

CONCEPT NOTE

ASEAN INCLUSIVE BUSINESS AWARDS 2026 & INCLUSIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY SPECIAL AWARDS 2026

1. BACKGROUND

The ASEAN Inclusive Business (IB) Awards under the Philippine ASEAN Chairship 2026 continue to serve as a regional platform that recognizes enterprises demonstrating impactful and sustainable business models that integrate low-income and marginalized communities into their core operations. Since its inception, the Awards have highlighted how Inclusive Business models contribute to economic growth, social progress, and resilience across ASEAN.

In line with the conduct of the Ninth ASEAN Inclusive Business Forum with the theme “Building Capacities for Inclusive Business: Advancing the ASEAN Framework for Talent and Institutional Development,” the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026 seek to reinforce the region’s commitment to strengthening inclusive, innovative, and future-ready enterprises.

Inclusivity remains at the heart of all Inclusive Business models and continues to serve as a fundamental principle in advancing equitable economic participation across the region. As ASEAN economies continue to evolve amid technological, economic, and social transformations, innovation has become increasingly important in strengthening inclusivity and expanding opportunities for underserved communities.

In this regard, the Inclusivity Special Award recognizes enterprises that demonstrate outstanding efforts in creating meaningful social and economic impact for the Base of the Pyramid (BoP), including through innovative approaches, technologies, partnerships, delivery systems, and community-driven solutions that improve accessibility, participation, and livelihoods. Meanwhile, the Sustainability Special Award recognizes enterprises that demonstrate a strong commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and long-term sustainable business practices.

The ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026 and the Inclusivity and Sustainability Special Awards 2026 therefore aim to celebrate enterprises that exemplify inclusive growth and sustainable development while contributing to ASEAN’s vision of a resilient, people-centered, and future-oriented regional economy. The Awards ceremony is scheduled on 22 September 2026 at the Likhang Filipino Exhibition Tent, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City, Philippines, on the occasion of the Ninth ASEAN Inclusive Business Forum.

2. Criteria for ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026 and Inclusivity and Sustainability Special Awards

2.1 Criteria for ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026

Based on the Guidelines for the Promotion of Inclusive Business in ASEAN endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM), applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- a. Be headquartered in an ASEAN country, with commercial and/or operational presence in ASEAN;
- b. Be organized as a private for-profit enterprise;
- c. At least 55% of the applicant's equity should be owned by ASEAN nationals;
- d. Integrate the Base of the Pyramid (BoP) in its core operations working with and/or serving as suppliers, distributors, retailers, employees, and/or customers;
- e. Demonstrate commercial viability;
- f. Comply with legal standards for labor and environment in its countries of operation; and
- g. Not falling under excluded business' list:
 - i. Producing or trading in weapons and munitions, or gambling, casinos and equivalent businesses;
 - ii. Conducting activities involving harmful or exploitative forms of forced labour or child labour;
 - iii. Producing or trading in any product or activity deemed illegal under host country laws or regulations or international conventions and agreements, or subject to international bans, such as pharmaceuticals, pesticides/herbicides, ozone-depleting substances, PCBs, wildlife or products regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES);
 - iv. Producing or trading in radioactive materials (this does not apply to the purchase of medical equipment, quality control (measurement) equipment and any equipment where the radioactive source is considered to be trivial and/or adequately shielded);
 - v. Producing or trading in unbonded asbestos fibres. This does not apply to purchase and use of bonded asbestos cement sheeting where the asbestos content is less than 20%;
 - vi. Undertaking drift net fishing in the marine environment using nets in excess of 2.5 km in length and battery shock fishing;
 - vii. Undertaking commercial logging operations for use in primary tropical moist forest;
 - viii. Producing or trading in wood or other forestry products other than from sustainably managed forests;

- ix. Involved in production, trade, storage, or transport of significant volumes of hazardous chemicals, or commercial scale usage of hazardous chemicals;
- x. Engaged in production or activities that impinge on the lands owned, or claimed under adjudication, by Indigenous Peoples, without full documented consent of such peoples, as defined in respective national laws; and
- xi. Cigarette, narcotic drugs, alcoholic drinks.

Applicants from all AMS will be required to complete an application form (ANNEX 1) containing a set of questions which is divided into two parts; namely:

- Part 1: Basic information for eligibility screening; and
- Part 2: Detailed description of IB activities and how the organization drives the impact on the social, economic and environmental well-being of a specific community or target group. Question number 8 and 18 are revised to include the criteria for inclusivity and sustainability special awards.

Each ASEAN Member State (AMS) shall conduct the initial screening and evaluation of applicants at the national level based on the established eligibility and assessment criteria. Following the national screening process, each AMS shall endorse only one (1) enterprise as its official nominee to the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026.

The endorsed nominees from all AMS shall be recognized as recipients of the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026. From among these recognized awardees, the recipients of the Inclusivity and Sustainability Special Awards shall be selected through the regional evaluation process based on the established criteria and evaluation mechanism.

2.2 Criteria for Inclusivity and Sustainability Special Awards

As the organizer of the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026, the Philippines, the host country, shall present two (2) Special Awards recognizing outstanding achievements in “Inclusivity” and “Sustainability.” Winners for each category shall be selected from among the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026 recipients that best demonstrate excellence in the respective criteria.

a. Inclusivity Special Award

To qualify for Inclusivity Special Award, the original Question No. 18 under Part 2 of the application form:

Please describe if you believe your organisation contributes to systemic change (for example, by addressing gender issues as well as issues of poverty). Please describe why, giving one or several concrete examples. (max. 150 words)

is revised to request more detailed information related to inclusivity. Applicants are now asked to provide response to the following questions:

To qualify for the Inclusivity Special Award, applicants shall provide additional details addressing the following:

- i. BoP categories
This may include women, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, urban poor people, rural poor people, unemployed, retirees, ex-convicts, others (please specify)
- ii. Impact on the BoP
This may include job creation, income generation, increase in income, access to public facilities, access to low-cost goods, access to education and health, others (please specify)
- iii. Multiplier/Spillover effect
This may include access to opportunities, poverty reduction, gender equality, access to necessities, social well-being, community development, others (please specify)

Applicants are encouraged to provide concrete examples and measurable outcomes for each category.

b. Sustainability Special Award

For the Sustainability Special Award, an addendum question builds upon Question No. 8 under Part 2 of the application form:

Does your company promote Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) standards?

Applicants are required to provide expanded responses describing how the company implements ESG practices with concrete examples under the following indicators: (max. 50 words for each indicator)

No.	Indicators	Statements (example)
Environment (E)		
1	Emission Management	My firm is implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and its carbon footprint (e.g. prioritise digital copies, use hybrid cars, energy-efficient light bulbs, paperless operation and others)
2	Water Management	My firm is implementing initiatives on water efficiency (e.g. use water-saving taps, low-flow showerheads, water heater insulation, high efficiency toilets and others)
3	Waste Management	My firm uses eco-friendly raw materials in my business operation (e.g. recycled rubber, biodegradable plastics, compostable straws and others)
Social (S)		
5	Labour Practices & Standards	My firm has a policy which sets out clear commitments and targets to support gender equality, racial diversity & equal opportunity and remuneration
6	Safety & Health	My firm has an occupational health & safety (OHS) policy which sets out clear commitments and targets
7	Employee Benefits	My firm offers employee benefits programmes such as training, childcare, etc.
Governance (G)		
8	Integrity/Anti-Corruption	My firm has a policy on gifts / corporate entertaining / anti-corruption that is consistent with its code of ethics/conduct or values statement
9	Decision Making & Strategic Oversight	My firm has an ESG policy which sets out clear commitments and targets to improve ESG performance and management.
10	Disclosure, Transparency, & Data Protection	My firm practices responsible financial and non-financial disclosure consistent with the company's code of ethics/conduct or value statements

Responses shall demonstrate how sustainability principles are embedded into business operations and contribute to long-term environmental and social impact.

3. Evaluation Mechanism

3.1 Nomination for ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026

Each AMS is invited to nominate one (1) company for recognition at the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026. The nomination process involves the following steps using the evaluation tool (**ANNEX 2**):

- **Eligibility Screening:** AMS should fill Part 1 of the evaluation tool with Answers “Yes” or “No”. Only candidates that pass the eligibility criteria (Part 1) and when all the evaluation tool in Part 1 indicates green - should be evaluated based on the Part 2 of the evaluation tool (with the criteria).
- **Scoring of Eligible Candidates:** Part 2 should be filled in with numbers. Each cell will indicate the maximum weight which could be given for the eligible candidate.
- **Nomination for Regional Selection:** AMS should shortlist the top candidate based on the scoring in Part (2) and submit the top candidate to the Award Secretariat for the Award Secretariat to populate the list of regional nominees. The list will be used for recognition at the ASEAN IB Awards 2026, and for further selection for the inclusivity and sustainability special awards.

3.2 Selection for Inclusivity and Sustainability Special Awards

The Innovation and Sustainability Special Awards shall be evaluated by a Selection Committee composed of representatives from the host economy, relevant ASEAN bodies, and technical partners.

The Selection Committee shall evaluate responses provided for the additional Special Award questions. Scores shall be based on the following:

- Inclusivity Special Award
 - BoP Categories
 - Impact on the BoP
 - Multiplier/Spillover Effect
- Sustainability Special Award
 - Environment
 - Social
 - Governance

Scoring shall follow the ASEAN IB Awards evaluation scale:

- Poor (0)
- Below Average (2.5)
- Average (5)
- Above Average (7.5)
- Excellent (10)

The Selection Committee may also consider the overall impact, replicability, and contribution of enterprises toward ASEAN's inclusive and sustainable economic agenda.

The Selection Committee will be the Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprise Development (BSMED), Department of Trade and Industry, the Philippines.

4. Travel Support

The Host Country shall provide airfare and accommodation for **one (1) ACCMSME representative, one (1) IB Focal Point, and one (1) IB Awardee from each ASEAN Member State (AMS)**. The participation of all three representatives will be **covered under the Host Country's sponsorship arrangements**, subject to applicable government accounting and auditing rules and regulations. This support is intended to facilitate the physical participation of the designated ACCMSME, IB Focal Points, and Awardees in the Ninth ASEAN Inclusive Business Forum and the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards 2026.

Daily subsistence allowance and other travel-related expenses not covered by the Host Country shall be borne by the participants or their respective organizations, or may be supported through other available sources, as applicable. Detailed information on eligibility, coverage, and travel arrangements shall be communicated separately by the Organizer.