THE Awards Asia 2026

Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	Chiang Mai University
Submission title or project name	SMART BEE SDGs – enhancing food security and beekeeper livelihoods in the Mekong region
Nominee / key personnel	Terd Disayathanoowat (head of SMART BEE SDGs research centre)
URL	https://www.youtube.com/@SmartBeeSDGs https://www.facebook.com/smartbee2018
Submission	SMART BEE SDGs, led by Chiang Mai University, is a transformative regional initiative enhancing food security, environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods across the six Mekong countries. Since 2015, it has addressed pollinator decline, rural poverty and cross-border disparities in beekeeping practices through interdisciplinary research, AI-driven bee health monitoring, and capacity-building. The project trained more than 300 beekeepers, created new bee-based product lines, and supported job creation and investment. Collaborating with more than 20 partners, it developed honey certification models that have been adopted in multiple countries, and it submitted regional policy recommendations to the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation. Stories of success include women-led honey businesses in Cambodia and product innovation in Myanmar and Vietnam. The initiative is ongoing, expanding into edible insect innovation, with strong sustainability and community ownership. Widely recognised in academic and regional media, SMART BEE SDGs exemplifies how universities can lead inclusive, cross-border development that is both scientifically grounded and socially transformative.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	Duke-NUS Medical School
Submission title or project name	Asia Pathogen Genomics Initiative (Asia PGI) Academy
Nominee / key personnel	The Asia PGI Academy was established by the Duke-NUS Centre for Outbreak Preparedness (COP). Its foundational team was led by Ruklanthi de Alwis (Sri Lanka), with Jeanie Wu (Singapore), La Moe (Myanmar) and Ashley Tsai (Taiwan). It was further supported by COP faculty and staff, alongside close collaborators including A*STAR, the National Environment Agency of Singapore, and the Duke-NUS Programme in Emerging Infectious Diseases.
URL	https://www.duke-nus.edu.sg/cop/workstreams/training-academy
Submission	The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the urgent need for faster outbreak detection, yet genomic sequencing access remains limited across south and Southeast Asia. To address this, the Asia Pathogen Genomics Initiative (Asia PGI), based at Duke-NUS' Centre for Outbreak Preparedness, strengthens regional capacity through a fully funded academy.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	IIMT University
Submission title or project name	Driving Entrepreneurship and Regional Development under the StartinUP Scheme
Nominee / key personnel	IIMT Business Incubator
URL	https://iimtu.edu.in/
Submission	IIMT Business Incubator Foundation, recognized under the Uttar Pradesh StartinUP scheme and supported by the Ministry of MSME, has been a beacon for entrepreneurship awareness and regional development. It fosters innovation by transforming ideas into successful startups through mentorship, funding, and expert guidance. Despite challenges such as social biases and limited infrastructural resources, the incubator has propelled multiple ventures to success, including startups, securing substantial government grants like ₹24.6 lakhs in the MSME Hackathon. With a 4-star innovation rating and collaborations with leading industry partners, the incubator empowers local youth and innovators by providing business training, technical support, and access to investors. Its contribution has not only created jobs but also cultivated a culture of entrepreneurship across Western Uttar Pradesh, driving social and economic growth in the community. This project symbolizes a transformative regional development initiative, turning potential into progress and ideas into impactful enterprises.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	Lyceum of the Philippines University Cavite
Submission title or project name	LPU Cavite and the Philippine Red Cross: building resilient communities through service learning
Nominee / key personnel	Community Outreach and Service Learning Office: Fedelyn P. Estrella, Maria Teresa O. Pilapil
URL	https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0H28i5JHjhVXB2GEPwqMXLYgz46wbmYwSvzJ7FgbhHqimzQadBoHHfjP22QFYN9a2l&id=61562254830980
Submission	In Calabarzon, one of the Philippines' fastest-growing yet most vulnerable regions, Lyceum of the Philippines University Cavite (LPU Cavite) harnesses higher education to address community needs through its Community Outreach and Service Learning (CSL) Office. In partnership with the Philippine Red Cross Cavite chapter, LPU Cavite institutionalised a service learning framework that embeds civic engagement, disaster preparedness and health promotion across the curriculum. Students and faculty lead blood donation drives sustaining regional hospitals, provide first aid and disaster training to thousands, and develop community-based technologies in health, energy and livelihood. Strategic leadership roles within Red Cross governance amplify the initiative's reach, ensuring alignment with regional priorities. Each year, beneficiaries gain access to vital services, while students cultivate civic responsibility and innovation. By bridging academia and humanitarian institutions, LPU Cavite delivers a replicable, scalable model of service learning that strengthens resilience, promotes inclusive growth and empowers communities.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	Naresuan University
Submission title or project name	Regional development approach utilising community-based management, inclusive participation and multidisciplinary academic services through SDGs
Nominee / key personnel	Det Wattanachaiyingcharoen (team leader, Agriculture and Environment Integration R&D Unit, Faculty of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, Naresuan University). R&D personnel: Pornnapa Sutawong; Kamolporn Boomthawon; Wandee Wattanachaiyingcharoen; Paitoon Trongtiang; Kaweecha Saewa; Nisa Siriwan; and area-based networks
URL	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61573798952019&sk=followers https://www.tiktok.com/@.aei62?_t=ZS-8uP5ZwAHq0g&_r=1 https://www.instagram.com/aei_mornor?igsh=MWtqbGIxNjNoa285bg==
Submission	More than 30 flagship initiatives/projects have exemplified excellence in regional development across Thailand through the area-based integrated development approach. By combining interdisciplinary academic knowledge with local wisdom, these projects effectively address complex challenges in water resources, agriculture, environment and health. Emphasising inclusive participation across stakeholders, the work promotes partnership and engagement through both bottom-up and top-down strategies. It results in policy frameworks and development programmes driven by self and community continuous improvement and guided by environmental impact assessments for sustainable development and health. These outcomes have been actively implemented and remain relevant today, directly contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals in economic, social, environmental and health dimensions. The outcome demonstrates how integrated solutions to area-based problems, grounded in local realities and resource coordination, can generate meaningful, long-lasting impacts at regional and national levels with budget implementation.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	The Chinese University of Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong
Submission title or project name	Open Books Hong Kong
Nominee / key personnel	
URL	https://openbookshongkong.com/en/
Submission	Open Books Hong Kong (OBHK) is a groundbreaking initiative launched in July 2024 by three university presses and libraries in Hong Kong. The project publishes Chinese-language open access monographs, aiming to promote bibliodiversity and foster the open access movement in Asia. In July 2024, the total number of Chinese-language monographs featured in the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB) represented only 0.004 per cent of global output. Despite challenges such as limited budget and copyright infringement, OBHK published 36 titles in its first year, reaching 212,838 readers from 123 countries with 540,487 views. The initiative demonstrated substantial reach and engagement with a global reading community. OBHK has established itself as a landmark initiative in the region. It has not only boosted Hong Kong's position as a hub for knowledge exchange between the Sinophone and anglophone worlds but has also served as a model for innovative approaches to knowledge-sharing in Chinese-language academia.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Submission title or project name	PolyU Jockey Club Operation SoInno: catalysing social innovation through community co-creation
Nominee / key personnel	The project team at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Jockey Club Design Institute for Social Innovation
URL	https://www.polyujcsoinno.hk/en/
Submission	Hong Kong faces a “double ageing” challenge, with both its population and its buildings growing older. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s Jockey Club Design Institute for Social Innovation’s “Operation SoInno” (2018-25) mobilised action research into social impact through 18 symposia, 28 action projects and five Social Innovation Regional Forums, with 130+ NGOs and 400,500+ participants. In 2024-25, we scaled successful prototypes: the Northern Metropolis Future Forum influences community-making for Hong Kong’s largest development with Shenzhen; transitional housing research shapes government housing welfare policy with modular integrated construction studies enabling construction collaboration across the Greater Bay Area; and an intergenerational play design project adopted by a Hong Kong housing society is shaping the concept of well-being in the region. By mobilising cross-faculty expertise – from engineering for ageing buildings to health sciences approaches for underprivileged children, well-being and dementia care – we’ve created a replicable model for regional development addressing Asia-Pacific’s demographic transitions. SoInno scaled up two projects – STEAMS for Good, which integrates design thinking with experiential, project-based learning, and ASCEND Tech for Good, which empowers youth-led start-ups to develop sustainable business models addressing digital equity issues – positioning Hong Kong as a knowledge centre for university-led social innovation addressing regional challenges.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Institution Name	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Submission title or project name	Jejak Pewaris Watan: breaking poverty barriers, opening university doors, and driving regional equity across Malaysia.
Nominee / key personnel	Nurwina Akmal Anuar; Insan Kamil Othman; Hamiduddin Saat; Syahidrul Asyraff Zamri; Abdul Qaiyum Borham; Muhammad Tajuddin Abdul Rahim; Mohd Nazri Mhd Nasir; Syaiful Bakri Mohammad; Saidi Ismail; Nurzainina Aida Md Zainal; Nur Emieza Saleh; Mohd Sanie Razak; Shamsul Ridzuan Samsudin; Zulhilmi Mohamad; Norathirah Norazman; Wan Muhammad Nashrul Wan Muhammad Najeeb; Ahmad Firdhaus Arham; Munira Ismail; Azeem Dzuljufri Suhaimi; Mohd Anuar Aziz; Samsuddin Abu Bakar; Mohd. Zairil Izwan Mohd. Zain; Nur Izzati Ab. Rahman
URL	
Submission	For many Malaysians from the most extreme poverty groups, the dream of entering university is overshadowed by the immediate struggle to pay registration fees, purchase essentials and adapt to campus life. These barriers are especially acute for OKU students (those with registered disabilities), indigenous communities and multi-ethnic, multi-religious low-income families. In response, the Jejak Pewaris Watan programme was established to provide early educational assistance and help with basic college needs. Sustained annually, the programme mobilises nearly RM40,000 per cycle, ensuring equitable distribution across Malaysia, including remote regions. With 92 per cent of beneficiaries successfully registering and commencing studies immediately, and 78 per cent reporting a stronger sense of belonging, the initiative demonstrates measurable success and lasting impact. More than financial relief, it removes the most demoralising barriers, enabling students to focus on learning, growth and service. Jejak Pewaris Watan stands as a model of regional development, promoting equity, unity and opportunity across generations.