



Driving Sustainable Business Transformation through Young Professionals: The SDG Innovation Accelerator 2025 in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global roadmap for coordinated solutions across social, environmental, and economic domains. This study analyzes the 2025 SDG Innovation Accelerator (SDGI) in Indonesia, organized by the Indonesia Global Compact Network and BRIN, which engaged 94 young professionals from 20 companies to generate SDG-aligned innovations. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and secondary data, the study highlights the case of PT Singaland Asetama's award-winning 'Green Carbon Black' and projects other plausible outcomes. Findings emphasize the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and global exposure in fostering sustainability-oriented innovation, with implications for policy, corporate practice, and future accelerator design.

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, laid out 17 SDGs to be achieved within a common timeframe, with aims spanning poverty eradication, climate action, inclusive economies, and institutional strengthening (United Nations, 2015). These goals have become integral to corporate sustainability strategies worldwide, where businesses are increasingly judged by their ability to innovate responsibly (Elkington, 1997; Seuring & Müller, 2008; Setiawan, et. al, 2025). In emerging economies such as Indonesia, where industrial expansion and environmental vulnerabilities co-exist, aligning economic growth with SDG outcomes presents both a challenge and a critical opportunity (World Bank, 2020).

Innovation accelerators – cohort-based programs offering training, mentorship, prototyping resources, and networking opportunities – have emerged as influential mechanisms in stimulating sustainable innovation (Cohen et al., 2019). They are particularly effective when targeting early-career professionals within firms, who often possess cross-functional knowledge and adaptability but lack autonomy to champion sustainability transition (Adams et al., 2016). By empowering these professionals with design tools, research networks, and pilot platforms, accelerators can catalyze bottom-up shifts toward sustainability-aligned models (Setiawan, et al, 2024).

In 2025, the Indonesia Global Compact Network (IGCN) partnered with the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) to launch SDGI: an accelerator targeting young professionals across the private sector (Adams et al., 2016). The program engaged 94 individuals from 20 corporate entities, grouped into 24 teams, and focused on strengthening each team's ability to design, prototype, and present SDG-aligned business solutions. The program culminated in a Solutions Showcase and Awarding Ceremony on 31 July 2025, where six teams were recognized and PT Singaland Asetama was awarded top honors for its innovation titled "Green Carbon Black," which was subsequently selected to represent Indonesia at the UN Global Leaders Summit in New York (Antara News, 2025; IGCN, 2025; Liputan6, 2025). These facts frame SDGI as a viable exemplar of the accelerator model applied to SDG innovation in Indonesia.

This paper aims to analyze the SDGI 2025 program through a case study lens, focusing on the interaction of accelerator design, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and innovation outputs. It explores the potential of such models to influence sustainable business transformation in emerging markets. Given the partial availability of public data – notably, the full list of winners is not disclosed – the study presents a detailed profile of the documented winner and constructs theory-informed profiles of other plausible winners as pedagogical illustrations. This approach balances empirical grounding with explanatory depth, while clearly distinguishing confirmed facts from analytical projections.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Sustainable innovation research emphasizes that solutions must move beyond incrementalism to address systemic environmental and social challenges (Adams et al., 2016; Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Breliastiti, et. al., 2025).

Innovations rooted in circular economy principles, industrial decarbonization, and inclusive value chains offer paradigmatic shift opportunities with higher transformative potential (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). This study subscribes to the framing that emergent innovation capacity is best activated through structured support and ecosystem engagement (Webster, 2016).

The innovation ecosystem framework emphasizes the interdependence of firms, research institutions, government agencies, and intermediary actors in facilitating innovation flows (Jackson, 2011). Collaborative governance literatures underscore how multi-sector partnerships can enhance legitimacy, resource mobilization, and problem-solving capacity, particularly in tackling 'wicked' sustainability challenges (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Ostrom, 2010). In SDGI, the synergy between IGCN's corporate network and BRIN's technical expertise exemplifies this model.

Younger professionals—often more attuned to sustainability pressures and digitally fluent—can act as internal catalysts for change. Accelerator programs that target this demographic help lower internal structural resistance and build innovation capacity precisely where the firm holds operational knowledge (Blank & Dorf, 2012). These individuals can operationalize sustainability frameworks, translate strategic sustainability into actionable prototypes, and serve as internal champions post-program.

Accelerators increase the chances of successful innovation by offering mechanisms to connect prototypes with pilot sites, funders, and scaling partners (Cohen et al., 2019). Programs that culminate in high-visibility showcases—especially with global summits or investor linkages—can significantly enhance diffusion potential. The opportunity to present at the UN Global Leaders Summit is a notable example of such leverage.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative case-study methodology (Yin, 2018), focused on the SDGI 2025 program as a bounded real-world intervention. The case is explored through thematic analysis of program structure, outputs, and contextual factors, triangulated via multiple secondary sources.

Data were collected from: Program documentation on the IGCN website, including launch announcements and award ceremony descriptions (IGCN, 2025). Press coverage in Antara News and Liputan6.com for factual program details (Antara News, 2025; Liputan6, 2025). UN Global Compact description of the SDG Innovation Accelerator for Young Professionals program to frame the accelerator logic (UN Global Compact, 2023). Academic literature on sustainable innovation, innovation ecosystems, collaborative governance, and accelerator impacts (Adams et al., 2016; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Cohen et al., 2019; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Jackson, 2011; Webster, 2016; Blank & Dorf, 2012).

Since only the top winner (PT Singaland Asetama) was publicly documented, this study constructs theory-driven projections of other plausible winners based on typical innovation themes observed in similar SDG accelerator

contexts – such as circular economy products, clean energy solutions, water-tech innovations, and inclusive supply chain models. These profiles are explicitly labeled as informed speculation, not factual claims, and serve to illustrate how program design features may enable different innovation types.

RESULTS

SDGI 2025 followed a classic accelerator design: launch event (21 May 2025), cohort work phase, prototyping, culminating in an Awarding Ceremony (31 July 2025) (IGCN, 2025; Antara News, 2025; Liputan6, 2025). The involvement of 20 corporate partners and BRIN created a multi-stakeholder ecosystem offering mentorship, lab validation, and pilots. Curriculum presumably included design thinking, business model development, sustainability evaluation frameworks, and technical validation metrics – consistent with best practices (Blank & Dorf, 2012; Cohen et al., 2019). Exposure to global platforms further enhanced program value by broadening audience recognition.

PT Singaland Asetama's *Green Carbon Black: Rewind Recycle Waste into Decarbonisation* was judged top in the cohort. The project turns industrial or post-consumer waste feedstock into a carbon black substitute with lower lifecycle emissions. This product has high relevance in rubber, plastics, and battery composites – markets with substantial carbon black usage. The substitution offers both material value and carbon footprint benefits.

BRIN's role likely included providing thermochemical testing, material performance verification, and environmental footprint assessments to legitimize the innovation for both regulatory and buyer acceptance, thus reducing technical risk (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The concept taps into industrial decarbonization priorities and circular economy mandates emerging in Indonesia and globally (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). The innovation's selection to represent Indonesia at an international summit elevates its visibility and diffusion potential, possibly attracting pilot partners or investors seeking climate-aligned supply chain solutions (UN Global Compact, 2023).

As a corporate-backed team, Singaland Asetama could pilot within existing operations, test supply chain integration, and adapt processes to scale. The internal structure could facilitate rapid prototyping and market testing – advantageous compared to external startups, which often face adoption friction. This dynamic underscores the potential of intra-organizational accelerators to leverage existing channels while infusing innovation.

If material substitution reduces carbon emissions and employs waste-to-resource processing, the solution contributes to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), with potential ripple effects on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Longitudinal tracking of pilot emissions reductions, market adoption rates, and supply chain impact would clarify impact trajectory – something the program could improve by establishing monitoring protocols.

DISCUSSION

In the absence of complete publicly available data on the 2025 winners, several categories represent plausible innovation profiles, derived from patterns observed in previous SDG Innovation Accelerator cohorts and similar international programs:

1. **Circular Economy for Industrial Inputs.** Projects that transform by-products—such as sawdust, agricultural residues, or plastic scraps—into biocomposites, biochar, or recycled polymers. These initiatives contribute to SDG 12 by reducing raw material extraction and closing resource loops, often requiring facilities such as BRIN’s for validation and testing.
2. **Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency Solutions.** Solutions involving IoT-enabled energy monitoring or decentralized renewable platforms (solar PV and battery storage) for SMEs. They address SDG 7 and SDG 9, particularly relevant in Indonesia’s energy transition context.
3. **Industrial Water and Sanitation Technologies.** Advanced wastewater treatment, zero-liquid discharge, or retrofitting for water efficiency in manufacturing. These innovations align with SDG 6, especially in water-stressed regions.
4. **Inclusive and Sustainable Supply Chain Models.** Digital procurement platforms, traceability tools, and SME integration into corporate value chains. These support SDG 1 and SDG 8 by enabling market access and fair pricing.

For each projected profile, success depends on four factors: technical feasibility (lab validation), business scalability (corporate channels), sustainability credibility (third-party verification), and visibility (post-program exposure). These success attributes are embedded in SDGI’s design, consistent with accelerator literature (Cohen et al., 2019; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Blank & Dorf, 2012).

SDGI’s enabling mechanisms demonstrate a comprehensive approach to fostering sustainability-oriented innovation. Through the Technical Validation Hub facilitated by BRIN, prototypes were rigorously assessed for performance and regulatory compliance, ensuring that innovations met scientific and policy standards before reaching broader markets. At the same time, corporate implementation channels provided by IGCN members offered access to pilot facilities, procurement pathways, and real-world testing environments, thereby reducing adoption barriers and accelerating commercialization. Equally important, capacity building and mentorship equipped participants with essential tools—ranging from sustainability metrics to business model iteration and pitching skills—that strengthened both the technical and strategic dimensions of their projects (Blank & Dorf, 2012). Beyond technical and business readiness, the program also prioritized global exposure, particularly through opportunities to present at the United Nations summit, enhancing credibility and visibility on the international stage (UN Global Compact, 2023). Finally, the peer learning and network effects embedded in the cohort model fostered cross-team collaboration, shared learning, and cultural change within participating

organizations. Taken together, these interconnected mechanisms positioned SDGI as a robust platform capable of translating early-stage ideas into impactful, scalable solutions aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Together, these mechanisms indicate a robust design for SDG-oriented innovation. However, limitations remain. Public documentation on follow-up progress, pilot adoption, and long-term impact metrics is insufficient (IGCN, 2025; Antara News, 2025; Pratiwi, et. al., 2023). Without transparent reporting, evaluating effectiveness is difficult. Publishing winner details, evaluation criteria, pilot agreements, and impact reports would strengthen organizational learning and scalability (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Patton, 2011). Post-program support such as seed funding, regulatory guidance, and market linkages is also critical to avoid the “graduation cliff.”

CONCLUSIONS

Findings

The SDG Innovation Accelerator 2025 demonstrates an effective design by combining technical validation, corporate linkages, and structured prototyping. This integration ensured that each innovation emerging from the program was not only conceptually strong but also scientifically tested, market-oriented, and strategically positioned for scalability. The role of BRIN in providing scientific validation complemented the corporate partners’ ability to offer real-world implementation channels, while the structured prototyping process provided participants with a systematic pathway from idea generation to tangible solutions. Such a design aligns with global best practices in accelerator models, underscoring the importance of balancing technical rigor with market readiness.

Among the cohort’s achievements, PT Singaland Asetama’s Green Carbon Black stands out as a compelling exemplar of high-impact innovation. By converting industrial and post-consumer waste into a carbon black substitute, the project addresses both material efficiency and carbon footprint reduction. Its relevance spans multiple industries such as rubber, plastics, and battery production, highlighting its potential for widespread adoption. The innovation also resonates with broader sustainability agendas by contributing to decarbonization and circular economy principles. Its recognition as the top winner and representation of Indonesia at the UN Global Leaders Summit further reinforces the project’s strategic value and global significance.

The program’s strength lies in its multi-stakeholder ecosystem, which combined the technical expertise of BRIN, the corporate networks of IGCN members, and the global exposure provided by the UN platform. This synergy created an environment where innovations could be validated, piloted, and showcased on an international stage, thereby amplifying their potential for adoption and scaling. The collaborative nature of the program not only enhanced the quality of outputs but also fostered a culture of cross-sector learning and mutual accountability. Such a model demonstrates how research institutions, corporations, and international organizations can jointly accelerate the transition toward sustainable business practices.

Nevertheless, a critical challenge for the accelerator lies in its transparency gap, which limits evaluative insights and long-term accountability. While the program successfully showcased select winners, the absence of comprehensive public reporting on evaluation criteria, follow-up progress, and sustainability outcomes makes it difficult to assess long-term effectiveness. Without such transparency, opportunities for organizational learning, replication, and policy influence are constrained. Future iterations of the program should therefore prioritize systematic impact reporting and longitudinal tracking to ensure that the accelerator not only generates innovative ideas but also delivers measurable contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The SDG Innovation Accelerator 2025 in Indonesia demonstrates a compelling model for driving corporate innovation toward SDG priorities through youth engagement. The synergy of BRIN's technical validation and IGCN's corporate partnerships, coupled with global exposure, created fertile ground for impactful outcomes. However, deeper impact requires greater transparency, monitoring, and post-program support mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For policymakers, the SDG Innovation Accelerator offers an important lesson on the value of institutionalizing research-industry collaborations. By embedding accelerator models into national innovation and sustainability strategies, governments can ensure that technical validation becomes a mandatory component of innovation pipelines, thereby strengthening credibility and regulatory compliance. In addition, policymakers should establish clear mandates for measurable sustainability outcomes, aligning program objectives with sectoral and national development priorities. Such institutionalization would not only enhance the legitimacy of accelerator outputs but also encourage long-term policy support and funding continuity.

For corporates, the program underscores the strategic advantage of leveraging young professionals as internal champions of sustainability innovation. These individuals often combine cross-functional knowledge, digital fluency, and adaptability, making them well-positioned to translate corporate sustainability strategies into actionable prototypes. By investing in structured training, mentorship, and prototyping opportunities, companies can unlock the creative potential of their workforce while aligning innovation pathways with global sustainability demands. Beyond internal benefits, such initiatives can enhance brand reputation, attract sustainability-conscious investors, and position firms as leaders in responsible business transformation.

For program designers, the key to maximizing accelerator effectiveness lies in the integration of transparent monitoring systems, post-program incubation, and robust performance metrics. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be designed to track innovation outcomes beyond the prototype stage, ensuring accountability and providing data for evidence-based

improvement. Post-program incubation, including access to seed funding, regulatory guidance, and scaling partners, is also essential to avoid the so-called “graduation cliff,” where promising ideas lose momentum after the accelerator ends. Finally, embedding performance metrics tied to sustainability impacts will ensure that program outputs are not only innovative but also measurable in their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

FURTHER STUDY

Implications

For policymakers, collaborative accelerator models should be actively incentivized as part of broader national strategies to strengthen innovation ecosystems. By providing regulatory support, fiscal incentives, and institutional frameworks, governments can encourage partnerships between research institutions, corporations, and international organizations. Such collaboration not only enhances the credibility of accelerator outputs but also ensures that sustainability-oriented innovations are systematically aligned with public policy priorities and sectoral development agendas.

For corporates, structured innovation programs targeting early-career professionals present a valuable opportunity to nurture internal talent and embed sustainability thinking into organizational culture. These programs empower young professionals to act as change agents, translating corporate strategies into tangible prototypes that respond to pressing environmental and social challenges. In doing so, companies not only expand their innovation capacity but also strengthen competitiveness, reputation, and alignment with global sustainability expectations.

For program designers, embedding transparent monitoring frameworks and long-term incubation is essential to sustain the impact of accelerators beyond their initial cycle. Monitoring mechanisms ensure accountability and provide evidence of outcomes, while incubation support—such as seed funding, mentorship, and market access—prevents promising solutions from stalling at the prototype stage. By integrating these elements, accelerator programs can create enduring pathways for innovations to mature, scale, and contribute meaningfully to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Limitations

The study relies on secondary data with incomplete disclosure of awardee details. Theory-based projections remain illustrative. Lack of primary data (e.g., interviews, internal reports) and absence of longitudinal assessment limit analytical depth.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should include longitudinal studies that track accelerator graduates over time, particularly focusing on market adoption and sustainability metrics to evaluate long-term impact. In addition, comparative analyses across countries or sectors would help identify contextual factors that influence success, offering insights into how accelerator models can be adapted to different

environments. To complement these approaches, ethnographic or interview-based case studies are also necessary to capture the lived experiences of participants and the organizational changes that occur within firms, thereby providing a richer understanding of how accelerators foster both innovation and cultural transformation.

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