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India's Largest
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Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

The Future of Industry, Enterprise and Livelihoods in the Global South

11 & 12 February 2026, The Eros Hotel, Nehru Place, New Delhi INDIA More information on www.worldfuturesforum.org

WORLD FUTURES FORUM 2026

REPORT



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Introduction

The World Futures Forum 2026 was held on 11th and 12th February 2026 at Hotel Eros, Nehru Place, New Delhi, bringing together one of the most diverse and purposeful gatherings of minds that India's MSME ecosystem has seen in recent years. Organised by India SME Forum, with WEDO as co-organiser and UNIDO as Knowledge Partner, the forum was held in a hybrid format, welcoming over 500 participants onsite and an extraordinary 5,210 participants online, spanning countries across the Global South, Europe, Asia Pacific, and beyond.

The theme, The Future of Industry, Enterprise and Livelihoods in the Global South, was not chosen lightly. It reflected a growing recognition that the world is at an inflection point. Artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and the green transition are reshaping every industry, every supply chain, and every market. The question is no longer whether these forces will change the way business is done. The question is whether small businesses, the 7.5 crore MSME units that employ over 33 crore people and contribute 30% of India's GDP, will be equipped to lead that change or be left behind by it.

The World Futures Forum 2026 was built to answer that question with action, not just intention. Over two days, ten sessions and a series of special activities brought together Union Ministers, senior government officials from multiple Indian states, representatives from international organisations including UNIDO and ITU, technology leaders from companies like Microsoft, Amazon, HCLTech, Festo, and Deutsche Messe, researchers, cluster development experts, startup founders, and on-the-ground MSME owners. Participants joined from Brazil, Spain, Argentina, Germany, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Fiji, Indonesia, and dozens of other countries, making the forum a genuinely global conversation rooted in Indian context.



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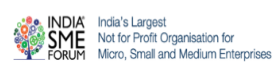
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The agenda was ambitious and deliberately broad. Sessions covered the full spectrum of what it takes for an MSME to compete in today's world: building competitive industrial clusters, protecting innovation through intellectual property, adopting AI and Industrial IoT on the factory floor, leveraging quality infrastructure for export readiness, navigating cross-border trade and e-commerce, and ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation reach the most underserved businesses and communities. Beyond the sessions, the forum featured a live Open Innovation Challenge that drew 150 solutions from across the world, an AI Rapid Fire showcase with four cutting-edge Indian startups, a Call for Papers that surfaced original research on circular economy, data protection, and AI ethics, and a Success Story presentation that reminded the room what disciplined, values-driven entrepreneurship can achieve.

The defining moment of the forum came with the launch of the AIM Global India Regional Chapter, UNIDO's global AI and manufacturing alliance, now for the first time led by a single country. With twelve Indian manufacturing SMEs already on board, and Centres of Excellence proposed for Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the launch signalled something far beyond a ceremony. It was a commitment: that India's small businesses are not merely participants in the AI revolution. They are being equipped, connected, and empowered to lead it.

The World Futures Forum 2026 was designed from the outset to move from dialogue to direction, from ideas to implementation, and from networks to long-term partnerships. What follows is the story of those two days, told for the people who matter most: the entrepreneurs, manufacturers, artisans, and dreamers who make up India's extraordinary MSME community, and their counterparts across the Global South who are watching, learning, and building alongside them.



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Inaugural

Panelists:

- Shri Jitan Ram Manjhi, Hon'ble Minister of MSME, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India, Government of India
- Mr. Vinod Kumar, President, India SME Forum
- Mr. Alejandro Rivera Rojas, Chief of Division – MSME Competitiveness & Job Creation, UNIDO
- Mr. Jason Slater, Chief of AI, Innovation & Digital Officer, UNIDO
- Shri. Salik Parwaiz, Director, Cluster Development and Export Promotion, Ministry of MSME
- Shri. Vinamra Mishra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises

The forum opened with energy and purpose. Senior leaders from the Government of India, UNIDO, and India SME Forum took the stage and from the very first words, It was evident from the outset that the platform aimed for action, not just dialogue



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Mr. Vinod Kumar

President, India SME Forum

Mr. Vinod Kumar welcomed the delegates and noted that the world is undergoing a profound economic, technological and geopolitical shift. He stated that participation in the forum reflected “a shared conviction that the future must not simply be anticipated but actively shaped, responsibly and inclusively.” He emphasized that the objective of the two days is to move “from dialogue to direction, from ideas to implementation, and from networks to long-term partnerships.”



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Mr. Alejandro Rivera Rojas

Chief of Division for MSME Competitiveness and Job creation, UNIDO

India has everything it needs to lead industrial transformation across the Global South: a vast MSME ecosystem, strong digital public infrastructure, affordable connectivity, a deep scientific talent base, and industrial clusters ready for the next leap. Yet the gap between potential and reality remains wide. "Too many small enterprises remain stuck in the same way of doing things year after year." Four questions framed the forum's agenda: how to build more competitive clusters, how AI can accelerate cluster-level innovation, how green patents can support low-carbon technology adoption, and how quality infrastructure can open global export markets for MSMEs.

Mr. Jason Slater

Chief of AI, Innovation and Digital Officer, UNIDO

Mr. Slater stated that "AI and data are preparing a revolution that goes way beyond the fourth industrial revolution." He compared AI to a fleet of superfast bikes that can take industries further and faster, but cautioned that without safety rules, infrastructure and equitable access, the promise of inclusive deployment could become risky. He announced that UNIDO's AIM Global alliance, comprising over 300 members across 40 countries, is entering its delivery phase, with India leading the initiative.



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Shri Jitan Ram Manjhi

Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

Drawing from nearly 46 years of public life, he emphasized that despite the scale of our MSME initiatives, their impact has not reached rural India in the way it should. The realities of villages are very different from cities. Income is uncertain, skills are informal, migration is forced, and access to tools, credit, and markets remains limited. If MSME efforts remain confined to cities and semi-urban areas, India's real challenges will not be addressed. India is a country of villages, and MSME growth must reach the grassroots. There is a strong need to actively promote and spread awareness of MSME schemes in rural areas, to go to villages, communicate in local languages, and involve rural people directly. Only when MSMEs are taken to villages in a planned and inclusive manner will migration reduce, sustainable livelihoods be created, and true national development be achieved. Platforms like the World Futures Forum, organised by the India SME Forum, along with global institutions such as UNIDO, help strengthen this approach by bringing together serious deliberation, global experience, and practical solutions

The session concluded with the formal launch of the **AIM Global India Regional Chapter**, bringing together leaders from Govt. of India, UNIDO and India SME Forum. The initiative aims to strengthen AI-driven competitiveness among Indian manufacturing MSMEs, with twelve enterprises already joining the platform.



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Building Competitive Industrial Clusters: From Strategy to Implementation

Panelists:

- Shri. Vinamra Mishra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India
- Shri. Salik Parwaiz, Director – Cluster Development & Export Promotion, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India
- Mr. Carlo Pietrobelli, UNESCO Chair in ST&I Policies for Sustainable Development, UNU-MERIT Maastricht / Professor, Roma Tre University
- Ms. Emane Wahsh, Business Development & International Trade Professional, Egypt, TIGARA Project
- Mr. David Fernández Terreros, Head of Cluster Development, @SPRI – Basque Business Development Agency, Spain
- Ms. Ebe Muschialli Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

Moderated by Mr. Giorgi Todua, Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO.

One of the most powerful ideas discussed at the World Futures Forum 2026 was also one of the simplest: small businesses grow faster when they grow together. That was the central message of the session, which focused on building competitive industrial clusters and translating global strategy into ground-level action. The session brought together experts from India, Egypt and Spain to demonstrate how cluster development works in practice.



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Ms. Emame Wahsh

Business Development and International Trade Professional, Egypt

Ms. Wahsh shared insights from the TIGARA project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, which is working with the Mahalla textile cluster of more than 10,000 enterprises across the value chain. The diagnostic revealed familiar gaps such as outdated technology, weak coordination, limited branding and poor global linkages. The objective is to build a globally competitive, EU-compliant textile hub by 2030. “We want to shift from volume to value,” she stated.



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Mr. David Fernandez Terreos

Head of Cluster Development, SPRI, the Basque Business Development Agency, Spain

Mr. Terreros presented the Basque region as an example of a mature cluster ecosystem built through sustained investment and policy continuity. “Around 85 percent of cluster members are SMEs, ensuring that initiatives directly benefit small businesses. The Basque Net Zero Industrial Supercluster has supported dozens of industrial plants in assessing carbon footprints and launching innovation projects, demonstrating that sustainability can strengthen competitiveness when approached strategically”.

Shri. Vinamra Mishra

Joint Secretary, Ministry of MSME, Government of India

Shri Vinamra highlighted India’s rapid progress in innovation and intellectual property. India has significantly improved its position on the Global Innovation Index, startup numbers have expanded sharply, and annual patent filings have crossed one lakh. Approval timelines have reduced substantially, while 87 IP Facilitation Centres support MSMEs in filing patents, trademarks and geographical indications. The ZED programme has certified over 5.7 lakh MSMEs, and new initiatives are being developed to support energy efficiency and green transition for small enterprises.

Ms. Ebe Muschiali

Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

“Cluster development is built on collective efficiency. Firms and institutions achieve more together than they can alone. We work at three levels: enabling policy frameworks,



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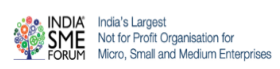
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strengthening meso-level institutions, and supporting firm-level collective action. Do not create artificial clusters. Build on what already exists, strengthen governance, and promote trust through joint action. Clusters today are not just cost-reduction platforms. They are resilience-building ecosystems that respond to technology shifts, market realignments and sustainability demands.”

Shri. Salik Parwaiz

Director, Cluster Development and Export Promotion, Ministry of MSME

“Clusters are not only economic units. They are instruments of inclusive and balanced regional development. In the last five years, we have supported more than 200 projects through Common Facility Centres and infrastructure upgrades. Our next phase integrates digitalization, sustainability, innovation and export promotion. With new trade agreements and the Export Promotion Mission, clusters must become gateways to global value chains.”

Mr. Carlo Pietrobelli

Policy Advisor on Innovation & Industrial Development, UNESCO Chair in ST& I Policies for Sustainable Development in Latin America at UNUMERIT Maastricht, Professor of Economics at Roma Tre University

“The green transition and digital transformation are structural shifts, not temporary trends. Global value chains are being reshaped, and this creates new entry points for agile clusters. Geographic concentration still matters. Proximity and collaboration remain powerful drivers of innovation. Clusters can move beyond efficiency to become engines of resilience, inclusion and long-term competitiveness.”



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Takeaways

Clusters do not succeed by accident. They require structured diagnostics, clear governance and sustained institutional support. Sustainability and competitiveness can reinforce each other when green transition is treated as a strategic opportunity. India's growing innovation ecosystem, when integrated through strong cluster frameworks, has the potential to create globally competitive MSME ecosystems.

Innovation, Digitalization & IP in MSME Clusters

Panelists:

- Shri. NR Meena, Senior Joint Controller of Patents & Designs, Patent Office Delhi
- Ms. Natalia Seiler, Executive Director, Agencia Competitividad Córdoba, Argentina
- Prof. Dr. Joern Block, Director, Steinbeis Transfer Centre for Technology & IP Management, Germany
- Mr. Sandeep Tandon, National Project Manager, UNIDO Facility for Low Carbon Technology Deployment
- Dr. Ritin Koria, PhD, Programme Specialist – Innovation, UNIDO

Moderated by Mr. Giorgi Todua, Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO.

The session examined how MSME clusters can protect and scale innovation through digitalization and intellectual property. Speakers from Argentina, Germany, India and UNIDO shared practical experiences on AI adoption, green patents, Industrial IoT and innovation ecosystems.



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Ms. Natalia Seiler

Executive Director, Competitiveness Agency of Córdoba, Argentina

Ms. Seiler shared how her agency introduced AI adoption across 27 clusters spanning biotech, automotive, tourism and agritech. She noted that the agency first experimented internally before working with businesses. “We started in our own agency, working like a sandbox. After we gained confidence, we translated it to our clusters and innovation ecosystems.” In less developed clusters, the focus was not on technology but on solving problems. “We don’t talk about AI. We talk about mapping pain points.” Simple digital tools were introduced first, building confidence gradually. She cautioned that “AI for itself is not going to shorten the gap in the Global South.



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What makes the difference is how we are going to build it," describing the goal as moving from "human intensive" to "human expansive" models.

Prof. Dr. Joern Block

Director, Steinbeis Transfer Centre for Technology & IP Management, Germany

Green patents are no longer a niche concern. Filings in renewable energy, carbon capture, and energy efficiency are growing faster than almost any other category globally, with China leading and other countries steadily catching up. "Using AI-based text analysis combined with patent classification, we can map innovation strengths across countries and clusters,"

Shri N.R. Meena

Senior Joint Controller of Patents & Designs Head of office, Patent Office Delhi

Most MSMEs do not file patents simply because they do not know they can, or how to. Awareness and proper drafting remain the two biggest barriers to IP protection for small businesses. The incentives, however, are significant: an 80% reduction in filing fees and access to expedited examination for faster processing. The Patent Office has also introduced AI-based tools for automatic allocation of applications to technical experts, ensuring both speed and objectivity. The process is structured, transparent, and far less daunting than most small business owners imagine. "MSMEs should not be afraid of it. It is a fair process and their innovations deserve protection."



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Mr. Sandeep Tandon

National Project Manager, UNIDO

UNIDO's Facility for Low Carbon Technology Deployment has been running since 2017, and its findings from deploying Industrial IoT across ten sectors carry an important lesson for MSMEs: the biggest value of smart technology on the factory floor is not environmental. It is productivity. For small and micro enterprises, real-time data visibility meant faster decisions, less downtime, and lower costs. Emission reduction was a welcome bonus, not the primary driver. "Overall plant downtime reduces, productivity improves, and on that basis they can build the case for machine learning and artificial intelligence." IoT, in other words, is not the destination. It is the stepping stone that makes AI adoption meaningful and measurable for small businesses.

Dr. Ritin Koria

Programme Specialist – Innovation, UNIDO

Innovation is not a single act. It is a systemic process that no single business, ministry, or institution can drive alone. Drawing on UNIDO's National Innovation and Manufacturing Survey across 56 sectors, one finding stood out: there is too much competition and too little collaboration between India's premier technical institutions and its second-tier universities. Put them in the same room, and the results change. IITs bring technical depth. Second-tier universities bring entrepreneurial drive. Together, they can take ideas to market faster. For MSMEs, the mindset shift is equally important. "Don't think locally, think globally. Borders have blurred. It is no longer national, regional or sectorial. It is supranational."



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Takeaways

The session reinforced that innovation in MSMEs must be protected through IP, strengthened through digital tools and scaled through cluster collaboration. Practical enablers already exist — including 80% fee reduction for MSME patent filings, fast-track examination and AI-based patent analytics. Industrial IoT is demonstrating measurable productivity gains on factory floors, creating a foundation for AI adoption. The key challenge is not complexity or cost, but awareness and coordinated ecosystem support.

From Standards to Markets: Leveraging Quality Infrastructure for MSME Competitiveness

Panelists:

- Shri Alok Srivastava, Director General, National Testing House
- Mr. Arvind Kumar Upadhyaya, CEO, STQC Certification Services
- Mr. Anil Jauhri, Former CEO, NABCB
- Mr. Sunil Thawani, CEO, Quality Indeed Consulting

Moderated by Ms. April Chang, Associate Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO

The session examined how quality infrastructure standards, testing, certification and compliance systems can strengthen MSME competitiveness in global markets. Experts from accreditation bodies, testing institutions, certification services and UNIDO discussed practical solutions to reduce export rejections and improve compliance readiness.



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Ms. April Chang

Associate Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO

Setting the tone for the discussion, Ms. Chang emphasized the need for focused intervention. “We can’t fix everything at once. We need to identify the one highest leverage move.” She highlighted the importance of simplifying compliance pathways for MSMEs and announced that UNIDO is developing a digital tool called *Quality Map*, which will allow exporters to select their product and target market to receive a clear list of applicable standards and requirements. “You pick the product, you pick the export market, and it gives you all the requirements.” The tool is expected to go live in 2026.



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Mr. Anil Jauhari

Former CEO, National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies

Most export rejections have nothing to do with product quality. They stem from weak systems. "At different touch points, we need to understand the laws and regulations, have a system for implementation, and then a mechanism for data collection, analysis and improvement." Basic quality tools like root cause analysis and Pareto charts, combined with risk-based thinking, can eliminate most compliance failures before a shipment ever reaches a foreign border. Build the system first, and the product will take care of itself.

Shri Alok Srivastava

Director General, National Testing House

Shri Srivastava identified awareness gaps and limited access to accredited laboratories as key challenges. "One of the major concerns is the awareness which is lacking," he stated, noting that many MSMEs are unclear about the standards applicable in specific export markets. National Testing House laboratories are certified under ISO 17025, ensuring international acceptance of test results, and there is a need to expand accredited lab capacity as new Free Trade Agreements open markets with stringent compliance norms. Better hygiene, storage and process controls can significantly reduce technical rejections such as pesticide residues and contamination.



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Mr. Arvind Kumar Upadhyaya

CEO, STQC Certification Services

The problem is rarely the product. "It is not that the product does not comply. Ultimately it complies, but with a lot of effort, because there are so many gaps in providing the standard documentation." The evidence gap, as he described it, is where export orders are silently lost. The solution is a credible evidence pack: consistent records, end-to-end traceability, and documentation that creates a clear, verifiable chain from raw material to finished product. Digital tools can make this seamless. QR-code verified certificates and digitally signed reports eliminate authenticity concerns entirely. "If it is digitally signed and the digital signature is valid, no verification is required." The question of whether a report is genuine simply goes away.

Mr. Sunil Thawani

CEO, Quality Indeed Consulting

"We need to move toward systems-based thinking. Organizations must understand and respect laws and regulations across the entire journey, from sourcing raw materials to final delivery. At every stage, there should be systems for implementation, along with mechanisms for data collection, analysis, insights, and continuous improvement. MSMEs need to build competence to identify the root causes of compliance failures using tools like Pareto analysis, cause-and-effect diagrams, and risk-based thinking. More importantly, quality must be communicated in the language of money. When owners understand that a rejection can lead to a loss of money, they pay attention. Ultimately, we must address the culture of 'chalega', where defects are tolerated, and replace it with a culture of quality, prevention, and accountability."



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Takeaways

The session underscored that product quality alone is insufficient for global competitiveness; robust compliance systems, documentation and traceability are equally critical. Export rejections often arise from awareness gaps and weak record-keeping rather than technical failure. India possesses strong accredited testing and certification infrastructure, but MSMEs require better access, simplified guidance and digital verification systems. Tools such as UNIDO's Quality Map and DigiLocker-style trusted documentation frameworks can significantly reduce compliance uncertainty. For MSMEs targeting global markets, quality infrastructure is not a regulatory obligation but a strategic investment.

Experienced and Practical Solutions for Cluster Development and MSME Competitiveness in India

Panelists:

- Smt. Anuja Bapat, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India
- Mr. Vikram Joshi, Owner, Rangotri
- Mr. Alejandro Rivera Rojas, Chief, Division of MSME, Competitiveness, Quality and Job Creation, UNIDO

Moderated by Ms. Nirupama Soundararajan, CEO & Co-founder, Policy Consensus Centre.

The concluding session of Day 1 focused on India's on-ground experience in cluster development. Bringing together an MSME cluster leader, a UNIDO expert and a senior government official, the



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discussion examined lessons from two decades of implementation and priorities for the next phase of cluster-led competitiveness.



Mr. Vikram Joshi

Owner, Rangotri; Member, Jaipur Block Printing Cluster

In 2003, the Jaipur block printing cluster was on the verge of collapse, torn apart by litigation and internal disputes. Twenty businesses came together, formed a collective, and rebuilt from the ground up. Four things made it work: industrial symbiosis among members, a manageable group size, frequent coordination meetings, and committed leadership. "Twenty is a manageable



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number. We could share information very quickly and make decisions very quickly." Reflecting on national programmes, where 55 of 70 sanctioned textile parks never took off, the message was direct: "We need to learn how to celebrate failure. Go back and see what went wrong, prepare a report, and make sure we don't make those mistakes again." Future-ready clusters must now focus on AI adoption and compliance readiness.

Mr. Alejandro Rivera Rojas

Chief of Division, MSME Competitiveness and Job Creation, UNIDO

India is one of the most significant global examples of cluster development, and elements of UNIDO's own methodology were shaped by lessons learned here. But success is not a reason to stand still. The next phase demands four things: moving up the value chain; deeper integration with universities and research institutions; building resilience against geopolitical and climate shocks; and stronger permanent governance structures. Rural agro-processing clusters represent an overlooked opportunity, where urban migration creates demand while rural production creates livelihoods. UNIDO is also developing global standards for measuring cluster performance, which could improve benchmarking and make it easier for cluster members to access credit, "solving one of the MSME sector's most persistent problems."

Smt. Anuja Bapat

Deputy Director General, Ministry of MSME

India's Cluster Development Programme formalises what micro enterprises do naturally: cluster together and share resources. An all-women embroidery cluster in Moradabad eliminated near-total rejection rates with a single AutoCAD machine. A group of dal mills grew so much through shared infrastructure that members have since moved into protein fortification entirely. "The



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programme has to keep adapting," as MSMEs now span sectors from drone manufacturing to electric vehicles. The government is adding testing facilities, R&D support, and reviving 200 legacy clusters, while deregulation "frees up time, money, and bandwidth that small businesses can redirect towards growth."

Takeaways

India's cluster development programme has demonstrated durability and tangible results over two decades. However, emerging challenges including AI integration, ESG compliance, global value chain participation and resilience planning require structural upgrades rather than incremental adjustments. Future-ready clusters will need stronger governance, institutional linkages, performance benchmarking and focused expansion into rural and agro-processing sectors. The path forward lies not in replacing the existing model, but in modernizing it for a more competitive and technology-driven MSME ecosystem.



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Day 2

Opening Remarks

Mr. Jason Slater

Chief of AI, Innovation and Digital Officer, UNIDO

Mr. Jason Slater brought the room back to first principles. The AIM Global India Chapter, launched the previous day, was not symbolic, he said. It is meant to deliver real solutions, creating a space where any MSME can walk in with a production challenge and leave with a tested answer. Recalling a pen gifted to him by Mr. Vinod Kumar when they signed their joint declaration, he closed with a simple reminder: entrepreneurs are nation builders. The work begins now.

AI for Boosting Productivity & Competitiveness in Industry and Manufacturing

Panelists:

- Mr. Raimund Klein, CEO, International Centre for Industrial Transformation, Singapore
- Ms. Christi Thomas, Deputy Head – Commercial AI & Innovation Hub, FCDO, British High Commission, Delhi
- Mr. Harish Nachnani, Head – Didactic, Festo India Pvt. Ltd.
- Dr. Arvind Gupta, Head & Co-Founder, Digital India Foundation
- Mr. Thomas Rilke, Division Manager, Deutsche Messe Technology Academy, Germany



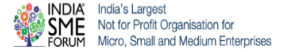
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Moderated by Ms. Nishtha Mehta, ICF PCC, Senior Advisor - International Centres of Excellence for AI & Digital Transformation, UNIDO.

The opening session of Day 2 examined how Artificial Intelligence can improve productivity and competitiveness in manufacturing. Experts from Singapore, Germany, the UK and India discussed digital maturity, practical factory-level use cases, institutional support systems and adoption pathways for MSMEs.





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Mr. Raimund Klein

Chief Executive Officer, International Centre for Industrial Transformation, Singapore

Mr. Klein shared insights from global digital maturity assessments, noting that “ninety percent of companies worldwide are stuck in the digital dust,” with only a small fraction prepared for industrial AI adoption. Industrial AI is not about isolated automation, but about the proportion of processes and supply chains operating autonomously. He observed that globally, most companies remain below the first band of a five-level maturity scale, highlighting both the scale of the challenge and the opportunity.

Mr. Thomas Rilke

Division Manager, Deutsche Messe Technology Academy, Germany

Mr. Rilke emphasized that many manufacturers are not yet sufficiently digitised to adopt AI effectively. Substantial productivity gains can be achieved through foundational digitisation before introducing advanced AI tools, underscoring the importance of strengthening digital basics prior to scaling intelligent systems.

Mr. Harish Nachnani

Head – Didactic, Festo India Pvt. Ltd.

Mr. Nachnani illustrated practical AI applications on factory floors, including predictive maintenance, real-time quality monitoring and energy optimization. He explained how AI systems detect early signs of machine irregularities, reducing unplanned downtime. Referring to industry examples, he highlighted measurable reductions in breakdowns through predictive



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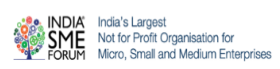
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monitoring. He emphasized that similar proportional benefits are achievable for MSMEs operating smaller production lines.

Ms. Christi Thomas

Deputy Head, Commercial AI & Innovation Hub, FCDO, British High Commission, New Delhi

Ms. Thomas identified three key barriers to MSME AI adoption: clarity, competence and cost. She stated that “MSMEs require clear guidance on relevant AI tools and realistic returns, access to skills development, and mechanisms to mitigate upfront investment risks”. She highlighted cluster-based Centres of Excellence as practical platforms where MSMEs can learn, experiment and build confidence before committing capital.

Dr. Arvind Gupta

Head & Co-Founder, Digital India Foundation

Technology adoption works only when it is driven by need from the bottom up, not imposed from the top down. Twenty years ago, most MSMEs resisted ERP software. Then competitors adopted it, productivity gains became visible, and the rest followed. AI will follow the same curve. "The tipping point will come when the cost of not adopting AI outweighs the cost of adopting it." For that tipping point to reach every corner of India's MSME workforce, localisation is not optional. AI tools that work only in English are tools that exclude. Building them in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and other Indian languages is the difference between technology that empowers and technology that divides.



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Takeaways

AI is already delivering measurable productivity gains through predictive maintenance, quality monitoring and energy optimization. However, successful adoption depends on strong digital foundations and process clarity. MSMEs should begin with existing data, address inefficiencies systematically and leverage Centres of Excellence for low-risk experimentation. Skills development and language localisation are critical enablers. The central message: start small, build capability gradually and integrate AI strategically rather than impulsively.

Bridging Policy and Practice: MSME Export Readiness in Uttar Pradesh

This fireside conversation focused on translating MSME policy into measurable ground level outcomes. The discussion examined export readiness, digital onboarding, plug and play infrastructure, cluster cooperation and the potential for a Centre of Excellence in Uttar Pradesh.



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Shri Raj Kamal Yadav

Managing Director, UPSIC, Government of Uttar Pradesh

Shri Yadav highlighted that Uttar Pradesh, with nearly 96 lakh MSMEs, has structured its export enablement strategy across three levels. “The first and foremost is how to bring them into the net of exports,” he said, noting partnerships with platforms such as Walmart, Flipkart and Amazon Global for onboarding and orientation. Many artisans possess world class skills but require support in business communication. “Their product is top notch. Where the lack is how do we engage with buyers? How do we draft good mail? How do we follow up without



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offending?” The state provides training on such soft skills alongside financial incentives, including reimbursement of up to ₹5 lakh for digital onboarding and cataloguing support.

On infrastructure, he outlined the plug and play factory model. “You just come, give us your requirements, bring your machines and start producing from the next day.” Across Kanpur, Agra and other cities, hundreds of MSMEs are already operating through such facilities.

Explaining the philosophy behind MSME One Connect, he noted, “Do not ask us what we can give you. Tell us what you need and we will curate the solution accordingly.”

Mr. Jason Slater

Chief of AI, Innovation and Digital Officer, UNIDO

Following the global call for AIM Centres of Excellence, 15 countries have already expressed interest. The concept is straightforward: create a safe, practical space where an SME can walk in with a real production challenge and walk out with a tested solution, the skills to implement it, and a clear adoption roadmap. "The SMEs are the game changers. They are the future of industrialisation." By enabling collective experimentation and shared learning, these centres address two of the most persistent barriers at once: the cost of adoption and the fear of getting it wrong alone.

Mr. Vinod Kumar

President, India SME Forum

Moderating the session, Mr. Kumar underscored the importance of aligning institutional frameworks with enterprise realities. The discussion reinforced the need for collaborative



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ecosystems where policy design, digital infrastructure and industry participation work together to enable export competitiveness.

Takeaways

The fireside chat reinforced that effective MSME policy begins with listening rather than prescribing. Uttar Pradesh's approach, combining digital onboarding, soft skills training, financial incentives and plug and play infrastructure, demonstrates how targeted handholding can accelerate export participation. The ODOP model highlights the strength of cooperative cluster structures and shared facilities. A Centre of Excellence in a state with wide sectoral representation could serve as a practical laboratory for technology driven MSME transformation.

AI and Digitalization for an Inclusive Digital Economy

Panelists:

- Dr. Ajay Singh , Global AI Leader, HCLTech
- Ms. Atsuko Okuda, Ph.D, Regional Director,Asia Pacific,International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- Mr. Pratik Desai, PhD, Founder, KissanAI
- Ms. Shruti Bhatia, Asia AI Workforce GTM Leader, Microsoft
- Mr. Farrukhbek Alimdjanov, Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

Moderated by Mr. Nitin Wali, Chief Business Officer APAC, OnActuate & Board Member, India SME Forum.

This session examined how Artificial Intelligence can enable an inclusive digital economy, particularly for MSMEs and underserved communities. Speakers from industry, multilateral



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institutions and startups discussed adoption barriers, connectivity gaps, cloud infrastructure, practical field applications and the importance of localisation.



Mr. Ajay Singh

Global AI Leader, HCLTech

Mr. Singh identified mindset as the first barrier to MSME AI adoption. He cautioned against adopting AI out of fear of missing out, stressing the need to define the business problem, assess process readiness and evaluate return on investment. Fragmented workflows and poor data quality can undermine AI outcomes. He also highlighted the risks of AI hallucinations, particularly



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for small enterprises without dedicated technical oversight, underscoring the need for informed and structured adoption.

Ms. Atsuko Okuda

Regional Director, Asia Pacific Region, International Telecommunication Union

Ms. Okuda emphasized that digital inclusion begins with connectivity, noting that 2.2 billion people globally remain offline, with rural communities and women disproportionately excluded. She shared examples of satellite connectivity transforming remote communities, enabling access to digital services, AI tools and new business opportunities. She also referenced ITU's development of over 500 AI standards across governance, agriculture, health and risk management, providing structured frameworks for safe and scalable adoption.

Ms. Shruti Bhatia

Asia AI Workforce Business Go to Market Leader, Microsoft

Ms. Bhatia framed inclusion around three pillars: access, agency and outcome. She highlighted cloud computing as a key enabler for MSMEs through pay-as-you-go models that reduce upfront infrastructure costs. She emphasized that AI tools must reflect local languages and user contexts to ensure meaningful adoption. She also noted that human adaptability and critical thinking remain central to maximizing AI's economic benefits.



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Mr. Farrukhbek Alimdjanov

Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

Mr. Alimdjanov shared field-level evidence of AI-driven productivity improvements. Precision farming initiatives in Latin America doubled crop profitability within six months, while AI-enabled aquaculture systems in Indonesia significantly increased shrimp production. He cited examples from India where computer vision systems could automate quality inspection, demonstrating how simple, targeted interventions can unlock efficiency gains for MSMEs.

Mr. Pratik Desai

Founder, KissanAI

Mr. Desai emphasized designing AI tools for end users rather than technologists. KissanAI developed a voice-based agricultural assistant in Indian languages, enabling farmers to interact naturally without formal training. The system was trained on real farmer conversations to reflect local vocabulary and dialects. He explained that the business model evolved toward enterprise and government partnerships to scale impact. He also highlighted AI's potential to create new entrepreneurial pathways in agriculture rather than displace livelihoods.

Takeaways

An inclusive digital economy requires deliberate design choices. Connectivity, affordability and localisation are foundational. MSMEs need accessible cloud infrastructure, contextual tools and shared platforms to experiment safely. Practical field applications demonstrate that AI can deliver rapid productivity gains when deployed appropriately. Inclusion will depend on whether technology is built for real users in real conditions, not only for advanced digital environments.



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A Framework for India's AIM Centres of Excellence

Panelists

- Shri. Vishwa M, CEO, AP MSME Development Corporation
- Smt. Manisha Kumbhar, Additional Collector, Government of Maharashtra (GoM)
- Mr. Jason Slater, Chief – AI, Innovation & Digital Officer, UNIDO
- Mr. Vinod Kumar W., President, India SME Forum

Moderated by Dr. Ritin Korla, PhD, Programme Specialist – Innovation, UNIDO.

This session examined how India can institutionalise AI adoption for MSMEs through structured Centres of Excellence. The proposed UNIDO Centres of Excellence for Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra were discussed by state representatives, the India SME Forum and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, focusing on delivery mechanisms, sectoral priorities and measurable outcomes.

Mr. Jason Slater

Chief of AI, Innovation and Digital Officer, UNIDO

Mr. Slater clarified that a Centre of Excellence is not a demonstration venue but a working problem-solving institution. An MSME should enter with a production challenge and leave with a tested solution, clarity on required skills and a structured adoption roadmap. The centre must integrate intelligent manufacturing, robotics, workforce transformation and policy support under one framework. Success should be measured through tangible shop floor outcomes such as productivity gains, quality improvement, reduced downtime and energy efficiency. He noted that UNIDO's experience with similar labs globally demonstrates that structured, application-driven



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centres deliver measurable industrial impact. With 74 million MSMEs, India has both the scale and urgency to implement this model effectively.

Shri. Vishwa M

CEO, AP MSME Development Corporation

Shri. Vishwa outlined how the proposed centre aligns with Andhra Pradesh's Swarna Andhra 2047 vision. Core priorities include AI-driven defect detection, predictive maintenance, skilling, deep technology adoption, logistics optimisation and employment generation. The state is witnessing significant investments, including a 15 billion dollar data centre project by Google and steel sector commitments from ArcelorMittal, increasing the need for technologically capable MSME suppliers. Andhra Pradesh has announced 175 MSME parks and a cluster development policy covering 45 clusters. He observed that finance is not the primary demand from MSMEs. Skilled manpower, technology upgradation, plug-and-play infrastructure and ease of doing business rank higher. The Centre of Excellence is intended to address these structural gaps.

Smt. Manisha Kumbhar

Additional Collector, Government of Maharashtra

Smt. Manisha Kumbhar described Maharashtra's proposed centre as an anchor institution for Industry 4.0 transition. Key focus sectors include automobiles and auto components, pharmaceuticals, textiles and apparel, and food processing. The centre will provide AR and VR-based training, additive manufacturing exposure, digital twin simulations and AI-driven quality and compliance tools. It will also conduct digital readiness assessments and develop customised modernisation roadmaps for individual MSMEs, ensuring tailored progression rather than uniform intervention. The state aims to promote women's participation, balanced regional



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industrial development and sustainable manufacturing practices, positioning the centre as a national benchmark for inclusive industrial transformation.

Mr. Vinod Kumar

President, India SME Forum

Mr. Kumar highlighted a structural challenge within the MSME ecosystem. A large proportion of MSME factories operate machinery that is eight to twenty years old, while domestic machinery manufacturing has not fully aligned with Industry 4.0 standards. MSMEs procure what is available, perpetuating a cycle of outdated technology. He stated Centres of Excellence must demonstrate ideal modern production systems using advanced tools, including simulation and immersive technologies, so entrepreneurs can understand global benchmarks without travelling abroad. He further emphasized building master trainers and creating structured pathways to bridge the gap between engineering graduates and the millions of unfilled MSME jobs through industry-aligned skills

Takeaways

The AIM Centres of Excellence represent a structural requirement for India's MSME ecosystem. The capability gap between global buyer expectations and current MSME capacity is widening. Closing this gap demands physical institutions where modern technology can be demonstrated, skills developed and adoption risks reduced. Both Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have articulated readiness through policy alignment and sectoral prioritisation. The direction is clear: upskill, modernise and scale.



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Cross Border Trade and Ecommerce: Enabling MSMEs from the Global South to Access Global Markets Digitally

Panelists:

- Shri Raj Kamal Yadav, MD, UPSIC, Government of Uttar Pradesh
- Mr. Srinidhi Kalvapudi, Head – Amazon Global Selling
- Mr. Raimund Klein, CEO, International Centre for Industrial Transformation (INCIT) Transformation, Singapore
- Mr. Padmanabhan Babu, Founder & CEO, LEXSHIP
- Dr. Arpita Mukherjee, Professor, ICRIER
- Mr. Tomoyoshi Koume, Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

Moderated by Dr. Ritin Koria, PhD, Programme Specialist – Innovation, UNIDO.

The session focused on one of the most immediate questions for MSMEs: how to sell globally from the factory floor or cluster itself. Representatives from state government, global e-commerce, logistics, trade research and international development discussed export incentives, digital readiness, regulatory shifts and platform-driven access to global markets.



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Shri Raj Kamal Yadav

Managing Director, UPSIC, Government of Uttar Pradesh

Shri Yadav outlined Uttar Pradesh's layered export strategy for its 96 lakh MSMEs across diverse clusters. Under the state's Export Promotion Policy 2025, catalogue development costs are partially reimbursed, including support for high-quality 3D digital catalogues. Sample shipment expenses and freight costs are subsidised, with freight reimbursements capped per unit. International certifications such as SEDEX and LWG are also supported through financial incentives. Beyond subsidies, the Niryat Vriddhi Abhiyaan, implemented in partnership with the India SME Forum, targets strong domestic performers who are ready to transition into exports, helping them take the final step with structured guidance.



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Mr. Raimund Klein

Chief Executive Officer, International Centre for Industrial Transformation, Singapore

Mr. Klein emphasized that digital maturity is now a prerequisite for export participation. Global buyers expect real-time inventory visibility, digital documentation and traceability as standard requirements. Emerging compliance norms such as carbon passports, digital product traceability and cross-border data standards will increasingly determine market access. He stressed the importance of government-level mutual recognition of digital certifications so that compliance data generated in India is accepted abroad without duplication, positioning digital trade policy as a strategic priority.

Mr. Srinidhi Kalvapudi

Head, Amazon Global Selling

Mr. Kalvapudi shared insights from a decade of cross-border e-commerce engagement. Amazon Global Selling currently works with approximately two lakh Indian sellers, with strong growth in cotton home textiles, carpets and home decor. Growth is geographically diverse, spanning clusters in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. There are three pillars for inclusive digital trade: affordable access to global marketplaces, the distinctive value of Indian products, and a coordinated ecosystem of infrastructure, policy support and digital literacy. E-commerce has significantly reduced entry barriers that previously limited small exporters.



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Mr. Padmanabhan Babu

Founder and CEO, LEXSHIP

Mr. Babu identified psychological hesitation as a major export barrier. Managing customs, logistics, documentation and payments can be overwhelming for small businesses. LEXSHIP's integrated platform handles end-to-end documentation digitally, eliminating paperwork for its 13,000 exporters. He emphasized building global compliance systems from inception, arguing that delayed compliance becomes more costly over time.

Dr. Arpita Mukherjee

Professor, ICRIER

Dr. Mukherjee highlighted evolving global trade regulations and rising compliance standards. With geopolitical shifts reshaping trade flows, MSMEs must understand regulatory changes in their key export markets. She recommended developing plain-language market manuals for MSMEs covering compliance requirements, digital standards and technology expectations. She also emphasized the underexplored potential of cross-border services exports enabled by digital platforms.

Mr. Tomoyoshi Koume

Industrial Development Officer, UNIDO

Mr. Koume discussed the European Union's Digital Product Passport under its Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, which will require detailed digital disclosures on materials,



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manufacturing processes and environmental impact for products entering the EU from 2027 onward. A UNIDO assessment across multiple countries found that smaller firms in India and Bangladesh face significant awareness and capability gaps. Without structured capacity building and data standardisation support, many MSMEs risk losing EU market access. Coordinated action between government, industry and development partners is essential to ensure readiness.

Takeaways

Global markets are evolving rapidly, with rising digital and sustainability standards reshaping access conditions. Regulatory changes such as the Digital Product Passport will significantly impact export eligibility. At the same time, e-commerce platforms have reduced entry barriers and created unprecedented global reach for MSMEs. State incentives, digital infrastructure and compliance readiness must converge. The central message is clear: build globally from the beginning, digitise early, understand compliance requirements and treat international standards as strategic investments rather than obstacles.



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Highlights

Call for Papers

The World Futures Forum 2026 invited researchers and academics from around the world to submit papers on themes central to MSME development, digital transformation, and sustainable growth. Over 36 papers were received from across the globe. Five were selected. Three were presented at the event, offering the audience a glimpse of the cutting-edge thinking that is shaping the future of small business policy and practice.

Paper 1- "AI-Enabled Circular Smart Business Models and MSME Competitiveness"





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The first paper, presented on Day 1 by **Mr. Kushagra Bhardwaj**, co-author on behalf of **Dr. Shivalleela Arlimatti**, made a compelling case for why Indian MSMEs need to move from linear to circular business models. In a linear model, a business produces, sells, and the consumer eventually disposes. In a circular model, waste becomes a resource, reverse logistics bring materials back into the production cycle, and businesses find value where they previously found only cost.

The paper studied five businesses, three from Europe and two from India, to understand how this transition works in practice. The Indian examples included EcoReco, a formal e-waste recycler, and GPS, which converts organic waste into biogas and runs the largest such plant in the world, located in Indore. The European businesses offered models for recycling automotive parts, high-quality plastics, and fish waste. The key finding: AI enables this transition through cost efficiency, operational resilience, and strategic agility. With India's recent trade agreement with the EU opening new possibilities for integrating circular economy principles, the timing for Indian MSMEs to act on this could not be better.



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Paper 2 - "Critical Analysis of the Skill Performance Required for the Ethical Survival of Decentralised Systems"



The second paper, presented by **Dr. Harrieya Velan**, explored a question that sits at the heart of every AI conversation but rarely gets discussed directly: what happens to people when technology disrupts traditional ways of working and earning?

Drawing on historical patterns from India's post-independence development, the paper examined the gap between skilled and unskilled workers, the displacement that follows technological change, and the ethical responsibility of institutions to manage this transition fairly. The central argument was that AI must be deployed with transparency, equal opportunity, and a genuine commitment to grassroots development. Geolocation-based job matching, certified skill databases, and AI tools that connect workers to relevant opportunities in their own regions were



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proposed as practical pathways. The message was clear: inclusive AI development is not just good ethics. It is good economics.

Paper 3 - “Data Protection as a Foundation for Sustainable Digital Transformation of MSMEs in India: Reconciling the DPDP Act, Constitutional Values, and Traditional Ethics”



The third paper, presented on Day 2 by **Dr. Richa Mittal**, Assistant Professor at Prestige Institute of Management and Research, Gwalior, tackled India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 and what it means for MSMEs trying to go digital.

Her argument was elegant: data protection should not be seen as a compliance burden. It should be understood as constitutional infrastructure for sustainable digital transformation. Drawing on India's ancient philosophical tradition, she reminded the audience that ethical governance has always been central to Indian civilisation. In the digital age, that means transparency, accountability, and respect for privacy.



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For MSMEs specifically, she proposed a tiered compliance framework that is proportional to the size and capacity of the business, so that small enterprises are empowered rather than overwhelmed by regulation. Capacity building, digital literacy programmes, and privacy-enhancing technologies must be made accessible to small businesses if India's digital transformation is to be genuinely inclusive. She concluded with a thought that resonated through the room: in the digital age, truth requires transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity.

Success Story



Shri Balaji Renganathan of MOURI Tech shared a grounded journey of steady growth built on discipline, governance and capability. He emphasized that direction matters more than speed and that resilience is built through consistent decisions over time. Engagement with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization helped raise internal standards and global readiness. His message was simple: AI strengthens businesses only when fundamentals are strong.



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AI Rapid Fire:

The final activity of the World Futures Forum 2026 was a burst of energy that the audience needed. Four startups took the stage for five-minute pitches, each showcasing an AI solution built specifically to solve real problems for MSMEs. The range of ideas on display was a powerful reminder that India's startup ecosystem is not just keeping pace with the AI revolution. In many areas, it is leading it.



Nebula Cloud offered MSMEs something that has long been out of reach for small businesses: access to world-class engineering and R&D tools on a pay-as-you-go basis. Through a single cloud-based platform combining infrastructure, software, and computing power including GPUs, even



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a small manufacturer can now prototype, design, and run AI workloads without the prohibitive upfront investment that such capabilities once required. A live demo showed how a simple design intent typed into the system could be converted into a production-ready engineering blueprint within seconds.

Tracker Suite addressed one of the most common but invisible drains on MSME productivity: the chaos of manual processes across tasks, sales, and inventory. With 1,700 clients already on board and backing from NVIDIA's startup programme, the platform offers a three-in-one management tool available in Indian languages and Arabic, making it genuinely accessible to small business owners across diverse regions. Its AI agent, Tavi, handles everything from predictive task suggestions to live sales calls with customers in a natural, conversational manner.

Tax Fusion AI tackled a pain point that rarely makes it onto conference agendas but costs MSMEs enormous amounts of time and money: tax and legal compliance. Built by a chartered accountant who understood the problem from the inside, the platform uses an in-house large language model to provide expert-level tax research, generate compliant GST documentation, flag litigation risks, and keep businesses updated on regulatory changes, all at a fraction of traditional advisory fees.

Dexter Tech Labs closed the session with an AI-powered voice agent platform that automates the entire telecalling workflow, from deciding who to call and when, to having intelligent multilingual conversations, to following up automatically on WhatsApp and email and updating the CRM. For MSMEs running sales, collections, or customer support teams, the platform promises higher conversions, lower costs, and consistent outcomes without the burnout that comes from manual calling operations.



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Four startups. Four very different problems. One common thread: AI, built thoughtfully and affordably, can transform the daily reality of running a small business in India.

Recommendations

1. Establish cluster-linked AI and Digital Transformation Centres of Excellence by building on the AIM Global initiative and partnerships with organizations such as UNIDO and India SME Forum, so that MSMEs can access shared infrastructure, hands-on demonstration facilities, and structured skilling programmes that allow them to experiment with technologies like predictive maintenance, industrial analytics, and digital quality systems in low-risk environments before making capital investments.
2. Develop and deploy a globally aligned MSME Quality and Compliance Digital Toolkit that integrates self-assessment modules, AI-enabled compliance monitoring, and standardized checklists mapped to international standards, while also linking the toolkit with export platforms and certification bodies to help small firms systematically reduce rejection rates, improve product credibility, and transition from compliance-driven behaviour to competitiveness-driven quality adoption.
3. Create a Global South cross-border e-commerce facilitation framework that harmonizes policy guidance on logistics, digital payments, and data governance while simultaneously establishing shared market intelligence platforms and export readiness accelerators, enabling MSMEs to access real-time pricing insights, streamline regulatory navigation, and scale into international markets through digital trade channels with lower transaction costs and reduced information asymmetry.



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MSMEs must power growth from India's villages, not just its metros: Jitan Ram Manjhi

By Shariq Khan, ET Online - Last Updated: Feb 11, 2026, 05:32:00 PM IST

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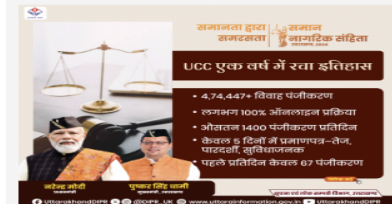
Synopsis The Union MSME Minister says bridging regional imbalances is key to realising India's economic potential.



ET AI Briefing

Listen to this article in summarized format

Listen



At a time when global investors are increasingly turning their focus towards India and their interest in India's growth story rises, Union MSME Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi on Tuesday emphasised that the country's next economic push must be driven by its villages and hinterlands.

Addressing the World Futures Forum (WFF) 2026, organised by the World Entrepreneurship Development Organisation (WEDO) and the India SME Forum in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), Manjhi argued that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can serve as the most effective vehicle to bridge regional economic disparities — provided policy and industry efforts move decisively beyond urban clusters. "India is a country of villages. Without rural development, the idea of India's development is incomplete," he said, underlining that while global trade engagement is expanding, the benefits must percolate to the hinterlands.



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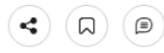
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Policy · 4 Min Read

Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi calls for rural-centric MSME push at World Futures Forum

If Day One is any indication, the World Futures Forum is positioning MSMEs not as peripheral beneficiaries of digital transformation, but as central protagonists in shaping the future of industry and livelihoods in emerging economies.

ET Online Bureau · ETGovernment
Updated On Feb 12, 2026 at 08:19 PM IST



Chief Guest Jitan Ram Manjhi, Hon'ble Minister of MSME, Government of India, delivered a candid keynote that reframed MSME policy through a rural lens.

New Delhi witnessed the opening of a significant global dialogue on February 11, as the India SME Forum, in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), convened the first day of the World Futures Forum.

The two-day high-level gathering, themed "The Future of Industry, Enterprise and Livelihoods in the Global South," serves as a strategic precursor to the AI Impact Summit led by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

सरकार का लक्ष्य भारतीय लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यमों को वैश्विक बाजारों से जोड़ना है: केन्द्रीय मंत्री मांझी

दिव्य दिल्ली: सूक्ष्म, लघु और मध्यम उद्यम मंत्री जीतन राम मांझी ने आज कहा कि सरकार का उद्देश्य भारत के लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यमों को वैश्विक बाजारों से जोड़ना है। श्री मांझी ने नई दिल्ली में विश्व फ्यूचर्स फोरम का उद्घाटन करते हुए यह बात कही। मंत्री ने इस बात पर जोर दिया कि वर्तमान में विश्व भारत के साथ व्यापार करने के लिए आकर्षित है।

उन्होंने इस फोरम की सराहना करते हुए कहा कि यह फोरम डिजिटलीकरण और कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता प्रौद्योगिकी के उपयोग पर विचार प्रदान करके लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यम क्षेत्र को मजबूत कर रहा है। इस अवसर पर मंत्री जी ने देश के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यमों (एमएसएमई) के विकास की आवश्यकता पर बल देते हुए कहा कि जब तक भारतीय गांवों का विकास नहीं होगा, देश का पूर्ण विकास संभव नहीं है। उन्होंने देश के 75 लाख से



अधिक एमएसएमई की सराहना करते हुए कहा कि ये उद्यम 33 करोड़ से अधिक लोगों को रोजगार प्रदान कर रहे हैं। उन्होंने केन्द्रीय बजट 2026-27 की भी प्रशंसा की जिसमें देश के एमएसएमई क्षेत्र को विशेष महत्व दिया गया है। वर्ल्ड फ्यूचर्स फोरम (डब्ल्यूएफएफ) अमेरिका के विश्व उद्यमिता विकास संगठन का एक द्विवार्षिक मंच है, जिसकी मेजबानी इंडिया एसएमई फोरम करता है। एमएसएमई मंत्रालय के सहयोग से आयोजित इस दो दिवसीय कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य वैश्विक दक्षिण में उद्योग,

उद्यम और आजीविका के भविष्य को आकार देने के लिए कार्ययोजनाओं पर चर्चा करना है। इलेक्ट्रॉनिक्स एवं सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी मंत्रालय द्वारा इस मंच को एआई इम्पैक्ट समिट 2026 के आधिकारिक पूर्व-समिति कार्यक्रम के रूप में मान्यता दी गई है। डब्ल्यूएफएफ 2026 में लघु एवं मध्यम उद्यम (एमएसएमई), नीति निमाता, उद्योग जगत के नेता, बहुपक्षीय संस्थान और प्रौद्योगिकी समर्थक एक साथ आएंगे ताकि प्रतिस्पर्धा, नवाचार और समावेशी विकास के लिए व्यावहारिक, भविष्योन्मुखी समाधानों को आगे बढ़ाया जा सके। यह एआई-सक्षम औद्योगिक प्रतिस्पर्धा, एमएसएमई की तैयारी, गुणवत्ता और विनिर्माण मानकों तथा सीमा पार डिजिटल व्यापार पर भी प्रकाश डालेगा, जिससे वैश्विक दक्षिण को वैश्विक एआई और उद्योग एजेंडा के एक सक्रिय निमाता के रूप में स्थापित किया जा सके।



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AI-led Cluster Strategy Recasts MSME Competitiveness In Global South

Abhishek Sharma | Feb 14, 2026

Indian MSMEs # Artificial Intelligence # Cluster Development # Global South # Digital Trade

India positions AI-enabled clusters and quality infrastructure as the new growth engine for MSMEs across emerging economies



India is sharpening its push to reposition micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled, cluster-driven engines of growth, with policymakers and multilateral partners arguing that competitiveness, not subsidies, will define the sector's next phase.

At the World Futures Forum in New Delhi, curated by the India SME Forum in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, the focus remained firmly on how digital adoption, quality infrastructure and industrial clustering can raise productivity and export readiness across the Global South.

India's MSME sector contributes around 30 per cent to national gross domestic product (GDP) and accounts for nearly 45 per cent of the country's exports, while employing more than 110 million people across manufacturing, services and trade. Despite its economic weight, many MSMEs operate at sub-scale levels with low technology use and weak productivity. Informality limits access to formal credit and global markets.

Stricter compliance norms, higher quality standards and rapid digital change are increasing pressure. The policy focus has shifted to AI, clusters and standards to raise value addition, not just numbers. A 2025 survey by PayNearby found that only 7 per cent of India's MSMEs are exploring AI-powered tools. PayNearby in 2024 also reported that 36 per cent of MSMEs cite resistance to adopting new technology, and 18 per cent struggle with the high costs associated with its implementation.



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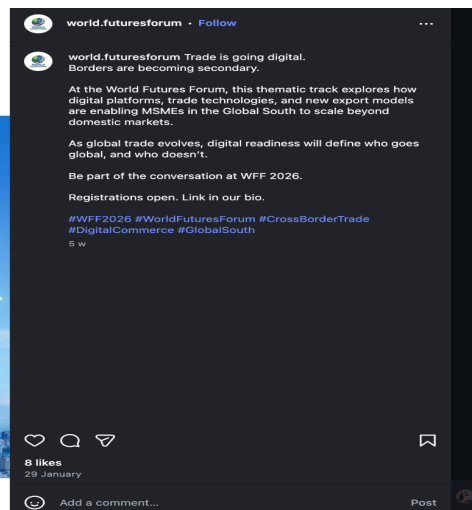
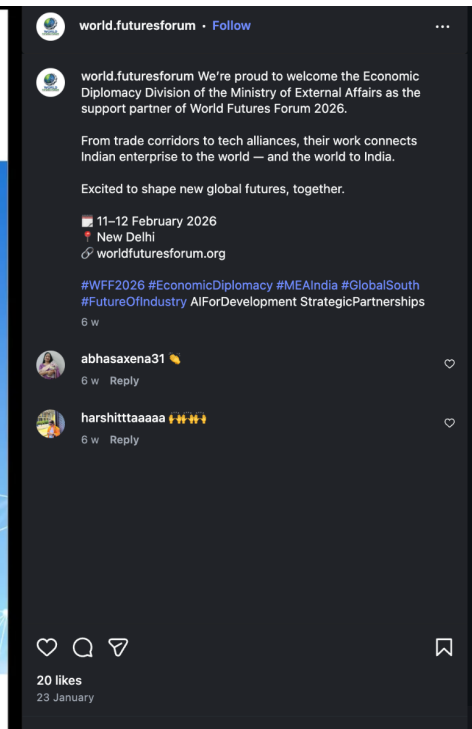


India's Largest Not for Profit Organisation for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

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Speaker Spotlight for Giorgi Todua, Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO. Includes event details for WFF2026 on Feb 11-12, 2026 in New Delhi, India.

Instagram post for Giorgi Todua spotlight. Text: 'world.futuresforum Speaker Spotlight | Giorgi Todua Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO. From MSME and cluster development to quality infrastructure and technology transfer, Giorgi Todua brings deep experience in helping enterprises improve productivity, readiness, and market access.'

Speaker Spotlight for Harish Nachnani, Head - Didactic, Festo India Pvt. Ltd. Includes event details for WFF2026 on Feb 11-12, 2026 in New Delhi, India.

Instagram post for Harish Nachnani spotlight. Text: 'world.futuresforum Speaker Spotlight | Harish Nachnani Head - Didactic, Festo India Pvt. Ltd. With decades of experience in industrial training and technical education, Harish Nachnani brings a strong perspective on skills, workforce readiness, and industry-aligned learning systems.'



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Fireside Chat: From Policy to Practice – Enabling MSMEs for Global Competitiveness

The conversation opened with Shri **Raj Kamal Yadav**, MD, UPSIC, **Government of Uttar Pradesh**, outlining how the state is preparing MSMEs to scale through e-commerce and export markets — particularly via initiatives such as **ODOP-One District One Product**, digital onboarding, and plug-and-play infrastructure.

Building on this, Mr. **Vinod Kumar W.**, President, **India SME Forum**, expanded the dialogue to address systemic national challenges — outdated machinery, limited exposure to modern production practices, and the need for demonstration-led, hands-on support rather than solely financial schemes.

Concluding the session, Mr. **Jason Slater**, Chief – AI, Innovation & Digital Officer, **UNIDO**, provided a global perspective — emphasizing the importance of Centres of Excellence as safe, practical spaces where MSMEs can experiment with technology, adopt AI-driven solutions, and convert policy into measurable outcomes.

The discussion reinforced a clear shift: enabling MSMEs requires ecosystem-level transformation — from infrastructure and skilling to experimentation and implementation.

#WFF2026 #MSME #CentresOfExcellence #AI #Ecommerce #GlobalSouth #IndustrialTransformation





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Session: UNIDO's Strategic Roadmap for India – Phase II Implementation

UNIDO presented its 2025–26 strategic roadmap for India, outlining Phase II implementation focused on digital skilling, Centres of Excellence, and resource mobilization for inclusive AI.

Aligned with global development frameworks such as the Global Digital Compact, the session highlighted the strategic vision for proposed Centres of Excellence in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh to accelerate digital transformation and inclusive industrial growth.

Participants included:

- Mr. Vishwa M CEO , CEO, AP MSME Development Corporation
• Ms. Manisha, Additional Collector, Government of Maharashtra (GoM)
• Mr. Jason Slater, Chief – AI, Innovation & Digital Officer, UNIDO
• Mr. Vinod Kumar W., President, India SME Forum

Moderated by Dr. Ritin Koria, PhD, Programme Specialist – Innovation, UNIDO.

The roadmap signals a structured, collaborative pathway toward AI-enabled, inclusive industrial development in India.

#WFF2026 #UNIDO #InclusiveAI #CentresOfExcellence #DigitalTransformation #MSME #GlobalDigitalCompact





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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT



RAIMUND KLEIN
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
INCIT - INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION

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world.futuresforum Speaker Spotlight | Raimund Klein

Founder & CEO, INCIT – International Centre for Industrial Transformation

From manufacturing design to global supply digitisation, Raimund Klein brings a sharp, execution-led perspective on industrial transformation and productivity across regions.

Catch him at the World Futures Forum 2026, where leaders from industry, policy, and global institutions come together to shape the future of manufacturing in the Global South.

Be part of the conversation. Registrations open. Link in our bio.

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Session: Cross Border Trade & E-commerce – Enabling MSMEs from the Global South to Access Global Markets Digitally

The session examined how MSMEs and small manufacturers can scale globally through digital trade platforms, global marketplaces, and D2C export models.

Key discussions addressed:

- Scaling cross-border e-commerce for MSMEs
- Regulatory, logistics, payments & compliance challenges
- Leveraging AI, data & digital tools for pricing and market access
- Export readiness strategies backed by Global South case studies

Distinguished panelists included:

- Shri **Raj Kamal Yadav**, MD, UPSIC, **Government of Uttar Pradesh**
- Mr. **Srinidhi Kalvapudi**, Head – **Amazon Global Selling**
- Mr. **Raimund Klein**, CEO, **International Centre for Industrial Transformation (INCIT)** Transformation, Singapore
- Mr. **Padmanabhan Babu**, Founder & CEO, **LEXSHIP**
- Dr. **Arpita Mukherjee**, Professor, ICRIER
- Mr. **Tomoyoshi Koume**, Industrial Development Officer, **UNIDO**

Moderated by Mr. **Vinod Kumar W.**, President, **India SME Forum**.

The session reinforced that digital trade is no longer optional – it is the gateway for MSMEs of the Global South to compete, scale, and lead in global markets.

#WFF2026 #CrossBorderTrade #Ecommerce #MSME #GlobalSouth #DigitalTrade #ExportReady



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Session: AI for Boosting Productivity & Competitiveness in Industry and Manufacturing

The session examined how Artificial Intelligence is transforming industrial ecosystems by enhancing productivity, efficiency, and global competitiveness – particularly for MSMEs.

Key areas of discussion included:

- AI-led automation and predictive maintenance
• AI-enabled quality control systems
• Adoption challenges and workforce skilling requirements
• Scalable AI solutions tailored to MSME realities
• Role of Centres of Excellence in Maharashtra & Andhra Pradesh

Distinguished panelists:

- Mr. Raimund Klein, CEO, International Centre for Industrial Transformation, Singapore
• Ms. Christi Thomas, Deputy Head – Commercial AI & Innovation Hub, FCDO, British High Commission, Delhi
• Mr. Harish Nachnani, Head – Didactic, Festo India Pvt. Ltd.
• Dr. Arvind Gupta, Head & Co-Founder, Digital India Foundation
• Mr. Thomas Rilke, Division Manager, Deutsche Messe Technology Academy, Germany

Moderated by Ms. Nishtha Mehta, ICF PCC, Senior Advisor – International Centres of Excellence for AI & Digital Transformation, UNIDO.

The conversation highlighted a clear shift: AI is no longer experimental, it is operational, scalable, and central to industrial competitiveness.

#WFF2026 #AI #Manufacturing #MSME #Industry40 #DigitalTransformation #CentresOfExcellence



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Session: From Standards to Markets – Leveraging Quality Infrastructure for MSME Competitiveness

This session focused on strengthening MSME access to global markets through robust quality infrastructure, compliance systems, and digital tools.

Key deliberations included:

- Aligning MSMEs with international standards and compliance frameworks
• Leveraging AI and digitalization to enhance quality and reduce border rejection rates
• Enabling MSMEs to integrate into global value chains
• Introduction to UNIDO digital tools – QI4SD Index, Standards Compliance Analytics & Digital Maturity Assessment

The session featured a presentation by Ms. @April Chang u , Associate Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO.

Panelists included:

- Shri Alok Srivastava, Director, National Testing House
• Mr. Arvind Kumar Upadhyaya, CEO, STQC Certification Services
• Mr. Anil Jauhari, Former CEO, NABCB

Moderated by Ms. April Chang, Associate Industrial Development Expert, UNIDO.

The discussion reinforced a clear message: Quality is not a regulatory burden — it is a strategic gateway to global markets.

#WFF2026 #QualityInfrastructure #MSME #GlobalValueChains #Standards #DigitalTransformation #UNIDO



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