Key Messages by Ecosystem Theme

Below are some of the high-level, takeaway messages relating to three different themes or topics within an innovation ecosystem - (1) Research, Incubation & Acceleration; (2) Pathways to Scale; and (3) The Enabling Environment. For more specific analysis, you can also view recommendations according to a range of typical ecosystem challenges or stakeholder groups.

- Building more collaborative partnerships between research institutions, government and established industry actors is vital to improving the flow of timely, relevant and accessible research and innovation between these actors. More (and more targeted) advocacy around the important contribution that research plays in informing the continuous evolution of a dynamic innovation ecosystem is also needed to increase the demand for new knowledge and ways of working.
- The co-creation of a national research agenda with clear priority areas for research and innovation aligned with development needs is an important unifying asset around which a variety of stakeholders can develop focused partnerships. It can also act as a valuable catalyst in driving more domestic investment in under-performing / neglected sectors where innovation is most needed, and a vehicle through which to incentivise and consolidate data and evidence from across the ecosystem.
- The curricula currently used by most education and training institutions around innovation needs updating to reflect more of the agile skillsets and practices required.
for contemporary entrepreneurship, while also broadening the reach and attraction of these courses to encourage innovators within more marginalised communities. Codifying tools, resources and ways of working for entrepreneurs will make a significant contribution to professionalising the field and strengthening demand for innovation-led responses to the fourth industrial revolution.

- Incubators play an important connector role in helping fledgling innovators identify and engage with wider networks from which they can source the different kinds of support they will need along the scaling pathway. They can also help to articulate, communicate and translate innovator needs to other funders and potential partners while also capturing and disseminating practical lessons from the testing of different business models within their portfolio.

Pathways to Scale

- Scale depends as much on who you know as on what you know. An innovator needs to access networks that cross-pollinate their peer entrepreneurs testing different products and services in different sectors with those who have already successfully reach scale and who can act as mentors or Board Directors for start-up companies. International development agencies in particular should place more emphasis on funding the innovator and the ecosystem that supports them, rather than just the innovation they are seeking to scale.

- Intermediary or market shaping institutions can play a critical role in helping to broker scaling partnerships between different actors within the ecosystem at different stages of the scaling pathway, but these ‘helper’ organisations must be clearly visible and sustainably-resourced in order to be effective over the lengthy timeframes that scaling typically requires.

- Venture capitalists, international funders and established private sector actors should not only seek to provide appropriate support to emerging entrepreneurs, but should at the same time be watchful for
opportunities to support strategic mergers and acquisitions in order to mitigate the risk of flooding (and over-burdening) the market with too many start-ups.

- Greater attention should be paid by all actors to better understanding demand for innovation in different sectors and populations, and the external social, cultural, political and economic factors that will continue to influence the scalability of an innovation over time. The ethical engagement of target populations in the design and continuous iteration of innovations will also likely increase their ultimate sustainability and exponential scale in the future.

The Enabling Environment

- Responsibility for the design, monitoring and management of an innovation ecosystem is shared across all stakeholders - not just government. However, government can play a key leadership role in promoting the importance of an ecosystems approach and establishing priorities for innovation around which different actors are catalysed to collaborate.

- Finding new (and ethical) ways to test and explore the regulatory implications of emerging technology innovations is important to ensure innovation does not further exacerbate existing inequalities and divisions within society. Platforms for sharing data, sharing research findings and convening actors engaged in the testing and analysis of new products, services and approaches are a critical part of the infrastructure needed to enable well-functioning innovation ecosystems.

- An enabling environment is also one in which failure is seen as an opportunity for shared learning rather than shame, which in turn requires the nurturing of a culture where those with new ideas and approaches are given meaningful platforms and opportunities to pitch and share their ideas with others.