

ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024: “UNITE” for Sustainable Growth and Transformation

October 29-30, 2024 | Marcian Garden Hotel, Zamboanga City

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Zamboanga City, Philippines — The ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024, held on October 29-30 at the Marcian Garden Hotel, gathered the region's brightest minds in entrepreneurship and innovation under the theme "Unleashing New Innovations and Transforming Enterprises (UNITE) for Sustainable Growth." This highly anticipated summit, was led by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) IX, through the HERMOSA Consortium and was spearheaded by the AZUL Hub Technology Business Incubator (TBI) of Ateneo de Zamboanga University (AdZU). RAISE WesMin, Agri-Aqua TBI of Western Mindanao State University (WMSU), and SIDLAK TBI of Jose Rizal Memorial State University (JRMSU) also played a key role as co-organizers, along with the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) IX and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) IX.

The summit aimed to foster a thriving environment for innovation by bringing together TBI experts, students, entrepreneurs, and investors, from across Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Through diverse activities, including plenaries, panel discussions, and pitch competitions, the ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024 provided a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and networking, all critical to nurturing the region’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Day 1: Setting the Stage for Innovation

The summit opened with an invocation, the singing of Lupang Hinirang and Zamboanga Hermosa by the WMSU Grand Chorale, followed by an inspiring welcome address from Fr. Guillrey Anthony M. Andal, S.J., President of AdZU. Director Martin A. Wee,

DOST IX Regional Director, delivered an address emphasizing the vital role of innovation in regional development in improving the TBI system in ZAMBASULTA. After, the WMSU Jambangan Dance Troupe performed, adding a touch of culture to the proceedings.

A highlight of the event was the ceremonial Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing, reinforcing the commitment of key institutions in strengthening collaboration and forging partnerships. Among the signees were representatives from AdZU, DOST, DICT, DTI, NEDA, WMSU, JRMSU, ZICT, SSC, NDJC, STII, BaSC, and GDG.



Figure 1: Ceremonial MOU signing between AdZU and WMSU. From left to right: Dr. Joel G. Fernando (WMSU’s Vice President for Research Extension Services & External Linkages), Dr. Teresita Narvaez (WMSU’s Vice President for Resource Generation in concurrent capacity as Agribusiness Department Chair), Fr. Guillrey Anthony M. Andal, S.J., (President of AdZU), Asso. Prof. Al-Ghani D. Mohammad, representing Dr. Ma. Carla A. Ochotorena (WMSU’s University President), and Dr. Reynante E. Autida, (RAISE WesMin’s Program Leader).

The opening day’s plenary sessions featured Ms. Diane Eustaquio, National Startup Enabler, who discussed “Establishing a Startup Ecosystem and the Significant Roles of its Key Enablers”, and Engr. Edward Paul Apigo, Senior Science Research Specialist of DOST-PCIEERD, who presented “Empowering Local Startups and Entrepreneurs through the Innovative Startup Act.”

Following the plenaries, the panel discussion "Showcasing Homegrown Innovations: Challenges and Opportunities for Local Startups" brought insights from industry leaders, including Mark Sultan Gersava

(Bambuhay), Engr. Philip Adrian T. Atilano (TimeFree Innovations), and Erika Dell P. Sancho (Mata Technologies Inc.), moderated by Mr. Franch Maverick Lorilla, CDO bites Director for Research at USTP.

The afternoon sessions included two pitch competitions conducted through parallel sessions showcasing the innovative technologies of both students and professional entrepreneurs. The *Student Pitch Competition* (*iDEYA PITCH COMPETITION*), organized by DICT Philippine Startup Challenge, with AZUL Hub & SIDLAK TBI, and the *Investor Pitch and Business Matching for Professional Entrepreneurs*, organized by RAISE WesMin of WMSU. These competitions created a unique opportunity for innovators to connect with potential investors and explore pathways for commercialization.

Investor Pitch and Business Matching Session Fuels Innovation and Growth for Local Startups

One focal point of the Summit was the *Investor Pitch and Business Matching session for Professional Entrepreneurs*, organized by RAISE WesMin to connect professional entrepreneurs with potential investors. The session, led by Dr. Reynante E. Autida, Engr. Swidin S. Husin, and Ms. Lucy Felix-Sadiwa, and hosted by Engr. Arvic S. Francisco, was dedicated to advancing local startups and facilitating investment opportunities.



Figure 2: Participants of the Investor Pitch and Business Matching session, pitching their technologies: Ms. Mary Flordiluna Guisada, pitching FISH-VEGGIE SIOMAI, Ms. Ruffa Mae P. Murillo, pitching Night Soil Organic Fertilizer, Ms. Charity T. Castro, pitching Seaweed Crispies, and, Engr. Ray J. Arcillas, pitching Squash-filled Hopia.

The session featured a range of innovative technologies across the Food Technology, Agri-Aqua, and ICT categories, highlighting the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of Mindanao. Below are the technologies pitched by participants:

Food Technology Category

1. **Mr. Khyrthz Marco C. Salaguste** - *Adlai*
2. **Ms. Mary Flordiluna Guisada** - *FISH-VEGGIE SIOMAI*
3. **Dr. Jannette J. Icao** - *HOMANCA - "Ato ni Brew"*
4. **Dr. Marlon Dennis C. Ochoa** - *Blue Ternate Tea*
5. **Ms. Allen Day S. Mori** - *Lemonate Cucumber*
6. **Ms. Jeasa Mae J. Miñoza** - *Pomona Calamansi Jelly*
7. **Mr. Rupiel Arpi Lahaman** - *RuRu Mushrooms*
8. **Ms. Charity T. Castro** - *Seaweed Crispies*
9. **Engr. Ray J. Arcillas** - *Squash-filled Hopia*
10. **Ms. Gregoria C. Relampagos** - *ZamPen Native Chicken Pyanggang*
11. **Mr. Jeffrey G. Sereño** - *Cafelayan Innovations*

Agri-Aqua Category

12. **Ms. Angelea A. Testa** - *Chilistecide*
13. **Mr. Meynard P. Abello** - *EcoTap*
14. **Mr. Moncini A. Hinay** - *Gardenator: Household-Based Circular Food System*
15. **Ms. Ruffa Mae P. Murillo** - *Night Soil Organic Fertilizer*

ICT Category

17. **Mr. Emir V. Epino** - *ALERTO Solutions Inc.*
18. **Mr. Emir V. Epino** - *Community-Based Mapping Platform (CoMPASS)*
19. **Ms. Jolicar B. Maranga** - *VENDE: ERP with AI*
20. **Dr. Domely E. Tortola** - *LAAG App*
21. **Ms. Abigail Joy C. Subido** - *MyoTracker*

Day 2: Insights and Recognition

Day 2 began with a recap of the previous day's activities, setting the stage for a robust lineup of panel discussions and the eagerly awaited awards ceremony of the pitching competitions. The morning's plenary session featured Mr. Mark Sultan Gersava, who spoke about the Philippine Innovation Act's role in empowering Filipino innovators, highlighting government support for initiatives that drive sustainable growth.

The summit continued with four panel discussions, each spotlighting distinct aspects of building a thriving startup ecosystem:

1. Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship through Technology Business Incubators (TBIs)

The first session, moderated by renowned startup enabler Ms. Diane D. Eustaquio, centered on the crucial role of Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) in supporting the early stages of entrepreneurial ventures. Panelists included Mr. Mario S. Rodriguez, Project Leader of DOST-AdZU AZUL Hub; Prof. Yhebron J. Lagud, TBI Manager of DOST-JRMSU SIDLAK TBI; and Engr. Swidin S. Husin, Project Staff of RAISE WesMin ATBI, represented by Engr. Arvic S. Francisco, Unit Head of WMSU-TBI. They shared insights on how TBIs act as catalysts for innovation, providing mentorship, resources, and structured support systems essential for startup growth.



Figure 3: Ms. Diane D. Eustaquio, moderating the Panel Discussion titled “Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship through Technology Business Incubators (TBIs)”, with Prof. Yhebron J. Lagud, Mr. Mario S. Rodriguez, and Engr. Arvic S. Francisco.

2. Policy and Innovation: Government Initiatives for a Thriving Startup Ecosystem

The second panel session, moderated by Jehan Forro, President of the Zamboanga ICT Council, focused on the role of government in creating a supportive environment for startups. The panel featured insights from Mr. Jamju A. Rivera of LEDIPS, Isabela City, Director General Mohajirin Ali, Vice Chairperson of the Bangsamoro Economic Development Council, and Daren Diel-Espanola, Chief Economic and Development Specialist. The panelists discussed various government-led initiatives that aim to empower local startups, including funding programs, policy reforms, and infrastructure improvements.

3. Boosting the Economy: Industry’s Role in Supporting and Scaling Startups

Moderated by Andrew Wee from the Industry Group of Zamboanga, Inc., this session explored the pivotal role of established industries in fostering regional innovation and supporting startups. The panel included Ms. Hazel J. Lu from the Western Mindanao Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Pedro Rufo T. Soliven, from the Industry Group of Zamboanga, Inc. The discussion highlighted how partnerships between established businesses and startups can drive economic growth, with industry leaders offering mentorship, financial investment, and strategic alliances to help emerging entrepreneurs scale their businesses.

4. Funding and Scaling Opportunities for Local Startups and Businesses

The final panel session, led by Mr. Richard Day, President of Upgrade InnoLab Inc., delved into the available funding resources and scaling opportunities for local startups. Panelists included Engr. Edward Paul H. Apigo, Program Manager of the Startup Grant Fund; Ms. Loise Ray G. Leona, PTA IV of DOST IX; Mr. Ardi Abril T. Layugue, OIC-Chief Economic Development Specialist of NEDA IX; and Ms. Jonah Lyn

D. Corpuz, OIC-Chief of Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Division, DA IX. The discussion focused on scaling opportunities and funding resources available for startups and small businesses, empowering local entrepreneurs with essential tools for growth.

Highlight: Investor Pitch and Business Matching Session Awarding

A significant highlight of Day 2 was the *Investor Pitch and Business Matching for Professional Entrepreneurs* awarding of winners. Among the standout presentations are the following:

- **Winner:** Mr. Rupiel Arpi Lahaman with *RuRu Mushrooms*
- **1st Runner-Up:** Mr. Moncini A. Hinay with *Gardenator: Household-Based Circular Food System*
- **2nd Runner-Up:** Dr. Domely E. Tortola with the *LAAG App*



Figure 4: Winners of the with Investor Pitch and Business Matching Session. From left to right: Dr. Teresita Narvaez, Mr. Rupiel Arpi Lahaman (Winner), Mr. Moncini A. Hinay (First Runner-Up), Dr. Domely E. Tortola (2nd Runner Up) and Director Martin A. Wee.

Highlight: Student Pitch Competition Awarding (iDEYA PITCH COMPETITION)

Another highly anticipated segment of Day 2 was the announcement of winners for the *iDEYA Pitch Competition*. Listed below are the awardees, their technologies, and special awards.

- **Grand Winner:** Petmate (Western Mindanao State University)

- **1st Runner-Up:** Aviso Hub (Western Mindanao State University)
- **2nd Runner Up:** ReviewGo (Saint Mary's College of Labason)

Other Awards:

- **Special Jury Award:** InnoVest PH (Jose Rizal Memorial State University) and MindPath (Western Mindanao State University)
- **Audience Choice Award:** AraFlix (Mindanao State University - Tawi-Tawi, College of Technology and Oceanography)
- **TBI Excellence Award:** ReviewGo (Saint Mary's College of Labason)
- **Best Pitch Presentation:** Aviso Hub (Western Mindanao State University)

Moving Forward

The summit concluded with an inspiring message from Dr. Ma. Carla A. Ochotorena, President of WMSU, who was represented by Dr. Teresita Narvaez, Vice President for Resource Generation of WMSU. Regional Information Officer Thelma Diego, then presented the "Ways Forward and Conclusion" segment, calling for sustained collaboration to advance the regional startup ecosystem. In his closing remarks, Director Martin A. Wee emphasized the need for continued partnerships across government, academia, and industry to build a resilient, innovation-driven economy in his closing remarks.

As the ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024 drew to a close, the spirit of "Unleashing New Innovations and Transforming Enterprises" resonated with all participants. The summit has laid a strong foundation for future collaborations and established a cornerstone event, driving sustainable growth and transformation in the region.

The RAISE WesMin Team, as a co-organizer of the ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024, was thrilled to conclude the event on a high note. The summit successfully fostered

commercialization opportunities for innovators and pitchers and established valuable partnerships with various institutions.



Figure 5: The WMSU RAISE WesMin team concluding the ZAMBASULTA Business and Innovation Summit 2024, together with Dr. Teresita Narvaez (Vice President for Resource Generation of WMSU), Mr. Mario S. Rodriguez (Project Leader of DOST-AdZU AZUL Hub) and Director Martin A. Wee (Regional Director of DOST IX).