, this has now become a significant part of my role. I’ve so far worked one-on-one with five ventures to develop their Theory of Change and impact measurement, and delivered two Masterclasses. I think this all started from this module.”

— Cohort Partner

“It was much more practical and valuable than I had anticipated. The theme enabled me to re-visit our Theory of Change and impact measurement processes, think about aligning with external partners, and more of all discuss this with other people who are engaged or expert in it...It was around the time that we were visiting our impact and strategy, so it was great timing to increase my capacity to support on that.”

— Cohort Partner

IMPACT VENTURES

The aim of the Impact Ventures thematic was to address the needs of the Cohort Partners to provide impact measurement training and support to the social enterprises involved in their programs. The Akina Foundation developed and implemented five modules covering: Why Measure Impact, Theory of Change, Teaching/Facilitating a Theory of Change workshop, Gathering Data, Using Data. Each module consisted of a webinar with handouts and assignments followed by a seminar in two weeks later to discuss assignments, challenges and what was learned.¹³

¹². Impact Measurement Theme Proposal

¹³. Impact Ventures MEL Toolkit and Final Report

MENTORING AND MENTOR NETWORKS

The Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship delivered the Mentoring and Mentor Networks thematic, with support from Villgro. The thematic covered all aspects of creating, building, and maintaining a mentor network including sessions providing the definition of mentors, roles of mentors, characteristics and values of mentors and how to guidance on identifying, sourcing, selecting, onboarding, and maintaining engagement with mentors.

“We introduced training for entrepreneurs to have the skill to lead a mentor relationship, made small improvements to processes, recruited a new mentor manager, and put together a proposal for the Ministry of Economy and Finance for funding the mentoring program.”

— Cohort Member



“As we run mentoring programs for four years, this is the time to better the model and expand it. To do that, I think, we need to explore and learn how mentoring programs in other countries are run to figure out what can work and can’t work for us...I can better understand how to identify potential mentors and create suitable models for helping new mentors.”

— Cohort Partner

REPLICATING AND SCALING PROGRAMS

Social Enterprise Academy, with support from Village Capital and Global Entrepreneurship Network, led the Scaling and Replicating Programs thematic to help Cohort Partners achieve financial sustainability and increase impact through scaling or replication opportunities within their current territories and in potential new markets. The thematic guided Cohort Partners through understanding replication and scaling models and practicalities for entering potential new markets, assessing and selecting relevant strategies for scaling program delivery effectively, and applying learning in planning and design to ensure long-term contribution to greater sustainability through financial resilience and scaling of impact.¹⁵

“We got so much advice and clarity from a very good facilitator who understood ways of scaling and had done it himself. He was really open sharing things that had gone wrong from his own experience... The most important thing we learned was that [intellectual property] can never really be fully protected and we need to stop worrying about that because it has been a major bottleneck for us.”

— Cohort Member

“Replicating and Scaling Programs was positioned towards the end of the overall Frontier Incubators program in order to allow the cohort to engage with other topics before considering scaling. This timing of the series worked well in helping manage workloads for the cohort members.”

— Program Partner



¹⁵ Scaling and Replicating Programs MEL Toolkit

What we Learned about Thematic Webinars



01/ Adaptations made to programming need to be tested with participants and consider program timelines. The Thematic Webinars were an adaptation to the Frontier Incubators program offering added in response to demand from Cohort Partners during the Capacity and Partnership Building workshop. These were intended to be an elective resource to supplement the Custom Support Partnerships. However, **attendance in the Thematic Webinars was lower than anticipated due to limited bandwidth and competing priorities across the program.** Frontier Incubators had a set timeline, although a few exceptions were made for extended support, requiring contracts to be completed and implementation to start quickly. The program could have taken more time to design the delivery of the overall capacity support or built-in a cohort wide check in on the thematic to see how the new modality was working. Frontier Incubators did make some changes to the Thematic Webinars based on more informal feedback, including recording the webinars. Other changes that were not tested but may have improved participation include further involving Cohort Partners into the design and delivery of webinars, to present their tools and experiences, may improve attendance and the level of engagement. And, if the webinars were intended to be a mandatory part of participation, Frontier Incubators could have experimented with tracking attendance, requiring demonstration of applied learning, or incentivising engagement through positive reinforcement, etc. At the same time, these may have required extending the overall program timeline to avoid adding additional burden to the cohort.

“There was a high proportion of organisations that signed up, but only a smaller subset that were consistent in their attendance. The reasons cited included capacity, bandwidth, and availability. At times this meant sessions were less well attended than others. As we moved into July and August, we found it challenging to keep engagement up - the sense is that the overall program duration and multiple topics may have contributed. The overall timeline was a constraint, as some organizations seemed to lose steam over the course of the engagement. This can be a risk of online or non-mandatory course attendance programming where workload of the various [Cohort Members] impacts their attendance and engagement”

— Program Partner

02/ Participants valued access to tools and models, having ample opportunities for questions and answers, and dynamic discussions between multiple facilitators. Cohort Partners noted that they would have benefited from additional Asia-Pacific case studies (similar to learning from Custom Support Partnerships), a resource database, and lists of recommended reading.

03/ Cohort Partners who consistently engaged in the Thematic Webinars found them to be an effective modality for achieving additional capacity building goals and reported that the quality of the content exceeded their expectations. 100 percent of respondents felt that participating in thematic programs was worth their time and felt that the thematic programs were relevant to their organisations' current needs. Many cited the smaller number of participants beneficial as they were able to get more one-on-one support from Program Partners and discuss their challenges in detail with other Cohort Partners.

04/ When introducing new content and working with participants speaking multiple different languages, **providing resources before each Thematic Webinar** helped give Cohort Partners time to digest the material and come up with questions or topics they wanted to discuss in real time. This was an adaptation made after the first few webinars.

“The insights received from these thematic sessions helped us to think through many simple elements which proved to be so profound...We appreciated the practical tools and models that the instructors shared which they used in their own organisations.”

– Cohort Partner



05/ Enabling asynchronous engagement with the content (i.e., recording webinars for later access) proved to be important, given time differences, and managing other parallel support being provided. So far, over 58 percent of the cohort have made use of recorded content. The content developed also has the potential added value if it is made available to others in the ecosystem. By developing and testing content with multiple Cohort Partners from the region, these contextualised resources will be made available online for other incubators and accelerators to use.

06/ There are similar demands for support across incubators and accelerators in the Asia-Pacific region. **Thematic Webinars, when designed well, can serve as one way to simultaneously address the needs of multiple Cohort Partners while fostering peer learning and sharing, especially when supplemented with other opportunities for mentoring.** A number of the Program Partners worked with Cohort Partners to build in opportunities in their custom support plans to dive deeper into the content they were receiving in the Thematic Webinars. This helped to tailor content to the Cohort Partner context and provided opportunities to apply learning from the Thematic Webinars to their other capacity-building work.

“Their willingness and openness to support us one-on-one showed that they were committed to understanding the individual organisations and contexts, rather than limiting the conversation to a specific scope.”

— Cohort Partner

“The thematic sessions I attended toward the end were more personalized with smaller groups. This dramatically increased the value for me. There were fewer participants, so you could get a lot more air time and discussion, and it was much more tailored to what our needs were specifically allowing you to learn so much in just an hour and a half. Having our [Program Partner] work on the topics with us further no doubt added a layer of understanding.”

— Cohort Partner



CASE STUDY

A Deeper Look at Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration

“There are several important reasons to strive for gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity within our organisations, programs, and ecosystems. Intermediaries that are inclusive and diverse will be better equipped to attract and retain talent, design quality programs, innovate, respond to risk, and capitalise on new opportunities. The compounded effect of improving resilience across these factors will result in significant additional benefits to our employees, entrepreneurs, investors, and ecosystem. Achieving gender equality also constitutes a fundamental human right, and is essential to achieving sustainable development, vibrant economies, and peaceful societies more broadly.”

— Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit p.4, 2020ⁱ

Global research supports the argument for greater diversity and inclusion, especially regarding gender, across sectors and regions, to promote both social and economic benefits.ⁱⁱ Still, global inequality persists even in the social entrepreneurship spaces where access to education, technical assistance, mentoring, and funding remains inaccessible to many.

Frontier Incubator’s application data and ecosystem mapping activities found that many of the incubators and accelerators in the Asia-Pacific region had significant gender disparities within their programs. Further, there were no existing capacity building programs targeting incubators and accelerators focused explicitly on gender and power implications.

To begin addressing this gap, the Consortium and DFAT decided to integrate the theme of ‘Gender and Power’ across the week-long Singapore Workshop, by engaging global experts in the space, The Criterion Institute, even though Gender and Power were not included in the program’s initial design. At the same time, DFAT also decided to contract The Criterion Institute to design an overarching Gender Strategy to drive future programming under SFI. This adaptation required adjustments to the overall SFI Performance Framework to intentionally monitor the implementation of the Gender Strategy, development of new Learning Questions to help capture lessons learned through this process, and integration of explicit gender considerations into future procurement documents and processes.

i. https://toolkits.scalingfrontierinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FrontierIncubator_ToolkitPDF.pdf

ii. Within the entrepreneurship landscape, the Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI) found that globally incubators and accelerators with programs that focus on women achieve better results for all their entrepreneurs, irrespective of their gender. <https://medium.com/@frontierincu/who-applied-to-frontier-incubators-b76a5d672c60>

CASE STUDY

For Frontier Incubators, The Criterion Institute worked with the Consortium to build their understanding of Gender and Power concepts and support with session design for the Singapore Workshop. Sessions involved an introduction to key concepts related to 'gender' and 'power,' self-reflection on individual experiences, mapping how participating organisations performed against criteria, sharing good practices and challenges, and discussing questions for consideration at each stage of incubator and accelerators design and implementation.

“The concepts are complex and sensitive, and new to many, so language issues were exacerbated. In addition, the issues also vary significantly across contexts as they intersect with other cultural and social factors. Creating a safe space for issues to be discussed, in-person initially, was recognised by all involved as hugely important. As was anchoring examples to practical day-to-day operations - which ygap were able to do given their experience running incubation programs - and taking it slowly.”

— Frontier Incubators Learning Report, p.16

The introduction of the 'Gender and Power' theme resonated with both Program Partners and the Cohort Members, demonstrating that even global leaders in the incubation and acceleration fields can benefit from sessions and tools helping them reflect on these topics. There was such a strong response to the topic that DFAT contributed additional funding to support Gender and Power as one of the seven Thematic Webinars (led by ygap). The sessions sparked significant change in several organisations who immediately applied what they learned in Singapore to their organisation's practices.



“I took away some amazing personal experience on diversity and inclusion. It was super valuable for me, and I took it back to our team.”

— Program Partner

“Discussing gender and power dynamics was especially impactful because it isn't something that we have discussed in our cultural context. I realized thinking about gender doesn't mean it's one over the other, but the fact that everyone is represented.”

— Cohort Partner

“We always thought we had a very inclusive organisation, especially since we have a women-specific incubation program. However, when trying to reflect on ourselves applying a gender lens deliberately, we realised that our organisation was primarily female and that we had implicit biases when recruiting and hiring. Since then, we have intentionally decided to diversify our staff and considering how we can potentially incorporate blind screening into processes for our staff and incubation pipeline.”

— Cohort Partner

CASE STUDY

LightCastle Partners

- ▲ Hired 10 female employees
- ▲ Ran 4 Gender Focused Accelerators
- ▲ Supported 40 women-led enterprises

Based in Bangladesh, LightCastle Partners focuses on providing clear value for small businesses through accelerator programs with a focus on agriculture and technology. The Singapore Workshop was where Co-Founders Bijon Islam and Zahedul Amin began to think deliberately about gender, power, and bias in the context of LightCastle's organisational structure and program design.

"It all started post-Singapore. It helped us understand that it's about concepts of power, bias, and diversity -- not just men and women. — Bijon Islam

"I really started to think about gender within our organisation during the Gender and Power sessions. I realised our diversity was low, and we decided to make it an obligation to look into this and hire more females in our organisation." — Zahedul Amin

Islam and Amin left the workshop determined to share these insights with their team and committed to applying a gender lens to their work with support from ygap through the Gender and Power Thematic. When reflecting on the past organisations that had graduated from their programs, there were only two organisations with female founders, and they had rarely attended programming, with their male co-founders more likely to participate. To address this, Islam and Amin realised they had to think more broadly about power and bias, starting with their organisation.

"We started by looking at our organisational data. We had twenty-five staff-- all male. If we wanted to do this, the DNA of our organisation had to change," said Islam. Light Castle began to adapt their job postings to encourage female applicants and position themselves as an equal opportunity employer. But truly becoming an inclusive employer required additional changes, especially to fit with cultural needs in a primarily Muslim country. For example, hiring women meant that the once all-male office needed to make adaptations such as adding separate washrooms requiring a move to a new office, moving from shifting from having male-only cleaning staff, and considering how to make things accessible to people with disabilities.

LightCastle took a user experience approach having a Bangladeshi woman provide feedback on adjustments that needed to be made to create a comfortable work environment. LightCastle has since expanded to a staff of 40+ with ten female employees at the moment (25% Gender Ratio). After LightCastle began applying a gender lens to their internal operations, they began to think about how to adjust their program design to be more inclusive. Islam notes, *"A huge change was our communications materials. Previously they showed companies from our cohort with all-male CEOs. y-gap, Second Muse, and GEN gave us feedback on how important the communication piece is in attracting female entrepreneurs. It was a simple issue but something we never thought of before."*

Then, LightCastle decided to take things a step further by introducing their first Gender Accelerator focused exclusively on female founders in collaboration with UN Women. *"We thought, why not launch a female-led accelerator?"* says Islam, "At first we were nervous, but then it was a big hit!" The Gender Accelerator was explicitly designed to meet the needs of Bangladeshi female founders, including the hours in which they are expected to be engaged, the type of investors with whom they are connected, and the overall structure of the curricula.

"This has helped us become more inclusive, and we've seen more women applying, and women entrepreneurs have been very appreciative." — Bijon Islam

LightCastle has gone on to partner with UN Women to launch a gender Accelerator, supporting a total of 11 women-led enterprises in Bangladesh. Additionally, in 2019 LightCastle has also partnered with ACDIVOCA, who is implementing USAID Agricultural Value Chains's project in Bangladesh, to launch another three gender-focused accelerator programs with 45+ women-led small business graduates. Additionally, the other accelerator programs run by LightCastle have seen an increasing number of female founder applications, suggesting that they are addressing what was previously an unmet need in the market. Lastly, besides accelerator programs, LightCastle is actively supporting (via capacity development, capital raise, and market linkages) WeConnect International - who is implementing IFC backed Corporate Connect program for 50+ Women-owned small enterprises and SheTrades-managed by ITC with funding from UKAID to connect 50+ women-owned enterprises to the export market. LightCastle plans to continue applying a gender lens to their work as the organisation continues to grow.

CASE STUDY

Partnering to Develop the Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit

Another significant outcome of introducing ‘Gender and Power’ to Frontier Incubators was a partnership established between the Consortium and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. After being in communication with DFAT, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) was also engaged by the Consortium and invited to attend part of the Singapore Workshop to meet participants and discuss a shared interest in expanding SPF’s role in promoting gender lens investing (GLI) in the region. Based on apparent demand in the ecosystem for increased guidance on how to apply a gender lens to incubation and acceleration and seeing how much the theme resonated with the cohort, the SPF decided to partner with Frontier Incubators to fund the development of the [Gender Lens for Incubation and Acceleration \(GLIA\) Toolkit](#). The GLIA Toolkit is a free, interactive resource that provides 80+ practical tools, strategies, and real-world case studies to support making the work of incubators and accelerators more accessible and inclusive to all genders.

Six organisations (Agile Development Group, Instellar, ONOW, Phandeeyar, SHE Investments, and xchange) across South East Asia participated in piloting and helping adapt the content for the toolkit and contributed case studies from their experiences that can be found in the GLIA Toolkit.

“We’ve been doing work around developing a toolkit from the research side, but working with practitioners and having pilot partners involved in the design and continuous feedback - resulted in a fruitful collaboration. I’ve learned so much from seeing this process from their eyes as well. I highly recommend the partners to other organisations - if we were to try to do it alone, the final output would not be as good as what we’re coming towards. Collective action has brought a lot of extra value for us.”

— Lily Yu, Senior Advisor, Gender Investment and Innovation, Sasakawa Peace Foundation

Through this process, ygap leads Manita Ray and Audrey Jean-Baptiste identified four key insights about applying a gender lens to incubators and accelerators in the region:

01/ Context is critical to understanding how incubators and accelerators view and are impacted by gender dynamics. Culture, language, religion, social structures, politics, and other context-specific nuances affect how gender is considered and perceived. The GLIA toolkit highlights examples from multiple regions and countries to illustrate how the toolkit has been applied in different contexts and encourages organisations to consider and apply the elements that are relevant to them in their context.

“By contextualising the toolkit to our work, we were able to define the areas that need to be more gender-inclusive; in our case, the incubation program itself. We learned about how marketing collateral, as well as our application process, can affect the gender diversity of selected participants. We also learned that applying a gender lens to create a more gender-inclusive program would require teamwork, both internally within our organisation but also in how we engage with and educate our external partners.”

— Instellar

CASE STUDY

02/ The “concepts” of gender and how to apply a gender lens to incubation and acceleration are new to the ecosystem, and introductory guidance helps make the concepts more approachable and relevant to incubators and accelerators.

Introductory workshops have been critical in supporting organisations as they take the first step in understanding how gender relates to them and their work and how they might use the GLIA toolkit to improve their impact. Participant feedback revealed that the first few introductory sessions were key to unlock what participants knew subconsciously but had never considered deliberately. This ‘unlocking’ component helped participants understand what potential issues were, and the GLIA toolkit provided the mechanism and frameworks to guide thoughts around how to address these issues.

“We are not an organisation that started with a gender perspective, but it quickly became apparent that this cross-cutting issue was impacting our work deeply. As a small social enterprise, we lacked the resources to employ a gender expert and were not sure where to start to address gender. This toolkit provided an ideal approach to implementing gender inclusivity across our organisation.”

— ONOW

03/ An experimentation mindset is critical. Applying a gender lens can take time, patience, and practice. There is no one size fits all approach to applying a gender lens to incubation and acceleration. While it can be tempting to want to change everything at once and copy and paste what others are doing, determining what works within a specific context and environment, calls for small, controlled experiments. Applying a gender lens requires an acknowledgment that the process takes time and dedicated resources to get it right - and even then, it will likely continue to evolve and adapt to changing contexts.

“Building culture takes time and courage, and strong leadership and a desire to be truly inclusive is required. And the results will be worth it.”

— SHE Investments

04/ Creating sustainable change within accelerators and incubators requires starting with the organisation, and more specifically their organisation’s values and culture.

If there isn’t a common understanding of gender, diversity, equality, and inclusion across an organization and the importance of being deliberate about applying a gender lens, then it is more challenging to get team members to test, contextualise and implement gender strategies within their respective parts of the organisation. Similarly, there needs to be a common understanding of the biases and power relations that exist to create lasting change. During the pilot, even within organisations that identified as ‘feminist’ or had women as the key decision-makers they found that they could benefit from understanding the key concepts, and the value of diversity. Through the pilot, participants realised that they needed to start with their organisational values and culture when applying a gender lens.

“We felt that in order for xchange to have the credibility to promote the application of a gender lens in our engagements with the broader ecosystem, we needed to look inward first. Specifically, we wanted to ensure that everyone within our organisation understands how to apply a gender lens to their respective work and engagements.”

— xchange

The SPF hopes to continue expanding on the GLIA Toolkit and supporting this work. International organisations, such as the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, are helping to promote the Toolkit actively.

The example of integrating Gender and Power into Frontier Incubators highlights the significant role donors can play in catalysing partnerships around and investment in furthering the application of a gender lens to incubation and acceleration in the region through commitments and providing platforms for collaboration and collective exploration and action. For more on the partnership with the SPF, consult the Partnership Investigative Study.

Virtual Support Program

During the review process for the Cohort Partners, a number of organisations that had not yet run cohort-based incubation and acceleration programs or had more unique business models were identified as having potential to benefit from lighter touch capacity building mentoring support. These organisations were referred to more broadly as ‘entrepreneurship support organisations’ (ESOs).

In December 2018, twelve ESOs were invited to participate in the Virtual Support Program, where they were directly matched to existing Program Partners. These organisations were virtual mentoring, given that there was not enough funding to include all organisations in the in-person convening, and not all of the program content would have been relevant or appropriate for their needs. This tended to be due to the unique nature of their approaches or being in earlier stages of incubation and acceleration work. The Virtual Support Program offered one-on-one mentorship calls, access to the Masterclasses and other training materials, and Virtual Cohort calls every 6–8 weeks. This was a relatively small ‘experiment’ making up for less than 4 percent of the program’s overall capacity-building budget.

The goal was to test whether remote support would add additional value to these entrepreneurship support organisations. The Virtual Support Program had very mixed results. Some (34%) never completed their support (due to misalignment with partners, lack of bandwidth, and/or organisational challenges) while others (66%) viewed the engagement as a success. The Implementing Consortium notes, “we acknowledged at the outset that this was a high-risk mechanism, but agreed that it was worth experimenting. The results were highly varied, but a range of factors played into this.”

Accountability Lab and invest2innovate

Accountability Lab Pakistan was paired with Program Partner invest2innovate (i2i) to refine their incubator training curriculum and learn how to effectively lead training sessions, strengthen internal leadership skills, and build and maintain strong communities. In addition to engaging in consistent, bi-weekly calls, i2i gave Accountability Lab clear assignments, such as starting to gather needs assessment surveys from their program participants and conduct exit interviews from our previous ones. Accountability Lab hopes to maintain the relationship and continue the work they began in the future.

“What excited us most about this program was the opportunity to be matched with mentors who would help diagnose the needs of our organisation, before helping us to identify our leadership and organisational goals...Our mentorship experience with Kalsoom and the i2i team was incredibly valuable.”

– Cohort Member

16. FI Close and Next Steps, November 2019.

What we Learned about Virtual Support Programs

01/ Virtual mentoring in capacity-building programs can be challenging, but application of good practices can make it work. And, if done well, virtual support programs can add value by enabling connections (for learning and sharing) between people and organisations who would otherwise not have the opportunity for such collaboration. In their [blog](#) “Getting on the Same Page, Writing a Better Story,” ONOW, based in Myanmar, discuss their initial reservations, but ultimate success in partnering with the Miller Center. They cite understanding and execution and getting on the same page as fundamental to their success. Interviews with other Virtual Cohort Members revealed that **having shared expectations and a clear plan for collaboration up front, involving consistent check ins with clear agendas and advanced preparation of questions, ‘homework’, and action items, were essential for making virtual mentoring relationships effective.** Virtual Cohort Partners recommended upfront facilitation by Implementing Consortium at the beginning of these virtual relationships to ensure that shared expectations are set.

“[ONOW’s] commitment to doing ‘homework’ between calls was very important to make significant progress in a short period of time. Also their honest assessment of the current state, where their challenges were, and what they wanted to achieve helped us zero in very quickly on the strategic initiatives to focus on.”

– Program Partner

02/ Program Partners paired with organisations in the Virtual Support Programs should be demand (not supply) driven. Some of the members of the virtual cohort had very specific business models, and did not think their needs were well aligned with Program Partners’ expertise. Ideally, Program Partners should be selected and matched with organisations on a needs-basis to deliver the greatest value to participants in Virtual Support Programs. If this is not possible, organisations receiving assistance should be selected for needs that are aligned with Program Partner expertise.

03/ Members of the Virtual Support Program were less engaged with one another and the Frontier Incubators network. Reportedly, this was a result of the wide variation of business models and lack of opportunity for convening in person to build relationships.

“In such a diverse group, it was difficult to find a common starting place for us to initiate a deeper connection with them. The Frontier Incubators team did a good job of bringing us together, but the virtual setting and short incubation cycle made it quite challenging to connect with and learn from our peers as much as we would have liked to.”

– Cohort Partner

04/ If a Virtual Support Program is the only option available, time should be dedicated to relationship building and creating a sense of community amongst the cohort. Further, helping cohort organisations identify similar challenges and areas for potential shared learning may stimulate more peer-to-peer learning and help organisation see the value in engaging with one another.

Peer Network

Beyond building capacity of incubators and accelerators, Frontier Incubators sought to increase network connections and peer learning amongst participating organisations.

The Peer Network built on the relationships that were developed at the Capacity and Partnership Building Workshop in Singapore and operated via an online platform (Slack) and facilitated learning calls. Program Partners and Cohort Partners indicated that they felt the Peer Network was collaborative in nature and added value to their organisations and broader ecosystem.¹⁷ The Peer Network helped participants access expertise, learning, and improve their strategies.

“The whole Network has created a learning platform and community of practice for our work. My hope is that we continue to collaborate and learn from each other so we leapfrog our learning and further scale our impact.”

– Cohort Partner

“Having access to such a wide array of expertise in one network has been valuable for us in accessing knowledge, brainstorming new work, and accessing in country site visits”

– Cohort Partner



17. Partnerships Investigative Study, The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing collaborative spirit - was 6.21 out of 7. The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing benefits to their own organisation was 5.85 out of 7. The average score across the whole group for the set of questions addressing benefits to the ecosystem was 6.21 out of 7.

Participants' Perceived Value of the Peer Network

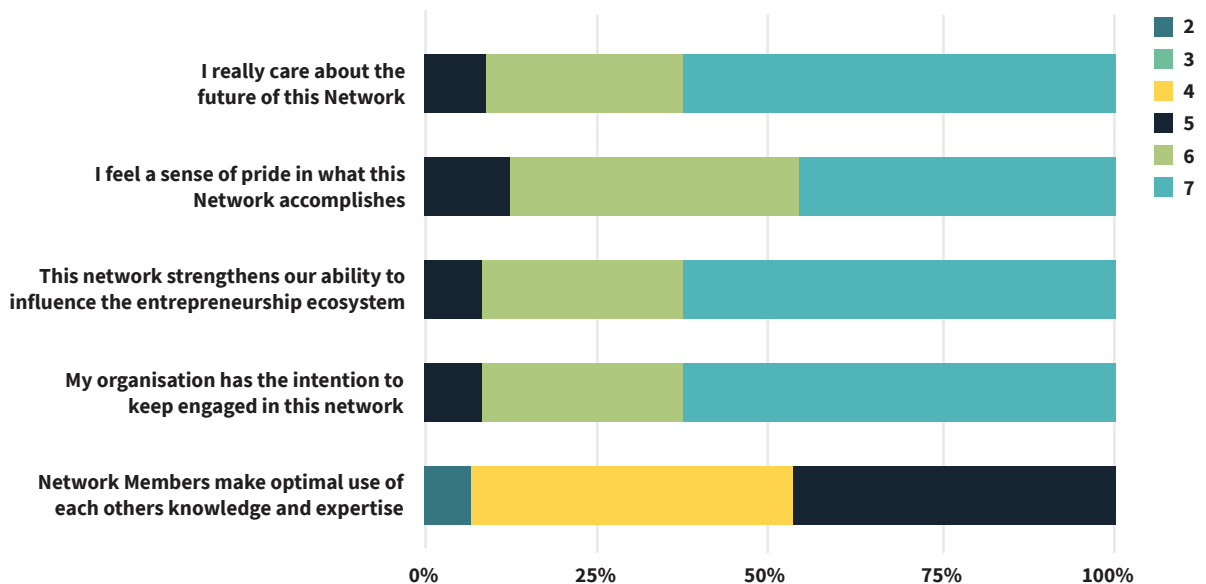
The Partnerships Investigative Study, revealed that Frontier Incubators participants felt that the network had a strong collaborative spirit and added some level of value to their organisations and the wider ecosystems in which they operate (See Fig. 1). Further, Figure 2 shows that members of the Frontier Incubators network care about the future of the network, have a sense of pride in what it accomplishes, intend to stay engaged, and believe that the network strengthens their ability to influence the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem. These findings also suggest, however, that the network may not be making optimal use of everyone's knowledge and expertise.

Figure. 1. shows how survey respondents (Program Partners and Cohort Partners) rated the three dimensions of 'network value' on a scale of 1 (Poor) to 7 (Excellent) as part of the Partnerships Investigative Study.

FIGURE 1: PERCEIVED NETWORK VALUE



FIGURE 2: PERCEPTIONS OF THE FRONTIER INCUBATORS NETWORK



What we Learned about Peer Networks

01/ Managing Peer Networks requires an investment of time and resources to set up a platform, curate content, encourage engagement, and promote sustainability. Peer networks and learning are seen as valuable and useful. But for that value to be realised, it needs to be carefully considered in the design of a program and investment - time and resources are needed.

02/ Processes and structures for engagement should be in place to encourage peer connections, when peer learning is an objective.

From the beginning of Frontier Incubators, the emphasis was on connecting the Cohort Partners to Program Partners. With Cohort Partners focused on their Custom Support Partnerships, there was less time to engage in collaborations with the rest of the Peer Network. There were numerous instances of resource and knowledge sharing between Cohort Partners, but this could have been further optimised.

03/ Peer network facilitators should not assume that all 'peers' can participate equally and should proactively think about ways to uncover and address barriers to participation. Some in the peer network experienced barriers to participation in and benefiting from the Network. For example, Cohort Partners from the Pacific expressed that differences in their context (e.g., market size, investment capital available, supply chain, cultural mindsets, business models, and entrepreneurship pipeline) made it difficult to relate to others in the Peer Network. Language barriers are also common among global networks. In Frontier Incubators, across the region, those who were less comfortable speaking English were also less likely to engage with the Network actively.



04/ During the implementation of the Program, continuing the Regional Guide Circles may have helped foster regional peer learning within the same time zone around similar challenges Cohort Partners were facing, incentives for participation or clearer expectations for peer learning could have been put in place. Also, greater transparency, via peer-led webinars, about what each organisation was doing may have fostered greater levels of engagement.

05/ There is a clear desire to maintain involvement in the Frontier Incubators Peer Network, but a framework for ongoing engagement is required. Champions to help take on network management roles are currently being identified to support this effort. For most peer networks to be sustained, even those that feature organic participation, identification of a core group of champions to facilitate network management, is often necessary to ensure sustainability. **The perceived and actual value of a network is not enough to make it viable.** Any program that seeks to build a sustainable peer network should start planning for post-program sustainability early-on in design and implementation.

05/

Recommendations

Recommendations

This section highlights key lessons learned and recommendations from across Frontier Incubators.

01/ In-person convening and intentional partnership building were central to the success of the Frontier Incubators model for delivering capacity building support to incubators and accelerators in the Asia-Pacific region. Time invested in fostering meaningful relationships across the network, starting with the Singapore Design Workshop, was consistently cited as a main factor in contributing to success. In this context, the ability to collaborate openly and commitment to understanding the systems within each organisation operates were essential in designing and delivering meaningful support. Having had at least one in-person meeting also made virtual collaboration more successful overall. Although time and resource intensive, the approach to creating partnerships across a network contributed to results achieved beyond intended outcomes. Programs that seek to develop strong support partnerships, rather than discrete technical assistance contracts, should incorporate in-person convenings and intentional relationship building into the overall design.



02/ While global case studies can be useful, regional and country-level case studies should be sourced to help contextualise good practices to the Asia-Pacific context. Global good practices are transferable to the Asia-Pacific context, but they require contextualisation—and often translation—to resonate with local organisations. Transferring and adapting regional good practices was less of a challenge (i.e., applying lessons learned from Pakistan to Bangladesh). However, the focus of Frontier Incubators across the entire Asia-Pacific region meant that there were significant contextual differences across the cohort. In particular, the Pacific proved to be an exception where regional good practices also required further contextualisation to the Pacific context. While internal organisational tools and strategies¹⁸ were fairly easy for Cohort Partners to adapt, materials that involved engagement with local enterprises and investors typically required some adaptation. Cohort Partners wanted more Case Studies on how global good practices had been applied in the Asia-Pacific region. Working with regional incubators and accelerators to source regional case studies can help fill this gap and serve as an asset to others in the region.



¹⁸ Internal organisational tools and strategies being those used within an organisation rather than for engaging with enterprises and entrepreneurs.

03/ Adapting the existing Frontier Incubators model to focus on the Pacific may add greater value to the Pacific-based organisations supporting entrepreneurship. Although there are similarities, the Pacific region's context differs from Asian countries, with smaller market sizes, unique supply chain challenges, cultural attitudes toward business ownership, and a wide diversity of models for supporting local entrepreneurship and ESOs are often chambers of commerce, [enterprise] support centres, or independent business consultancies that have different needs than other incubators and accelerators.¹⁹ The Virtual Cohort Partners highlighted the diversity of focus areas— from youth entrepreneurs to persons with disabilities—and support models. Several Pacific-based organisations expressed difficulty relating to the types of investment (and sizes of investment) other incubators and accelerators sought and expressed a desire for increased opportunities to engage in Peer Learning with other Pacific-based organisations facing or having addressed similar challenges. Expanding the Pacific cohort would enable increased regional peer learning and the identification of Pacific-specific case studies and good practices that could be leveraged to support improved entrepreneurship support services in the region, as well as creating the space to further test how proven good practices used for incubators and accelerators may be adapted to other types of ESOs.²⁰



04/ A Gender Lens should be intentionally embedded throughout programs that seek to support incubators and accelerators. Introducing considerations of Gender and Power at the very beginning of the program generated significant buy in from Cohort Partners and Program Partners. Providing guiding questions and a basic framework for organisations to start thinking about Gender and Power in their own lives and organisations and then collaborating with them to develop their own strategies, identify their own challenges, and test tools and concepts together can result in relevant, locally driven solutions to promoting equity within incubators and accelerators. This integration is essential in supporting incubators and accelerators to address their own biases and power imbalances so that they can help equitably address the challenges facing women entrepreneurs and investors globally.



19,20. Frontier Incubators Learning Report, p.12, 2019.

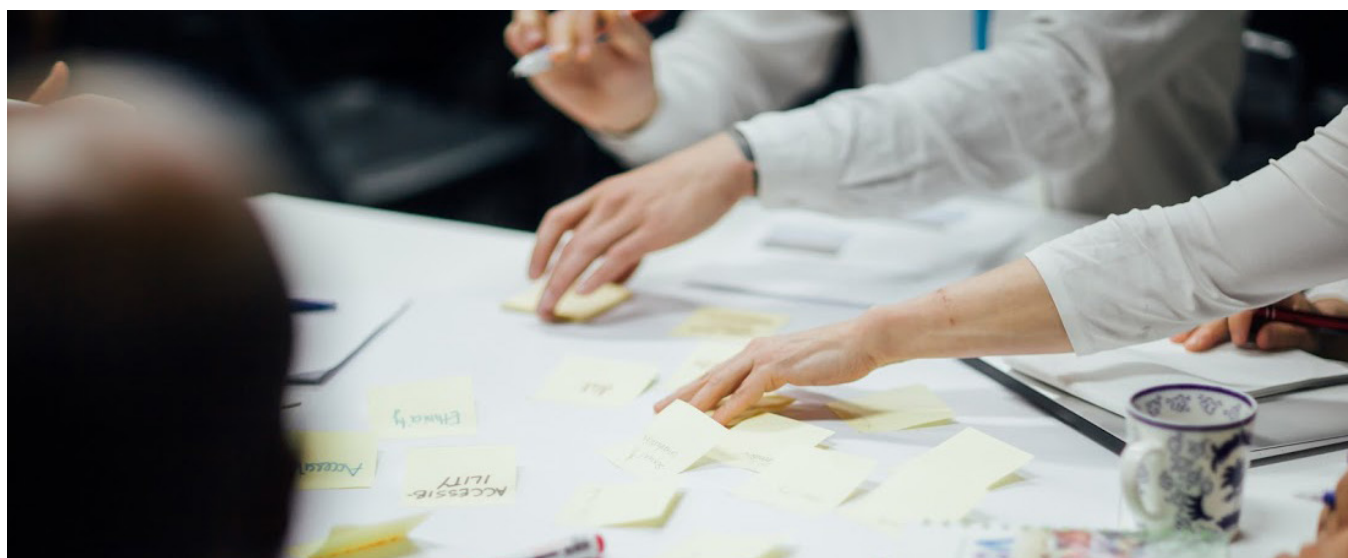
05/ Incubators and accelerators are uniquely positioned to serve as ecosystem builders once their organisations are viable. Incubators and accelerators inherently serve as intermediaries between social enterprises, mentors, and technical experts that provide support services, educational institutions, and investors. That success relies on sound entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems, serves as a strong incentive for them to engage in ecosystem building activities with other important institutions such as local governments. Providing capacity building support to incubators and accelerators helps build viable foundations necessary for them to effectively engage as ecosystem builders, by ensuring that they are able to deliver quality support to social enterprises and establish a sense of stability as organisations. However, capacity building support alone does not address the ecosystem-level challenges that constrain incubators and accelerators in the region. These challenges include access to patient capital and impact investment, a pipeline of viable social enterprises, business enabling environments, and more. The incubators and

accelerators in Frontier Incubators are now better positioned to serve as ecosystem builders, and targeted future support could further scale their capabilities and promote activities to help incubators and accelerators address shared local and regional challenges. Donors, including DFAT, should continue to investigate the value of supporting incubators and accelerators as ecosystem builders.

06/ Finally, embedding processes to encourage adaptive management throughout implementation is critical to implementing programs to support the evolving needs of incubators and accelerators. Frontier Incubators incorporated mid-point check ins to resolve challenges (and replicate identified good practices) across the custom support programs. However, building in further flexibility, including options to re-match with new partners or shift focus areas as needs evolved, may have enabled participants to get even more out of the program.

“The program has been very supportive and adaptive. They really listen to the challenges we are facing and that has made the program go beyond expectations.”

– Cohort Partner



06/ Annexes

- + Program Partners
- + Cohort Partners
- + Virtual Cohort

Annex 1: Frontier Incubator

Program Partners

Akina

Ākina is New Zealand's leading social enterprise (SE) development organisation, operating in New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region. Ākina delivers a range of capability building programmes for SEs at different stages of development and provides specialist capacity building and advisory services in enterprise development, financing and market access, and sector development.

Fledge

Fledge is a network of conscious company accelerators and seed funds, searching the world of great mission-driven for-profit startups. By inviting 6–8 at a time to an intense 10-week accelerator, and investing in each using a unique revenue-based equity structure, Fledge creates a long-term relationship to continue guiding them from idea to success. (So far) Fledge runs programs in Seattle, Vancouver, Lima, Barcelona, and Padua, and are expanding in 1–2 cities per year.

Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN)

GEN operates a platform of programs in 170 countries aimed at making it easier for anyone, anywhere to start and scale a business. By fostering deeper cross border collaboration and initiatives between entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, policymakers, and entrepreneurial support organisations, GEN works to fuel healthier start and scale ecosystems that create more jobs, educate individuals, accelerate innovation, and strengthen economic growth. Its extensive footprint of national operations and global verticals in policy, research, and programs, and ensures members have unparalleled access to the most relevant knowledge, networks, communities, and programs.

Miller Center's Global Social Benefit Institute (GSBI)

Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship is the largest and most successful university-based social enterprise accelerator in the world. Miller Center's Global Social Benefit Institute (GSBI) helps social entrepreneurs to help more people. Since 2003 GSBI programs have accelerated 900+ social entrepreneurs, who have raised over \$940M+, and positively impacted the lives of 300M+ people.

invest2innovate (i2i)

I2i supports startup communities in growth markets, and has been operating in Pakistan since 2011. i2i supports entrepreneurs via the i2i Accelerator, an annual four-month program that provides business support and access to mentors and investment. i2i has licensed and customised its curriculum to support a number of initiatives, including the National Incubation Centre Islamabad, the Grameenphone Accelerator in Bangladesh, and trainings for youth in Pakistan, Ukraine and Nepal.

Social Enterprise Academy (SEA)

SEA delivers transformational learning and development programs focused on leadership, entrepreneurship, learning and social impact for people working for social purpose at all levels, and organisations at all stages. 12 country teams are currently in development. With local adaptation and innovation by a growing team of partners across Africa, Asia and Europe, the Academy aims to help build the strength of the social enterprise movement.

Spring

Spring exists to change the world through entrepreneurship. A certified B Corporation, Spring supports entrepreneurs who are using business as a force for good through incubation, acceleration, leaders roundtables, funding training, workshops, and ecosystem development advisory services. Headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, Spring supports entrepreneurs via City Partners in over 10 countries around the world.

The Difference Incubator (TDi)

TDi's mission is to awaken the possibility of doing good and making money by returning to the roots of business. They work across Australia and the Pacific with entrepreneurs and businesses to create sustainable business models that create measurable impact. TDi combine their significant experience in entrepreneurship, finance and investment, innovation, design, development and measurement with a flexible and relational approach that builds capacity and sustainable results.

Annex 1: Frontier Incubator Program Partners (cont.)

Uncharted

Uncharted is the next generation of accelerator that uses the power of an entrepreneurial accelerator to address major social and environmental issues like the future of food, urban poverty, and hate and discrimination. They scale and connect organisations in three ways.

1. Accelerate: Resourcing organisations with mentors, funders, and customised training.
 2. Connect: Bringing together ventures who are all tackling the same problem so they can share insights and find collaboration opportunities.
 3. Empower: Giving power away and empowering others to change the world, whether through one-off specialised training or licensing their world-class curriculum.
-

Village Capital

Village Capital builds bridges for entrepreneurs who are creating an inclusive and sustainable world. Their programs connect high potential, early-stage entrepreneurs with the people, institutions, and capital they need to succeed. Since 2009, Village Capital has supported more than 1,000 entrepreneurs through their programs, and partnered with affiliated investment funds, including VilCap Investments, that have invested seed capital in more than 90 program graduates. Through their VilCap Communities program, Village Capital provides an all-inclusive solution for program design, management, and implementation of a venture development program.

Villgro

Villgro Innovations Foundation is India's oldest and one of the world's largest social enterprise incubators. Villgro supports innovative, impactful and successful for-profit enterprises who are tackling some of the most pressing challenges in the developing world—access to healthcare, education and modernising agricultural practices. Villgro's unique incubation model is being replicated in Kenya, Philippines and Vietnam.

Annex 2: Frontier Incubator Cohort Partners

BRAC Social Innovation Lab (SIL)

SIL is a knowledge and experimentation hub of BRAC, which works with young innovators and internal programmes to test new ideas, design prototypes, conduct market research, learn and share what works and what doesn't in solving the most complex social problems.

Centre for Social Initiatives Promotion (CSIP)

CSIP aims to provide direct support to individuals and organisations who apply innovative and sustainable business solutions to solve social and environmental challenges and works to raise awareness of social enterprises, build a strong network, and improve the enabling environment for social enterprises.

Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF)

As the National Private Sector Organisation of Fiji, FCEF promotes good governance, leadership, and excellence that enhances business environment.

Impact Hub Phnom Penh (IHPP)

IHPP's mission is to inspire, connect, enable, and support Cambodian youth to develop innovative mindsets and entrepreneurial solutions which contribute toward advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Cambodia through their innovation space, events, incubation programs, online courses, and an extensive network of national and international innovators, entrepreneurs, mentors, policymakers, and multi-stakeholder partners.

Impact Hub Yangon (IHY)

IHY is an innovation lab, a business Incubator, and a social enterprise community centre that offers a unique ecosystem of resources, inspiration, and collaboration opportunities to grow impact.

Instellar

Instellar supports social enterprises to grow their businesses and boost their impact. We are accelerating social innovation in organisations, and working together towards scalable and sustainable social impact through incubation, consultancy, and investment in other mission-driven companies.

KisStartup

KisStartup was established in 2015 with the mission to accompany entrepreneurs and startups in enhancing their innovation capacity, to support them to innovate more effectively and bring more practical benefits to the community. Our vision is to become a flourishing community of innovators, rooted in Vietnam and acting globally, that creates long-lasting impact.

LightCastle Partners

Currently focused on agriculture and technology, LightCastle runs accelerator programs that adopt lean startup principles, conduct sessions, link up with mentors/entrepreneurs and facilitate market connections and collects market data to build pitches and create investor linkages.

One to Watch

One to Watch is an investment management company that works with small and medium sized companies focused on basic needs (food, infrastructure and healthcare) that create impact as well as profits through their in-house business accelerator programs, making investments, and providing post-investment business development support.

Rise Impact

Rise Impact specialises in delivering social business consultation, designing business incubation/ acceleration programs, and facilitating a range of services to spark innovation and bring new ideas to life, with clients including government agencies, universities, private companies, and NGOs.

Moonshot Ventures

Moonshot Ventures is a venture fund and startup studio that builds disruptive ventures with mission-driven entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia.

SHE Investments

SHE is a social enterprise in Cambodia that works with women micro-small entrepreneurs around the country, supporting them to scale and bridge the gender gap in the SME sector. SHE works with major international agencies and local partners to design and deliver Cambodia's first and only gender-focused, culturally tailored, and evidence-based incubators.

Annex 2: Frontier Incubator Cohort Partners (cont.)

Samoa Business Hub

The Samoa Business Hub provides business training for new and existing businesses, supports the delivery of basic business skills and financial literacy training to rural communities, and works in partnership with NGOs government ministries on projects to help promote sustainable business practices.

Social Innovation Acceleration Program (SIAP)

SIAP focuses on entrepreneurs with ideas and solutions to create positive impact and drive change through business, and assists them to further develop their product and grow the business by providing capacity building, mentorship, business development, access to funding and strategic partnerships, project management and community support.

Social Innovation Lab (SIL)

SIL works to create social impact by supporting social innovators and embedding sustainability as a core value in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Pakistan and beyond. They provide a testing ground to novice entrepreneurs while ensuring business practices that serve marginalised populations and fields.

Takhleeq

Takhleeq is a business incubator housed within University of Central Punjab with the objective of instilling the spirit of entrepreneurship in Pakistani youth. They provide hands-on training, coaching, mentorship, ecosystem linkages and in future, seed funding.

Toru Institute of Inclusive Innovation

Toru supports early-stage enterprises, entrepreneurs and potential innovators in the development of their solutions by providing support in product design, business incubation, leadership and creates access to resources through mentors, networks, partnerships, and funding, engaging youth, and establishing a knowledge hub for resource sharing.

WISE

WISE partners with an international network of organisations to provide women with the resources and opportunities they need to start up, grow and sustain business within the Mekong region. WISE builds women's capacity on entrepreneurship and innovation, provides mentorship, runs startup incubation and acceleration programs, supports businesses to raise investment, and promotes gender equality, women empowerment and women's leadership.

xchange

xchange is an incubator in the Philippines that invests in early-stage social enterprises while providing tailored mentorship and support to help them achieve scale. Beyond capital, xchange seeks to contribute. Their mission is to catalyse the growth of the Philippine social enterprise sector by helping individual social enterprises reach sustainability and scale in the shortest possible time.

Annex 3: Frontier Incubator

Virtual Cohort Members

Accountability Lab

The Accountability Lab works with young people to find creative, bottom-up solutions to challenges of accountability and integrity in their communities. The team has done everything from supporting networks of film-makers to push back against corruption, to developing websites to help citizens navigate government services, to running a TV show called Integrity Idol to “name and fame” honest bureaucrats.

Agile Development Group

Agile uses design thinking to change mindsets and increase awareness and employment of people with disabilities (PwDs) in Cambodia and deliver human centred design workshops for PwDs to create their own market based interventions.

CoCoNew Tonga

CoCoNew provides professional consultancy to help partners achieve their vision, mission and goals through the following; business planning, structure, KPI setting, financial/budget analysis and setting, marketing ad communications strategy and implementation, recruitment and onboarding of new recruits, mentoring and training of staff, coaching of senior executives, and opportunities for overseas events and networking.

COM Center for Entrepreneurship

The Center for Entrepreneurship fosters the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit in the students of the College of Micronesia-FSM (COM-FSM). The center has also collaborated with numerous organisations in the local community and facilitated large market-style events that invite the general public to participate.

Entrev8

Through a combination of innovation, entrepreneurship and governance, Entrev8 enables existing organisations and budding entrepreneurs to discover and exploit opportunities by showing individuals and teams how to blend emerging innovation tools to discover and test new ideas.

GO Products Limited

The GO Products mission is to provide an equal opportunity for Papua New Guineans in both urban and rural, remote communities, to access goods and services by embracing digital transformation.

Nepal Communitere

Nepal Communitere’s vision is to enable innovators to become successful entrepreneurs. As a vibrant community hub they offer cowering space, a makerspace, training lab, and business incubation services to help people turn their brilliant ideas into reality.

ONOW Myanmar

ONOW offers direct support through their Enterprise Development System to young and under-served entrepreneurs, typically young domestic migrant women, in each stage of a startup to increase the likelihood of success, expansion and increased employment. ONOW’s System includes pre-launch training and planning, capital funding and launch, and post-launch mentoring, and evaluation.

Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The Samoa Chamber of Commerce is an incorporated association of businesses and private sector organisations representing all areas of Samoa’s private sector. The Samoa Chamber of Commerce operates through grants, project work, and membership subscriptions.

Te Area

Te Ara is a Pacific owned and operated business working in social enterprise, capacity building through an innovative model of business incubation fostering economic self-determination. The Te Ara model is an indigenous approach to assist in the alleviation of trade deficits through SME capacity building using culture, local knowledge, and resources as drivers, and tourism as its sustainable financing mechanism.

Annex 3: Frontier Incubator Virtual Cohort Members (cont.)

Timor-Leste Food Lab

The Timor-Leste Food Lab is a social enterprise with an ‘agora’—an open food and coffee studio—dedicated to mentoring youths and building communities across disciplines and geographies. They incubate and provide long-term mentorship and on-the-job training to teams to run food and coffee businesses that deliver a positive social and environmental impact.

Women Agribusiness Incubator (WAGI)

WAGI, which in Filipino means victory or winning, is a new program being developed by Cuso International in partnership with Foundation for Sustainable Society, Inc. WAGI seeks to equip women entrepreneurs in Eastern Visayas, Philippines to launch, grow and scale-up their businesses through an integrated package of funding and technical support. It will provide seed capital grant and dedicated mentors to assist in developing, testing and growing their businesses.