

Entrepreneurship and Start-Up Ecosystem Vis-À-Vis Government Start-Up Scheme in Manipur: A Critical Review and a Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the Indian economy has moulded a favourable atmosphere for new businesses to start. The increasing population and limited job opportunities encourage people to become entrepreneurs rather than job seekers. To accelerate economic development and remove obstacles, the Indian government launched the "Start-up India" program in 2016. In Manipur, the "Start-up Manipur" program was initiated to promote sustainable economic growth and create jobs in the State.

The article seeks to examine the current landscape for start-ups and the ecosystem supporting them in Manipur. Considering the need for economic development, the paper also discussed the performance, significance, and challenges of the state government's start-up scheme in Manipur.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Start-up, Ecosystem, Business, Start-up Manipur

INTRODUCTION

India's start-up ecosystem is thriving, driven by innovation, ambition, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. As the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem, India provides a fertile ground for bold ideas and entrepreneurial dreams. Factors such as expanding digital infrastructure, business-friendly reforms, government funding, and the entrepreneurial spirit have contributed significantly to the development of the start-up sector in the country. As of March 14, 2024, there were over 123,900 recognised start-ups in India, with a presence in every State. These start-ups have generated direct employment for over 12 lakh individuals, putting India on track to become a leader in cutting-edge technology and innovation. Start-ups have been instrumental in introducing new technologies, products, and services that have the potential to change the world while creating jobs, establishing valuable enterprises, and fostering innovation.

The Indian government has been instrumental in transforming the start-up ecosystem through targeted initiatives that foster innovation and empower entrepreneurs. Historically, the Indian economy relied heavily on agriculture, but recent years have seen a surge in the service sector. Although manufacturing has often been eclipsed by agriculture in terms of industrial significance, its contribution to GDP has been consistently rising since independence. With a growing population and the influence of information and communication technology on business, the job market has been contracting. To motivate young people to become entrepreneurs and job creators instead of job seekers, the Indian government introduced the Start-up India initiative in 2016.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY:

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Gain a deep understanding of the start-up ecosystem in India, specifically in Manipur.
2. Identify the role of incubators in supporting the growth of successful businesses.
3. Examine government policies that promote entrepreneurship and establish business incubators.
4. Discuss the availability of grants and their distribution to various start-up programs.

5. Provide recommendations based on the study's findings.

The methodology and overall structure of the study conducted here are based on the literature gathered from a variety of secondary sources, including papers, department of planning reports, research and prior studies, blogs, and websites, among others (Bryman, 1989, Stewart, 1984, Neuman, 1997 and Pallant, 2007)

Data Collection Method:

The study relies solely on secondary data collected from various sources such as websites and reports. The data was extracted from newspapers, journals, articles, and websites, particularly Niti Ayog and the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (now DPIIT). The Start-up Outlook Report 2019, the State Start-up Ranking Report 2018 by DIPP, the PBI reports, the DIT reports, and the Global Innovation Index 2019 Report were also analysed. The data from these sources was analysed using representative figures and other comprehensive tools as needed.

Start-up Ecosystem

The start-up ecosystem in India is the environment where new businesses are established. India is the world's third-largest start-up hub, with a growth rate of 12-15% per year. While there are around 55,000 start-ups in India, only a small percentage are successful, with a failure rate of about 15%. Most start-ups focus on technology, and women entrepreneurs make up 15% of the total. New start-ups have created over 40,000 jobs annually.

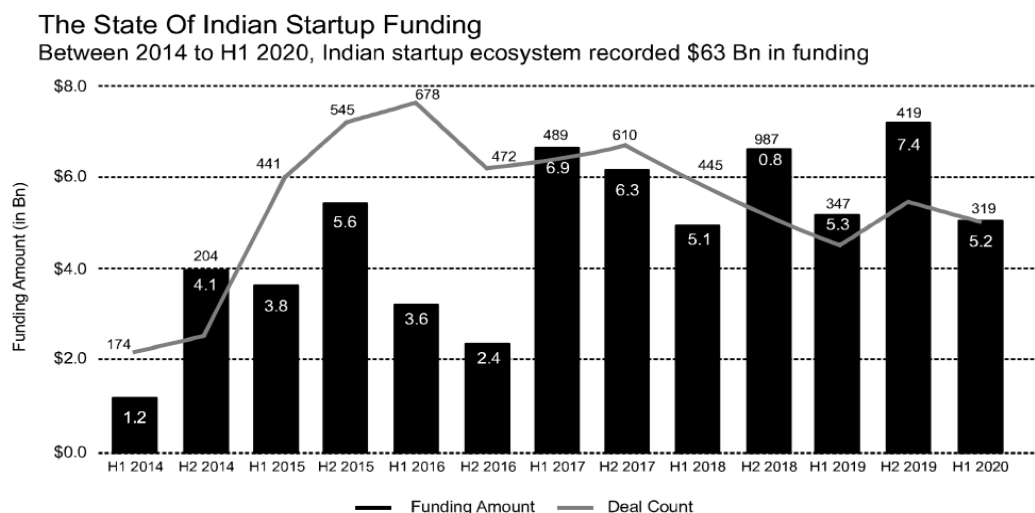
The Indian start-up ecosystem includes various players, such as the government (central and State), private entities, technical business incubators, catalysts, accelerators, and individuals. To foster innovation, start-ups, and private investment, the government launched the Start-up India initiative in 2016. Since its launch, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has recognised over 92,000 entities as start-ups.

Table-1: Number of start-ups recognised in the country in the last five years

Number of entities recognised as start-ups by DPIIT				
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
8,635	11,279	14,498	20,046	26,542

Source: PIB, Government of India

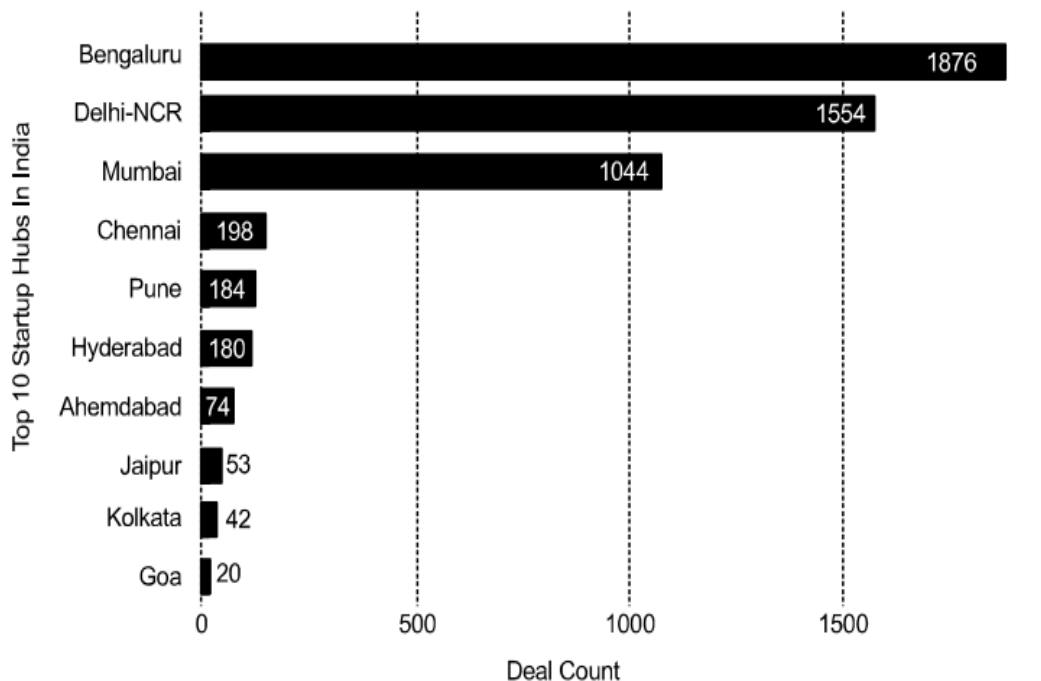
Fig-1: Start-up Funding Growth



Source: Singh, S. (2020). Presenting The State of Indian Start-up Ecosystem Report 2020

Indian start-ups have raised \$63 billion over the past five and a half years since the launch of Start-up India. Figure 1 illustrates a bar graph depicting the growth in start-up funding and the number of start-ups receiving funding. This surge has significantly simplified the process of establishing start-ups. The start-up ecosystem has experienced robust growth, expanding from 29,000 start-ups in 2014 to 55,000 by the end of 2020.

Figure 2. City-wise Start-up Count for India



Source: Singh, S. (2020). Presenting The State of Indian Start-up Ecosystem Report 2020

When discussing Indian cities as start-up hubs, Bengaluru, the country's IT capital, leads with the highest number of start-ups, followed by other major metropolitan areas. Start-up growth in non-metro cities has been slower. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of start-ups across various Indian cities, showing that the majority are concentrated in just three large cities. This can be attributed to better access to resources and a more favourable environment for such ventures in these metros.

Manipur Start-up Ecosystem

The Manipur government aimed to create a supportive environment for start-ups by providing incubation and mentoring facilities and a network of funding options. In 2016, they introduced the Manipur Start-up Policy, which was updated in 2022. The Start-up Cell oversees the implementation and monitoring of the Manipur Start-up Scheme, with the Planning Department serving as the nodal department. A dedicated start-up team within the nodal department assists in policy implementation. The "Start-up Manipur" initiative was launched to promote economic growth and job creation in the State. The programme aims to empower the youth of Manipur to create jobs, promote entrepreneurship and innovation and create an ecosystem that facilitates the growth of startups. Manipur aims to become a major startup hub in the North-East of the country. The government is working to improve the enabling environment for young entrepreneurs to unleash their ambitions and to create a robust startup ecosystem in collaboration with all stakeholders through adequate incubation and mentoring infrastructure, timely legal support and a network of appropriate funding mechanisms.

Objectives of Start-up Manipur Scheme

The Start-up Manipur scheme aims to:

- Promote a positive attitude towards start-ups through strategic investments, policy changes, and other programs.

- Encourage young people to explore entrepreneurship as a career option by offering relevant courses, developing entrepreneurship programs in vocational institutions, and supporting outreach initiatives.
- Support existing business incubators and accelerators and promote the establishment of new ones in partnership with the private sector.
- Provide start-ups with continuous support, including training, skill development, capacity building, networking, knowledge access, and support services.
- Implement a supportive regulatory framework that streamlines statutory clearances for start-ups.
- Offer necessary infrastructure to help start-ups establish and grow quickly.
- Create a platform for start-ups to access various financial support options, such as grants, bank loans, and fiscal incentives.
- Foster an enabling environment and supportive ecosystem to facilitate the growth of 1,000 start-ups within five years.

Enabling Ecosystem for Start-ups

The success of any enterprise depends on the social, political, and economic conditions of the region. An enabling ecosystem is essential to create a favourable environment for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and partner with educational institutions.

Network of Entrepreneurship Development Centres (NEDC)

As part of the pre-idea stage, the state government will undertake the following activities:

- Establish NEDCs in universities and institutes of Manipur.
- Incentivise entrepreneurship through NEDC partner institutions.
- Promote capacity building of NEDC partner institutions by collaborating with leading business incubators in the State.
- Submit performance reports to the state government for continued support.

Business Idea Incubation

The state government has taken the following steps to incubate entrepreneurs:

- Recognised the importance of business incubation for economic development and job creation.
- Assisted in establishing business incubators in the State and supported their incubation of start-ups.
- Facilitated the creation of new incubators in both public and private sectors, as well as in institutions of advanced learning and other government establishments.

Product Development Stage

During the product development stage, the state government will:

- Facilitate access to research and development labs and resources.
- Provide technology support through partner institutions.
- Create a statewide mentor and expert network for start-ups.
- Assist start-ups through the Innovation Enabler Mechanism (IEM) by obtaining regulatory support from the government.

Commercialisation Stage

- Provide access to a network of registered venture capital funds.

- Connect investors with potential projects through a database.
- Establish a digital platform to connect ecosystem stakeholders, support networks, funding sources, and service providers.

Table-2: Showing the detailed data of the Start-up Manipur Scheme, Government of Manipur

	No of Applicants	No of Start-Up selected	No of Start-Up benefited
Revenue	1334	371	87
ESS	0	285	224
Idea	20802	829	679
Stand-up	1289	325	57
Idea Covid Support	28202	9612	8773
Stand Up	181	55	1

Source: DIT, Government of Manipur, India

Table-2 provides an overview of various programs or initiatives related to start-ups and shows how many applicants were involved, how many start-ups were selected, and how many benefited. For the Revenue program, 1,334 applicants applied, of which 371 were selected, and 87 start-ups ultimately benefited. In the ESS program, there were no applicants, but 285 start-ups were selected, with 224 benefiting. The Idea stage had a large number of applicants, 20,802, with 829 selected and 679 start-ups benefiting. For the Stand-up, 1,289 applicants applied, 325 were selected, and 57 start-ups benefited. The Idea Covid Support program saw the highest engagement, with 28,202 applicants, 9,612 start-ups selected, and 8,773 benefiting, likely reflecting the impact of COVID-19. There is also a second Stand Up program listed, which had 181 applicants and 55 start-ups selected, but only one benefiting. Overall, Idea Covid Support had the greatest number of applicants and beneficiaries, while the second Stand Up program helped the fewest start-ups, with only one benefiting.

Table-3 : Showing the detailed data of the Start-up Manipur Scheme, Government of Manipur

Year	As on Date	Category	Round	No of Applicants	No of Start Up selected	No of Start Up benefited	Total Project cost in Lakhs	Subsidy per Beneficiary	Total Sub Amt Disbursed lakhs
2017-18	08/02/2022	Revenue	1	211	44	30	1,438.14	30	431.44
2018-19	08/02/2022	Revenue	2	275	42	23	1,196.47	30	368.97
2017-18	08/02/2022	ESS	1	0	108	102	304.00	Rs 3 lakh	304.00
2018-19	08/02/2022	ESS	2	0	177	122	366.00	Rs 1 lakh	122.00
2017-18	08/02/2022	Idea	1	517	200	183	376.50	Rs 3 lakh	376.50
2018-19	08/02/2022	Idea	2	3,691	579	467	1,020.00	Rs 3 lakh	1,020.00
2019-20	08/02/2022	StandUp	3	988	171	46	3,540.43	30	1,043.43
2020-21	08/02/2022	Idea Covid Support	4	11,608	4,831	4,789	1,436.70	Upto Rs 1 lakh	1,436.70
2020-21	08/02/2022	Stand Up	4	181	55	1	408.00	30	184.58
2020-21	08/02/2022	Revenue	4	350	93	9	526.25	30	168.17
2021-22	03/03/2023	Revenue	4	498	192	25	1,193.97	upto 30.00	777.92
2021-22	03/03/2023	StandUp	4	301	154	11	405.64	upto 30.00	120.59
2021-22	03/03/2023	Idea Covid Support	4	16,594	4,781	3,984	1,434.30	0.3	1,195.20
2021-22	03/03/2023	Idea	4	16,594	50	29	150.00	3	52.50

Source: DIT, Government of Manipur, India

Table-3 outlines various start-up support programs across different years, showing details such as the number of applicants, selected start-ups, beneficiaries, total project costs, and subsidies disbursed. In the Revenue stage, for the years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2020-21, and 2021-22, the number of applicants ranged from 211 to 498, with selected start-ups between 42 and 192 and beneficiaries between 9 and 30. The total project costs varied, and subsidies per beneficiary were generally up to Rs. 30 lakhs. The ESS in 2017-18 and 2018-19 had no applicants but selected 108 and 177 start-ups respectively, with most receiving a subsidy of Rs. 1 to 3 lakhs. For the Idea stage in the same years, there were many applicants, particularly in 2018-19, with 3,691 applying, 579 selected, and 467 benefiting. The StandUp program in 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 had applicants ranging from 181 to 988, with a relatively smaller number of beneficiaries. The Idea Covid Support program saw the largest participation, particularly in 2020-21 and 2021-22, with over 16,000 applicants and thousands of beneficiaries each year. In all programs, significant subsidies were disbursed to support the start-ups, particularly under Idea Covid Support, where nearly Rs. 1,500 lakhs were distributed in 2020-21.

An Analysis: State Performance And Way Forward

Institutional Support:

This section evaluates how Manipur provides institutional support for start-ups. Institutional support refers to making it easier for start-ups to access information and resources needed to succeed. Here's a breakdown of the findings:

i) *Performance Recital:*

Manipur has a user-friendly start-up portal (<https://startupmanipur.in/category/notifications/>) that provides comprehensive information. The portal offers details on start-up registration, government departments supporting start-ups, funding options, incubators, mentors, and more. Responsive Support: The State reports a quick turnaround time (under 30 days) for resolving queries received on the portal.

ii) *Way Forward:*

There's no identified mechanism for start-ups to submit requests or grievances with a tracking system. Beyond the current two, more state government departments could offer institutional support to start-ups. Expanding the number and frequency of support initiatives could benefit more start-ups. Publicly stating a timeframe for responding to queries through official channels would be helpful. Implementing additional state policies specifically designed to support start-ups could be beneficial.

iii) *Overall:*

Manipur offers a good foundation for institutional support through its dedicated start-up portal and readily available information. However, there's room for improvement by establishing a grievance redressal system, expanding support across different departments, and developing additional policies.

Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Manipur

This section evaluates Manipur's efforts to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, focusing on student entrepreneurs, women-led start-ups, and regulatory reforms.

i) *Performance Recital:*

Manipur has over 5,000 registered start-ups, leading among Category B states. The State has actively supported over 20 women-led start-ups in a year. Over 20 events, including roadshows, boot camps, and workshops, have been conducted to encourage student entrepreneurship, involving 450+ students. Initiatives like the Start-up Manipur Cohort and XR for Start-up Roadshow have provided acceleration programs and awareness campaigns for start-ups.

ii) *Way Forward:*

The State could focus on creating outreach programs to inform entrepreneurs about the benefits of registering

their start-ups. Implementing specific incentives for women-led start-ups, such as a monthly support stipend, could further encourage their growth. Establishing University Innovation Hubs in urban centres could engage students in remote areas.

iii) Overall:

Manipur has made significant strides in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly in supporting student entrepreneurs and women-led start-ups. By implementing additional measures to disseminate information and provide specific incentives, the State can further enhance its entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Access to Market:

This section evaluates Manipur's efforts to provide market access and opportunities for start-ups. Market access refers to helping start-ups participate in public procurement and connect with domestic and international markets.

i) Performance Recital:

The state government has eased requirements for start-ups by eliminating the need for an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD). More than eight start-ups have been provided with market access and showcase opportunities, such as the India Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2022.

ii) Way Forward:

The State could further relax its procurement proposals to encourage more start-ups to participate in public procurement. Allocating a certain percentage of government procurement to start-ups could provide them with guaranteed market access. Programs connecting start-ups with state government departments can facilitate case-wise solutions and promote procurement activities.

iii) Overall:

Manipur has made progress in providing market access for start-ups by relaxing procurement requirements and offering showcase opportunities. However, further measures, such as reserved procurement and increased departmental connections, can help enhance start-ups' access to markets.

Incubation and Mentorship Support:

This section evaluates Manipur's efforts to provide incubation and mentorship support to start-ups. This involves offering financial and infrastructural assistance to start-ups and incubators.

i) Performance Recital:

Fifty start-ups received incubation support, ten were connected with mentors, and two new incubators were established. The State supported the establishment and upgrading of incubators to create a supportive ecosystem for start-ups. Details of incubators are readily available on the State Start-up portal.

ii) Way Forward:

The State could establish more incubators to guide young entrepreneurs and consider virtual incubation options. Providing financial support to new incubators, such as capital assistance, stamp duty reimbursement, and power tariff subsidies, could be beneficial. Expanding the reach of acceleration programs can help more start-ups benefit. Leveraging virtual platforms for seminars and discussions can connect with stakeholders outside the State and country. Engaging with mentors from outside the State, nationally and internationally, can provide start-ups with diverse perspectives.

iii) Overall:

Manipur has made progress in providing incubation and mentorship support to start-ups. However, expanding the number of incubators, offering financial incentives, and leveraging virtual platforms can further enhance the support provided to start-ups.

Funding Support:

Start-ups rely heavily on timely access to funding for their growth. This reform area encourages State and Union Territory (UT) Governments to establish new Seed or Venture Funds, Fund of Funds for Start-ups, or continue supporting existing ones. The focus is also on ensuring Start-ups can access these state-supported funds.

i) State Performance Recital:

The Manipur government has been supporting local start-ups through a variety of incentives under the Manipur Start-up Scheme. This includes reimbursements and grants awarded via events and competitions. Over 90 start-ups have received funding through these state-backed funds. Additionally, the State facilitated opportunities for ten start-ups to connect with private investors during the World Expo in Dubai in 2022.

ii) Way Forward:

The state government could further diversify its funding options by offering grants, monthly allowances, interest subsidies, and more. Information about available grants should be widely shared with start-ups. Collaborating with financial institutions, venture capitalists, and angel investors could provide additional funding streams. Regularly organising events and conferences focused on funding opportunities and processes would further enhance support for start-ups.

iii) Overall:

The government of Manipur has provided funding to various start-ups through various schemes and events. However, there is potential to diversify funding options and increase awareness of available grants. The government could collaborate with financial institutions and investors to create more funding opportunities and organise events focused on funding discussions.

Capacity Building of Enablers:

Enhancing the capabilities of key stakeholders and enablers is crucial for fostering the growth of the entire start-up ecosystem. Providing essential information to ecosystem facilitators enables start-ups to actively participate in government initiatives. This area evaluates the effectiveness of sensitisation workshops, programs for government officials, and training for state-supported incubators. It also emphasises developing the capacity of potential private investors to stimulate local investment in start-ups.

i) Performance Recital:

The Manipur government has conducted sensitisation workshops for government officials and programs aimed at encouraging potential investors to invest in start-ups. The State has taken several initiatives to build capacity, equipping incubator managers with skills in business training, financial management, monitoring, evaluation, marketing, stakeholder management, and networking. As part of these efforts, the Planning Department of Manipur organised a one-day investor sensitisation program on March 24, 2022, at Classic Grande, Imphal. This program followed up on a Business-to-Business meeting held during the Dubai World Expo 2020, where government officials and start-ups engaged with potential investors to pitch their products.

ii) Way Forward:

The State could hold monthly virtual programs across various districts to continue sensitising potential investors about start-up investment opportunities. Additionally, the government could organise quarterly workshops for different government departments and officials to facilitate more interaction with start-ups, helping them better understand these businesses' challenges. The State could also enhance the training of state-supported incubators by collaborating with incubators from other states, allowing for shared learning and capacity-building opportunities.

iii) Overall:

The government of Manipur has been conducting workshops to educate government officials and potential investors about start-ups. They have also trained incubator managers in various areas to improve their skills. However, there is potential to expand these efforts further by conducting more frequent workshops and collaborating with other states.

Roadmap to a Sustainable Future:

This initiative aims to foster innovation in rural start-ups while prioritising sectors such as renewable energy, sustainability, and climate change, with a special focus on start-ups involved in the circular economy.

i) Way Forward:

By amending the Start-up Policy, the State could define clear criteria for start-ups working in sustainability, renewable energy, climate change, and the circular economy. Specific incentives could be developed to support these start-ups, potentially through revisions to current policies or introducing new incentives. The State may also conduct sensitisation workshops for start-ups, incubators, and other stakeholders focused on these sectors. Additionally, the State could create a separate "Social Impact" parameter to recognise start-ups based in rural areas that promote sustainable practices, renewable energy, circular economy, and climate change solutions.

ii) Overall

The government of Manipur aims to promote innovation in rural start-ups, particularly in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate change. They plan to clearly define sustainability-focused start-ups and develop specific incentives to support them. Additionally, they will conduct workshops to educate stakeholders about these areas and consider creating a separate parameter for start-ups that promote sustainable practices in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Manipur has made notable progress in establishing a robust start-up ecosystem through various institutional, financial, and infrastructural initiatives. The State's focus on streamlining information access via its dedicated Start-up portal, compliance with institutional support requirements, and engagement with key stakeholders has effectively promoted entrepreneurship. Noteworthy achievements include over 5,000 registered start-ups, support for women-led start-ups, fostering innovation through events and student engagement, and active participation in national and international events like the Dubai Expo 2022.

However, there are key areas where the State can further enhance its support mechanisms. Expanding the number of departments involved in start-up facilitation, increasing activities to benefit start-ups, and developing grievance mechanisms with tracking features can improve institutional efficiency. Establishing University Innovation Hubs and increased outreach to women entrepreneurs, coupled with targeted incentives, will strengthen Manipur's innovation culture. Additionally, further relaxations in public procurement processes and an increased focus on connecting start-ups with government departments for case-specific solutions will provide better market access.

The State's funding support, which has benefited numerous start-ups, can be diversified and expanded through collaboration with financial institutions and private investors. Virtual incubation programs, cross-state mentorship opportunities, and expanding acceleration programs can extend the reach of incubator and mentorship support. Moreover, capacity-building programs for government officials and private investors will contribute to a more supportive ecosystem.

Manipur's commitment to sustainable development is commendable. Including start-ups working in renewable energy and circular economy into its policy framework will ensure a future-oriented, sustainable growth model. By continuing to focus on innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability, Manipur is poised to become a thriving hub for entrepreneurship.

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