

CO-CREATING THE FUTURE

Science, Technology, and Innovation for Development



15-16 DECEMBER 2026



TOKYO, JAPAN

HOSTED BY
GDN
Global Development Network

GDC 2026 CO-CREATION LABS

This document serves as the official Call for Participation for the GDC 2026 Co-Creation Labs taking place in Tokyo. We invite GDN Grantees and Alumni to apply as "Challenge Hosts" to pitch their projects to Japanese and international experts. The goal is to collaboratively design scalable, STI-driven joint ventures that address critical development challenges.



GDC 2026 will be organised in partnership with the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Japan, the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), World Bank Group Tokyo Development Learning Center, and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF).

VISION

To mark the 25th Anniversary of the Global Development Awards Competition (GDAC), the Global Development Network (GDN) is building on a legacy of impact while creating pathways for future collaboration and innovation.

The [2026 Global Development Conference](#) is a two-day diplomatic and policy summit:

- Day 1 focuses on showcasing Global South talent and facilitating hands-on co-creation.
- Day 2, hosted at the Delegation of the European Union to Japan (Europa House), elevates these discussions through a Global Policy Symposium, where multilateral donors and policymakers will explore how to finance and scale the exact innovations generated in the Co-Creation Labs.

The defining feature of this event is the **Co-Creation Labs**, taking place on the afternoon of 15 December. Moving beyond traditional conference panels, these structured and interactive matchmaking sessions are designed to pair proven Global South innovators with Japanese Technical Experts and international development agents.

The ultimate goal of these Labs is to translate high-level dialogue into actionable partnership blueprints. By the end of the event, we aim to showcase a portfolio of newly co-created, scalable project concepts that successfully merge Global South innovation with Japanese and International Technical Experts.

These concepts will be presented on Day 2 not as finalised funding requests, but as a tangible demonstration of what can be achieved through effective international cooperation. They will demonstrate to multilateral partners and policymakers what can be achieved when locally led evidence and innovation are combined with global technology, expertise, and strategic partnerships to address development challenges at scale. Furthermore, select AI-focused concepts developed in these Labs will act as pilot initiatives for the new AI pillar of GDN's Global Research Facility.

DEFINING "SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION" (STI)

To ensure a diverse range of solutions and avoid equating "STI" exclusively with "Digitalisation" (which would exclude exceptional climate, agriculture, and governance projects), we define our overarching theme broadly:

Science, Technology, and Innovation

In the context of this conference, STI represents the broad ecosystem through which complex development challenges are addressed and aligns closely with our core identity:

- Science: This explicitly includes rigorous social science disciplines such as economics, political economy, behavioural science, and impact evaluation. We provide the scientific rigour to prove whether a project actually works for human beings.
- Technology: The physical or digital tools used to solve a problem. This includes digital tech, but equally includes green technologies (hydroponics, solar mini-grids, drought-resistant crops) and health/biotechnology innovations.
- Innovation: We prioritise social and institutional innovation such as a new community governance model, a novel micro-finance mechanism, or a new way to manage protected marine areas - not just new software.

Digitalisation / Inclusive Digital Transformation

Digitalisation is one specific, highly important tool within the STI umbrella. It refers to the application of digital technologies (AI, mobile apps, Digital Public Infrastructure, data analytics) to accelerate or scale a development outcome.

THEMATIC HUBS

GDN's 25-year portfolio spans a vast array of development sectors from education and human security to biodiversity, trade, and employment generation. To ensure focused and actionable outcomes, the Co-Creation Labs will channel these diverse projects through two macro-thematic hubs aligned with global funding priorities. GDN grantees and Alumni from all sectors are encouraged to participate, provided their scale-up challenge intersects with one of these broad frameworks:

Inclusive Digital Transformation and Sustainable Economies (Hosted in partnership with ADBI)

Focusing on how digital public infrastructure, green technology, and the Blue Economy can drive inclusive economic growth across various sectors (including education, agriculture, and trade).

Health Innovation, Governance and Resilient Societies (Hosted in partnership with the World Bank Group Tokyo Development Learning Center)

Focusing on institutional innovation, universal health coverage, and urban and disaster resilience to build secure, human-centred societies and sustainable cities.

Co-Creation Tracks

Within both thematic hubs, participants will be organised into three distinct working tracks to accommodate different types of projects.

Scale and Optimise (Track A): For projects that already utilise digital tools, data, or green technologies among others within the STI umbrella. The objective is to explore pathways for scaling, strengthening or adapting existing solutions. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Health/Digital focus - An NGO providing healthcare for migrant families in construction camps.
 - Challenge: How do we create a cross-border digital health passport for transient children?
 - Potential Outcome: A concept note for a secure, cloud-based immunisation tracking system designed with data-privacy experts.
- Climate/Environment focus - A conservation group addressing human-wildlife conflict using community engagement.
 - Challenge: How can we predict and prevent conflicts before they destroy livelihoods?
 - Potential Outcome: A proposal for an AI-driven "Early Warning System" utilising remote camera traps and SMS alerts.
- Digital/Education focus - An initiative running solar-powered digital schools for remote areas.
 - Challenge: Our infrastructure works, but how do we personalise the curriculum for 30,000 students across different dialects?
 - Potential Outcome: A roadmap for integrating AI tools that adapt in real-time to a student's learning pace.

Innovation Pivot (Track B): For traditional development or social science research with little to no current technological components. The goal is to design a digital, technological, or innovative layer that modernises the model to unlock new systemic impact. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Governance/Digital focus - A research initiative that mapped bottlenecks in national research systems, identifying that local policymakers rarely use local evidence.
 - Challenge: How do we force evidence-based policymaking in low-capacity environments?
 - Potential Outcome: The design of an AI-powered "Gov-Match" dashboard (Digital Public Infrastructure) where Ministry officials can type a policy question and instantly receive synthesised data from vetted local researchers.
- Blue Economy/Climate focus - Local communities enforcing no-fishing zones to protect coral reefs and restore biodiversity.

- Challenge: How do we financially compensate these indigenous communities for the global climate service they provide?
- Potential Outcome: A pilot design for "Blue Carbon Tokenisation" where satellite imagery proves the reef is protected, automatically triggering micro-payments to the community's digital wallets.

AI Frontier (Track C): For projects requiring advanced Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, or Large Language Models (LLMs) to overcome massive scale bottlenecks. Focuses on securing computing infrastructure, building local-language datasets, and measuring the socio-economic impact of AI in the Global South

- Example: A local think-tank analysing informal labour markets.
- Challenge: How do we analyse thousands of unstructured, native-dialect audio interviews to provide real-time policy recommendations?
- Potential Outcome: A partnership blueprint with a tech firm to secure local computing credits and develop a sovereign, local-language LLM that protects data privacy while accelerating analysis.

"MATCHMAKING" APPROACH

To ensure dynamic and productive collaboration, participation in the Labs is curated through a three-part Call for Participation. We are seeking three distinct groups of stakeholders to build our "Co-Creation Pods" (expert roundtables).

1. Challenge Hosts (GDN Grantee or Alumnus)

We invite past and current GDN/GDAC grantees to submit their projects. Applicants will be asked to identify their primary "Barrier to Scale" or a specific "STI-related Need" (e.g., adding an AI layer, digitising data collection, securing climate tech).

Opportunity: If selected as a Challenge Host, they will pitch their project to a table of Japanese and international experts. They will leave Tokyo with a co-designed concept note to upgrade and scale your project for further development towards donor pitching.

2. Solution Partners (Japanese Experts, Tech Firms, and NGOs)

We invite Japanese and International Technologists, academics, JICA specialists, and corporate foundations to review our catalogue of Global South challenges and apply to join a specific Co-Creation Pod.

Opportunity: Find top-notch, vetted Global South partners. This is a unique platform to match Japanese and International technological and policy experts with local implementers. The objective is to design projects where Japanese and International Counterparts act as equal "shareholders" in knowledge creation and implementation.

3. Scalars (International Donors and MDBs)

We invite representatives from multilateral banks, bilateral donors, and philanthropic foundations to join the Labs as strategic advisors.

Opportunity: Gain a front-row seat to a pre-vetted, de-risked pipeline of innovative projects. Help these teams shape their concepts to fit the funding criteria of scale-up mechanisms.

"MATCHMAKING" LAB MECHANICS

The Labs are designed for up to 150 people split across the two venues. Each Co-Creation Pod will bring together up to 15 participants in a carefully curated format:

- **Challenge Host:** The selected GDN Grantee or Alumnus pitching their specific project.
- **Facilitator:** To guide the discussion and capture outputs.
- **Experts/Donors:** JICA, WB, ADBI, SPF staff, AND selected Japanese and International NGOs/Innovators recruited through a targeted call.
- **Peer Innovators:** Other GDN grantees and regional participants.

The Power of Peer Innovators: A distinctive feature of the Labs is the opportunity for peer-to-peer exchange across regions. For example, a team working on a digital health challenge in Bangladesh may benefit from insights provided by participants from Nigeria or Colombia who have tested similar approaches in their own contexts.

THE "TOKYO PORTFOLIO"

By the end of the session, each Co-Creation Pod will produce a standardised Project Scale-Up Concept which will include:

- Base Project: The original project.
- STI Integration: The proposed designed tech, science, or innovation component developed through the lab.
- Scale Potential: Opportunities for replication or expansion.
- Partnership/Governance: Defining which counterparts and possible funders will act as equal "shareholders" in the project's future.

These concepts will be aggregated into the "Tokyo Portfolio" which will be officially presented on Day 2 of the Conference. This portfolio will serve as a concrete catalogue of innovative Japan-Global South, North-South, and South-South partnerships for institutional incubation and scale-up funding.

Defining the Partnership Model: "Equal Shareholders"

The projects generated for the Tokyo Portfolio are not meant to be taken as traditional "donor-recipient" grants. They will be designed to be true joint ventures. The Co-Creation Labs will encourage participants to define partnership models where Japanese counterparts (tech firms, academics, or NGOs) act as equal "shareholders" alongside the Global South implementers. This could include shared intellectual property on a new tech tool, joint academic publications, or co-management of a scaled implementation rollout.

FUNDING AND LOGISTICS

Selected GDN Grantees and Alumni will receive full travel sponsorship to attend the Conference in Tokyo. Funding is available for one representative per project.

To apply to be a Challenge Host, please submit a Concept Pitch by email to conference@gdn.int by **20 August 2026**, which must include:

Note: Please ensure the limits below are respected. Do not attach full research reports since we are looking for concise, challenge-oriented pitches.

1. Project Profile (Max 300 words)

- Indicate the GDN programme through which your work was funded.
- Briefly describe the core project, its timeline, and its proven impact to date.

2. Track Selection and "Barrier to Scale" (Max 300 words)

- Select your preferred track (Track A: Scale and Optimise, Track B: Innovation Pivot, or Track C: AI Frontier).
- What is the primary bottleneck preventing your project from reaching significantly greater impact? (e.g., lack of data, inefficient manual processes, financing gaps, policy resistance).

3. "STI / Tech Wishlist" (Max 300 words)

- If you had access to a room full of technology, policy, and finance experts, what specific solution would you want to co-design with them? (e.g., "I want to explore adding remote satellite sensing to my agriculture project", "I want to design a secure digital payment system for my women's cooperative" or "I need technical partners to help build an ethical, bias-free AI dataset for my region").

4. Added Value (Max 200 words)

Beyond your own project, what specific lessons, failures, or successes can you share with other innovators at your Co-Creation pod?

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Phase 1: Sourcing the Challenges (July-August 2026)

This current call is exclusively for GDN Grantees and Alumni. In August, GDN will review these submissions and select the projects that demonstrate the highest potential for scale, innovation, and cross-sector collaboration.

Phase 2: Engaging the Japanese and Global Ecosystem (September-October 2026)

Once the Challenge Catalogue is finalised, GDN will launch a targeted "Call for Solution Partners". The catalogue will be circulated across our network of technologists, academics, JICA specialists, corporate foundations, and international donors.

- For experts and partner organisations: If you represent an institution, tech firm, or donor agency interested in co-creating solutions with Global South innovators, please note that the formal matching process will begin in September. You will be invited to review the Challenge Catalogue and apply for a seat at the specific pod where your technological, scientific, or policy expertise can add the most value.

- Early Expression of Interest: If your organisation wishes to be notified the moment the Challenge Catalogue is released, or if you are interested in co-sponsoring a specific thematic pod, please reach out to us at conference@gdh.int.

Phase 3: The Co-Creation Labs (November-December 2026)

GDN will finalise the "Co-Creation Pods" ensuring each pod has a balanced mix of local contextual knowledge, technical/policy expertise, and scaling insight. All participants will arrive in Tokyo fully briefed on their pod's specific challenge and ready to co-create practical solutions for development impact.