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ADB and JICA launch SEEK Initiative to scale Japanese startups across Southeast Asia and Pacific

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New programme offers seed funding of up to US$400,000 and market-entry support to accelerate innovative solutions in clean energy, sustainable agriculture, digital economy and other priority sectors

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), through its venture capital platform ADB Ventures, has launched the Southeast Asia Emerging Entrepreneurs Kickstart (SEEK) programme in partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to accelerate the commercialisation and regional expansion of Japanese startups addressing key development challenges across Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Supported by the High-Level Technology Fund (HLTF), an ADB trust fund financed by the Government of Japan, the initiative is designed to bridge the funding and market access gap faced by early-stage technology companies developing solutions for emerging economies. The programme combines early-stage capital with market-entry assistance to help startups validate demand, adapt technologies to local conditions and scale commercially across the region.

SEEK will support startups developing innovations across multiple high-impact sectors, including clean energy, sustainable industry, smart mobility, logistics, sustainable agriculture, circular economy, inclusive finance, digital economy and resilient communities. Eligible companies will be considered for seed funding of up to US$400,000, enabling them to progress from market exploration to commercial deployment.

Beyond financing, the initiative provides participating startups with access to ADB's regional development network, potential customers, strategic partners, investors and technical experts. The programme is intended to reduce market-entry barriers by helping companies refine business models, establish regional partnerships and better align their technologies with local development priorities.

The programme will initially focus on Japan-based startups, leveraging the country's strong innovation ecosystem and growing pipeline of technology companies developing solutions with potential application across Asia and the Pacific. By connecting

Japanese innovation with development needs in emerging markets, ADB and JICA aim to accelerate technology transfer while creating new commercial opportunities for startups seeking international expansion.

The initiative also reflects growing recognition that access to patient capital remains one of the principal constraints facing early-stage companies developing technologies for sustainable development. Through the combination of catalytic funding, technical assistance and regional market access, SEEK seeks to improve the commercial readiness of promising innovations while reducing investment risks during the early stages of business growth.

ADB said the programme is expected to create a replicable framework for linking startup innovation with regional development priorities, strengthening collaboration between public development institutions, investors and private-sector innovators. By supporting commercially viable technologies capable of addressing climate resilience, sustainable food systems, clean energy and financial inclusion, the initiative aims to contribute to long-term economic and social development across ADB's developing member countries.

Japan-based startups interested in expanding into Southeast Asia and the Pacific will be invited to submit company profiles and pitch decks for evaluation under the programme. Successful applicants will gain access to funding, strategic advisory support and regional business networks designed to accelerate market adoption and sustainable business growth.