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Innovation for inclusive development in Southeast Asia: the roles of regional coordination mechanisms

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Abstract In the past, studies on inclusive development involve mainly the perspective of equitable distribution of economic and societal outputs. This study, however, takes a different approach and analyses the potential roles of regional coordination mechanisms (RCMs), specifically universities and research council's networks within

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Southeast Asia, in disseminating the innovation-related activities for inclusive development or Innovation for Inclusive Development (IID). The literature on innovation intermediaries within the realm of innovation systems studies was used to establish the framework of the study. The findings indicate that RCMs have a huge potential role to play. However, due to a number of reasons, including lack of funding support, lack of attention and commitment to IID, weak engagement with industry and non-governmental organisations, the implementation of the IID activities was rather poor. As a whole, the study argues that current approaches are not well positioned and it is fragmented preventing the effective use of RCMs despite their potentials for IID efforts. The study attributes this to the systemic failures in the regional coordinating systems. In enhancing the role of RCMs in IID, this study recommends the promotion of IID platform, the leveraging of non-government organisations and industry as well as energising the Southeast Asia engagement in promoting IID.

Keywords: Inclusive development; grass-roots innovation; intermediaries; social INCLUSION; ASEAN.

1. Introduction

In the realm of development studies, efforts in reorienting towards a more 'inclusive innovation' path have an important role to play in overcoming issues pertaining to economic growth, social and economic development (Chataway et al. 2014). Indeed, the concept of 'inclusive' and its corollary, 'inclusive development', has become part of the development agenda at both national and regional levels. Likewise, common issues and problems faced by countries, e.g. environmental, economy and societal well-being problems, can be effectively handled if and when better regional cooperation is established especially when sharing of innovative solutions among countries is promoted. Nevertheless, a review of the literatures shows that there have been a few attempts in examining the potential role of coordinating networks for inclusive development at the regional level.

More often, in past studies, inclusive development focuses on equitable distribution of economic and societal outputs (such as Cook 2006; Edwards-Schachter et al. 2012; Gupta 2012; Lawson 2010). Among others, the literature also focuses on the discourses on the intermediary roles of non-academic and independent networks such as those regional networks amongst non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the wider civil society organisation (CSOs). For instance, a landmark study on *Science and Technology Innovations for the Base of the Pyramid in Southeast Asia* (iBoP Asia) postulated that the roles of intermediation in promoting and supporting pro-poor innovation in science and technology are perhaps more commonly associated with development-related programmes of NGOs or other non-state actors. These literatures mainly focus on the role of NGOs acting as the bridging agents between the society and the state (Romero et al. 2012).

Despite the progress in the literatures on the roles of non-governmental actors as intermediaries in inclusive-related development programmes, the potential roles of universities and research councils coordinating networks, which are mainly academic and state-backed, are less explored in Southeast