



# ROUNDTABLE ON SCALING-UP INCLUSIVE BUSINESS IN THE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECTOR



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Invest India  
Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi



**INVEST INDIA**

NATIONAL INVESTMENT PROMOTION  
& FACILITATION AGENCY

**ecociate**

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Invest India and Ecociate Consultants organized a 'Roundtable on Scaling Up Inclusive Business in Agriculture and the Food Sector', on 3rd May 2024, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

The roundtable saw participation from 35 delegates representing inclusive businesses, public sector organizations, development agencies, investors, corporate social responsibility (CSR) groups, and private sector stakeholders. The primary focus of the roundtable was to bring together key stakeholders in the Inclusive Business ecosystem in India and to create a supportive environment to boost the growth and impact of Inclusive Businesses (IBs) in India.

This report outlines the key recommendations and insights from the Roundtable.

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## SESSION-1

### Key development and Initiative from Inclusive Business in Agriculture and Food system

**Mr. Gaurav Sishodia, Vice President of Invest India**, in his welcome address, highlighted Invest India's role in fostering a vibrant investment ecosystem in India. He shared how Invest India serves as a one-stop-shop, offering comprehensive services like market research, policy guidance, and assistance with regulatory processes to support companies in raising investments. Additionally, he underscored the collaborative efforts with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to promote inclusive business practices and sustainable development. Mr. Sisodia reiterated Invest India's commitment to encouraging investment and facilitating inclusive business, while expressing gratitude to the partners and stakeholders involved in this journey.

**Ms. Rupa Chanda, Director of the Trade, Investment, and Innovation Division, UN-ESCAP**, in the opening address, emphasized

the critical role of inclusive businesses (IB) in driving sustainable development by offering solutions to societal and environmental challenges. She outlined the importance of IB in fostering economic growth while ensuring that benefits reach marginalized communities, including farmers and other vulnerable social groups. Ms. Chanda shared examples of successful inclusive business models and their impact on local economies from the ASEAN countries. She also mentioned about the IB landscape study in India and highlighted that IB requires robust support in terms of policy frameworks, access to finance, and collaboration with stakeholders across sectors.

She highlighted the progress on inclusive business coaching being received by the 19 Agribusiness companies with the support of Ecociate and Endeava. In her presentation, she highlighted critical areas identified by the IB landscape study, and emphasized on focusing on capacity building, raising awareness, and encouraging partnerships among stakeholders.

She underscored that building appropriate capacities is crucial to ensuring that inclusive businesses have the tools and knowledge to thrive. This involves training and coaching for entrepreneurs, as well as creating supportive environments that nurture innovation. She also stressed the importance of encouraging partnerships among stakeholders to amplify the impact of inclusive businesses. Ms. Chanda concluded by reinforcing ESCAP's commitment to promoting inclusive business across the Asia-Pacific region. She encouraged continued partnerships and cooperation to unlock the full potential of inclusive businesses in contributing to inclusive and sustainable growth, both in India and beyond.

**Ms Marta Perez Cuso, Economic Affairs Officer, UN-ESCAP**, joined the event virtually and shared her perspective on inclusive businesses in India. She outlined the main goals of inclusive businesses as generating profit while maintaining financial stability, creating a positive social impact, and innovating to remain both relevant and profitable. She emphasized the potential for inclusive businesses in India, pointing to the successes achieved so far. Marta discussed UNESCAP's partnerships with Invest India and Ecociate, in the Indian states of Haryana and Telangana, to provide (i) coaching services to 19 Agribusiness companies, (ii) provide exposure to international investment forums, and (iii) closely monitor their growth and reach.

Marta continued to share insights and a set of recommendations from IB landscape study. These included (i) setting a clear direction (ii) raising awareness (iii) providing access to finance (iv) building capacity of IBs

(v) facilitating access to information, and (vi) fostering partnerships among stakeholders. All these are desired to further enhance impact of inclusive businesses in India. She offered a comprehensive status overview of the inclusive business scenario in India against the backdrop of the recommendations. Marta also identified several challenges these businesses might face, such as limited access to capital and regulatory hurdles, while highlighting the opportunities that exist for further growth and impact.

**Mr. Kirti Prasanna Mishra, Co-founder and Director of Ecociate**, opened the roundtable by outlining its purpose and objectives, setting the stage for discussions about inclusive business practices. He provided a brief overview of the Inclusive Business Coaching Program. Mr. Mishra also introduced the diverse profile of participants at the roundtable, representing various stakeholder groups, from entrepreneurs and business leaders to investors and policy advisors. Following the introduction, Mr. Mishra invited three inclusive business leaders to share their insights, focusing on their learning experiences and the challenges they encountered while



## Sharing of Experiences by Inclusive Businesses

implementing inclusive business practices.

Cornext, AgroNxt, and Azad Agro, three companies participating in the Inclusive Business Coaching Program, shared their learnings and experiences from the implementation of inclusive business models. These companies highlighted how their business practices were structured to create both economic value and social impact, focusing on supporting smallholder farmers and other vulnerable sections of society. Following section briefly captures their sharing:

**Mr. Madhav Kshatriya from Cornext**, spoke about Cornext's efforts in innovating and customizing technology offering for the smallholder dairy farmers. These farmers were provided access to silage-based fodder which has improved milk productivity, thereby positively impacting their incomes. He also informed the delegates about the investment being received by his company as an outcome of a match-making session organized by UN-ESCAP during one of their event in Bali, Indonesia.

**Mr. Rajat Vardhan from AgroNxt** shared how their innovative soil testing solutions have

enabled small farmers to access instant soil test results at affordable prices. These soil test results are helping smallholder farmers to judiciously plan the use of fertilisers and adopt sustainable agriculture practices.

**Mr. Dinesh Malik from Azad Agro** shared how Azad Agro has been providing smallholder spice farmers access to fair and remunerative markets. In order to help farmers adopt sustainable agricultural practices and ready the farmers for the market interface they also provide training and handholding support to them. He also shared about their work with the Government of Haryana to support farmers in receiving a higher subsidy for cultivating a particular spice crop.

Overall, these companies demonstrated that inclusive business models could drive meaningful change by addressing the needs of vulnerable groups while also achieving business success. Their experiences offered valuable insights into their innovations, & practical benefits of inclusive business and reinforced importance of collaboration and support from programs like the Inclusive Business Coaching Program.



## SESSION-2

# Opportunities for inclusive business in scaling-up sustainable agriculture in India and building an Inclusive Business Ecosystem

The session was a moderated discussion by Mr. Kirti Mishra, Ecociate in which all the participants shared their inputs and suggestions to develop an enabling environment and scaling up the inclusive business initiative in India. The summary of key inputs and recommendations from the session is presented below:



## Key Inputs and Recommendations

### 1. Establish a dedicated platform or forum for inclusive Businesses

- **Purpose of the Platform/Forum:** The platform/ forum would serve the purpose of connecting various stakeholders involved in the IB ecosystem, including businesses, government agencies such as National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), innovation cells, incubation centres etc., NGOs, relevant bilateral and multilateral agencies, financial institutions and inclusive business support organizations. This platform/forum would facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration opportunities, policy dialogue and address issues through dialogues and deliberations.
- **Invest India as a Lead Agency:** Invest India to be considered as a central lever for coordinating efforts, providing resources, and championing the growth of the IB ecosystem.
- **Decentralize the support for IB:** Decentralize IB promotion efforts by establishing incubation centres at district and block levels, closer to the communities most impacted by IB initiatives.
- **NRLM as a lead partner:** NRLM with its outreach (having access to huge social capital) and relevance in inclusive businesses to be one of the lead partners in this platform.

### 2. Measuring and Monitoring impact of IBs

- **Robust and responsive Monitoring mechanism:** Develop robust data collection and management systems, as part of responsive monitoring, to record and track impact of IBs. This will be vital for measuring progress, demonstrating

success stories, taking corrective action and attracting further investment.

- **Sector-Specific Impact Frameworks:** Design impact measurement frameworks tailored to specific sectors where IBs operate and provide clear guidelines. This would encourage IBs to focus on measurable social and environmental outcomes.

### 3. Financial incentives and Support to IBs

- **Setting up a fund with the Government to support IBs:** Establish a government-backed impact fund to support IBs. This fund, managed by a professional agency, would ensure transparency and accountability. The government should act as a patient investor, giving companies ample time to deliver on their inclusive business goals. It should also encourage other relevant institutional investors to join the initiative.
- **Financial Incentives:** Develop a framework for incentivizing IBs through various financial modalities. This could include grants, subsidies, blended finance mechanisms, and tax breaks to support their efforts in promoting inclusive growth.
- **Alternative Financing Mechanisms:** Explore alternative financing mechanisms, as traditional financial institutions may not fully understand or value the social impact potential of IBs. Also, traditional financing costs may be too high for IBs that focus on social and environmental outcomes.
- **Additional cost of inclusivity and sustainability need support:** Inclusive and sustainable business practices would attract additional costs, such as

training of farmers, reaching remote locations, dealing with lower economies of scale, and investing in green packaging etc. IBs require support to cover these costs to remain competitive in the market. The financing entities in the ecosystem have to be apprised for a responsive action.

- Supporting companies at early stages of product development:- Provide support for companies at early stages of product development, such as ideation and pre-market stages, to ensure that innovative solutions are developed with a focus on the needs of the base-of-the-pyramid (BoP) segment.

#### 4. Key Focus areas for IBs

- **Creating Access to Technology for Smallholders:** Leverage digital technologies to bridge the access and reach gap and ensure greater inclusivity in IB operations. This could involve areas like mobile banking, online training modules, digital agri and weather advisory and market access platforms for smallholder farmers.
- **Capacity Building for Community Institutions:** Strengthen the capacity of community institutions like FPOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to better understand business dynamics and work effectively with inclusive

businesses. This will enable community institutions to improve their reach and scale and transfer the benefits to smallholder farmers.

- **Women Empowerment:** Recognize crucial role of women in IB and work towards their empowerment in the agriculture and food sector. IBs in these sectors should actively integrate strategies that promote women's participation and leadership. IBs can incentivise women farmers by offering them better prices, developing women-friendly technologies and building their capacities along with offering them alternative livelihoods.
- **Value Chain Integration:** Promote a holistic approach where IB solutions are being integrated across the entire value chain, from sourcing raw materials to processing, marketing, and final product delivery. This fosters a more inclusive and sustainable model.
- **Promoting Sustainability in Agriculture and Allied Sectors:** IBs can take the lead in promoting sustainable and regenerative agriculture practices among smallholder farmers. These initiatives should be such which on one hand, help communities build resilience towards climate change and on the other, offer better economic returns.



- **Supporting smallholder farmers in achieving living income goal:** IBs should also consider supporting smallholder farmers and workers engaged in their value chains in earning an income level which is good enough to live a decent and dignified life.

## 5. Strategy for supporting IBs

- Develop a comprehensive strategy with short, medium, and long-term goals to support a large number of SMEs in becoming successful IBs.
- **IBs need to work on localized and customized solutions:** Learning from previous experience and initiatives by the large corporates in agriculture indicates that inclusive business need to focus more on localized problems and solutions. Looking at the diversity of Indian Agriculture, varied agro-climatic zones and other similar factors, scaling up these initiatives and interventions at a large scale might not be feasible in India.
- **Focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Encourage and support SMEs in transitioning towards becoming IBs. This could involve tailored training programs, mentorship opportunities, and access to financing schemes specifically designed for SMEs.
- **Social Behaviour Change:** Recognize the need for a shift in social attitudes and behaviours to support the growth of IBs. This could involve raising awareness about the concept of IBs and their positive impact among the target audiences.
- **Coaching and Support Services:** Conventional businesses need coaching and handholding support to identify and incorporate inclusive business opportunities in their operations. This

need for coaching was also articulated by the existing cohort members as it has helped them to better understand the entire ecosystem and forge collaboration with appropriate institutions. Business coaching services can help them develop strong business models, address real-world challenges, and navigate the complexities of operating as an IB.

- **Mapping of stakeholders:** Mapping of the relevant stakeholders within the country, who can potentially support IBs in accessing markets, leveraging finance and receiving other support services was expressed as an important need.

## 6. Policy level initiatives

- **Promoting 'Green Public Procurement':** As part of the Government's procurement program of agriculture commodities at minimum support price, it should consider incentivizing farmers who are producing agri commodities by using sustainable practices, apart the price support which is applicable to all farmers irrespective of their choice of package of practices.
- **Recognition of IBs:** Establish recognition programs to celebrate successful IBs and showcase their achievements. They can be provided preferences in procurement, pitching along with other incentives.
- **Accreditation Model:** Implement an accreditation system for IBs. This would provide a standardized framework for assessing their social and environmental impact, fostering trust among investors and potential partners like NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission)

## CONCLUSION

Concluding remarks were shared by Ms. Rupa Chanda and Mr. Gaurav Sisodia. The key highlights from the concluding remarks are as follows.

The concluding remarks from the event highlighted the success of the roundtable in uniting stakeholders and initiating meaningful discussions to scale up inclusive businesses in India. Attendees expressed optimism that the event laid a solid foundation for ongoing engagement and future dialogues that could significantly impact the growth and development of inclusive business practices across the country.

A key takeaway was the need to conduct a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise to identify various players in the inclusive business ecosystem in India. This exercise would help create a clearer picture of the key stakeholders, enabling better coordination and collaboration to advance inclusive business goals.

Invest India was recognized as a crucial institution to lead this initiative, given its extensive network and experience in fostering business development. By leveraging its resources and expertise, Invest India could play a pivotal role in bringing together

## DETAILS OF DELEGATES ATTENDED THE DIALOGUE

NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION	NAME OF DELEGATES
Access Development Services	Mr Shubhendu Das
Access Development Services	Mr. Pramod Kumar Sahu
AgroNxt Services Private Limited	Mr Rajat Vardhan
Ambuja Cement Foundation	Mr Manov Maity
Ayekart	Mr Rajesh Jain
Azad Agro Enterprises	Mr Dinesh Malik
Azad Agro Enterprises	Ms Poonam Sangwan
BharatRohan Airborne Innovations Pvt Ltd	Ms Megha Raju
BharatRohan Airborne Innovations Pvt Ltd	Ms Pragati Joshi
Bizzebuy	Mr Ravi Tiwari
Centre for Responsible Business	Ms Nitya

NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION	NAME OF DELEGATES
Centre for Responsible Business	Mr Aditya Petwal
Cornext Agri Solutions	Mr. Madhav Kshatriya
Ecociate Consultants	Mr Kirti Prasanna Mishra
Ecociate Consultants	Mr Santosh Kumar Gupta
GIZ	Ms Meekha Hannah Paul
HCL	Mr Prasenjit Sengupta
IDH	Mr Jagjeet Singh Kondal
India Impact Investors Council	Ms Neha Bhatnagar
India Impact Investors Council	Mr. Girish Aivalli
Intellicap	Mr Ankur Kathuriya
Intellicap	Mr Shivanshu Sharma
Invest India	Mr. Gaurav Sishodia
Invest India	Mr Dhruv Kumar Sharma
Invest India	Ms Sukriti Sharma
McCormick	Ms Poonam Pandey
National Rural Livelihood Mission	Mr Jayaram Killi
National Rural Livelihood Mission	Mr Raman Wadhwa
OLAM	Ms Malavika Gopinath
The Nature Conservancy	Mr Manoj Singh
UN-ESCAP	Ms Rupa Chanda
UN-ESCAP	Ms. Marta Perez Cuso
UNGCNI	Mr Ratnesh Jha
United Nations-FAO	Mr. Takayuki Hagiwara
WWF	Mr. Sumit Roy