

TRANSMISSION

# **Innovation Strategy**

The gateway to net zero

ssen-transmission.co.uk





# **Innovation Strategy**

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We define innovation as the successful adoption of new ideas, technologies, and processes that can materially impact our strategic goals and deliver our vision

### **Rob McDonald** Managing Director

SSEN Transmission

## Foreword

At SSEN Transmission, our priority is to successfully deliver our Pathway to 2030 programme, a transformative journey that will unlock the north of Scotland's potential as a renewable energy powerhouse.

The path to a sustainable future begins with the understanding that there will be no net zero transition without the electricity transmission network, and it cannot be underestimated how vital our electricity grids will be in tackling climate change. We have a big task ahead of us, and we recognise the need to understand and rapidly solve the challenges with connecting and transporting renewable energy to networks that were designed for a different purpose. This fuels our determination to lead by example, pushing boundaries and exploring groundbreaking ideas that can set new standards for the future of clean energy. Our Innovation Strategy is focused on those real world challenges. We believe that the effective use and implementation of innovative thinking can help us to identify new ways of accelerating change as we push forward on this journey.

One-sixth of the UK economy's carbon reduction aspirations will rest upon the connection of renewables to our network – marking our Pathway to 2030 programme as critical to realising the national ambition. The prospect of constructing the robust electricity infrastructure required to realise energy security and attain net zero targets propels us toward our ultimate goal of delivering a network for net zero. As we navigate this, we must remain steadfast in our curiosity, for within innovative thinking lies the key to unlocking our full potential and ensuring we realise our collective aspirations.





Low Profile 132kV Steel Poles – Accelerating the energy transition with new steel pole design



OHL Foundation Uplift – Improving OHL foundations through innovative design methods

Innovation must be part of the energy transition process and closely linked to organisational operations and maintenance challenges, as well as project development, delivery, and procurement for our business benefits to be realised.





AIM High – Autonomous inspection robot for HVDC valve halls



#### In-flight Investments

Argyll 275kV strategy
Fort Augustus to Skye 132kV upgrade
Orkney 220kV AC subsea link

#### Pathway to 2030 Investments

1a. Beauly to Loch Buidhe 400kV reinforcement (BLN4) 1b. Loch Buidhe to Spittal 400kV reinforcement (SLU4) 2a. Beauly to Blackhillock 400kV double circuit (BBNC) 2b. Blackhillock and Peterhead 400kV double circuit (BPNC) 3. Beauly to Denny 275kV circuit to 400kV (BDUP) 4. East Coast Onshore 400kV Phase 2 reinforcement (TKUP) 5. Spittal to Peterhead 2GW HVDC subsea link (PSDC) Ork 6. Peterhead to Drax 2GW HVDC subsea link (E4D3) 7. Peterhead to South Humber 2GW HVDC subsea link (E4L5) 8. Arnish to Beauly 1.8GW HVDC link 9. Aquila Pathfinder Spittal Loch Buidhe Peterhead Fort uaustus 6 7 **Public Consultation to Inform Project Development** New Infrastructure (Routes shown here are for illustrative purposes) All new reinforcements remain subject to detailed consultation and Upgrade/Replacement of environmental assessments to help inform route and technology options Existing Infrastructure More detail on these projects, including how to sign up for updates, will be Existing Network made available on SSEN Transmission's website, www.ssen-transmission.co.uk

# About SSEN Transmission

Enabling the transition to the low carbon economy through efficient connection and transportation of electricity from large scale renewables in the north of Scotland delivering a network for net zero emissions.

We are SSEN Transmission (the trading name for Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission), part of the SSE plc Group. We are responsible for the electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland, maintaining and investing in the high voltage 132kV, 220kV, 275kV and 400kV electricity transmission network.

Our network consists of underground and subsea cables, overhead lines on wooden poles or steel towers, and electricity substations. It extends over a quarter of the UK's land mass, crossing some of its most challenging terrain and powering our communities by providing a safe and reliable supply of electricity. We do this by taking the electricity from generators and transporting it at high voltages over long distances through our transmission network for onward distribution to homes and businesses in villages, towns, and cities.

Scotland's transmission network has a strategic role to play in supporting the delivery of the UK's Net Zero target. We're already a mass exporter of renewable energy, with around two-thirds of power generated in our networks area exported south. By 2050, the north of Scotland is expected to need around 40GW of renewable energy capacity to support net zero delivery which could contribute around one third of the GB total. For context, we currently have just over 9GW of renewable generation, including embedded generation connected through the distribution network in the north of Scotland. This will be achieved through delivering substantial work programmes like the <u>Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment</u>.

For all these reasons we must continue to explore and use innovation and R&D to transport more power through the existing infrastructure, build the new transmission needed sustainably and with less impact on the environment and the communities that house it. As well as continue to make our network safe, secure, and resilient as we continue to operate in challenging terrain and ever more challenging weather conditions, and continue to deliver at pace, offer value for money through efficient operations and maximising the talent we have in our workforce and stakeholders.



# Drivers for Innovation

We have one strategic objective at SSEN Transmission: to enable the transition to a low carbon economy. The world needs to decarbonise, and unquestionably, a significant aspect of this process involves electrification. To achieve the necessary scale of electrification required for a decarbonised world, we must embrace new methods of producing, storing, and utilising energy. This entire transformation relies heavily on a safe, secure, and reliable grid infrastructure, and innovation is the gateway to achieving net zero.



# Our Innovation Strategy



# Innovation will deliver a reliable and resilient network safer, smarter, greener, and faster.

#### Our strategy tower

Transmission lines are the veins of this country, carrying vital electricity from increasingly renewable energy sources to where it is needed. The tower is core to who we are and what we do at SSEN Transmission, and every element of it is central to how we design and deliver innovation.

The Strategy has been created and shaped by our business and tested with our external stakeholders. It has benefited from horizon scanning and engagement at every level, to ensure that this Innovation Strategy not only complements other strategies within our business but aligns with our wider goals and values as well as supporting the needs of our stakeholders and customers.

**Our Innovation Purpose** is the motivation of why we do what we do. Our Innovation Purpose is to deliver a reliable and resilient network safer, smarter, greener, and faster.

**Our Vision** is that everybody has the opportunity for innovative thinking and action. This Innovation Strategy goes beyond the boundaries of our Innovation Team, so that it lives and is embedded within the actions and behaviours of all our stakeholders. Without this, we cannot innovate on the scale we need to. We want to further foster a culture where our people can act on their good ideas, because these good ideas help to make SSEN Transmission – and the work we do – better.

**Our Focus Areas** are the drivers for innovation and are the areas for innovation highlighted within the purpose. We will focus on innovation that makes our business safer, smarter, greener, and faster. Innovation in these areas will materially improve our ability to achieve its goals.



# Our Innovation Focus Areas

The foundation of our Innovation Focus Areas has been shaped by our drivers of innovation. The urgency and magnitude required to decarbonise our electricity grids are crucial, and our focus areas will facilitate this. These areas have been identified through numerous rounds of horizon scanning and engagement with stakeholders - both internal and external. The selection of these focus areas is the result of pinpointing opportunities where innovation can have the greatest impact. By conducting horizon scanning and involving our teams, we obtained insights into what innovation means to team members in terms of their activities and areas of responsibility. Additionally, we validated these definitions with external stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding. The focus areas serve as the cornerstone of the Innovation Strategy, and these definitions also underpin the strategic objectives of innovation.



### Safer

Using innovation to push to be safer than we are today. We will focus on the security of the network, reducing physical hazards, promoting safe behaviours, and do so by designing out risk and designing in safety from the start.



### Greener

Applying the test of sustainability to everything we do. We will use innovation to quantify and communicate our contribution to net zero, reducing environmental harm throughout the lifecycle of our assets.



### Smarter

Becoming future ready by learning and adapting to maximise our assets. We will apply logic, data, and the right skills and experience to increase functionality and actively seek new ways of working and collaboration to improve efficiency.



### Faster

Keeping pace, increasing productivity, and minimising delays through flexibility, agility, and empowerment. We will apply new tools and assets, focus on the output to remove barriers and champion efficient ways of working.







### Objective: Use processes and people to design out risk and design in safety from the start. Prioritise Innovation projects that improve the security of the network, reduce physical hazards, and promote safe and efficient behaviours.

Safety remains our foremost priority. Our Safety Strategy envisions a shift from reactive to proactive measures, and Innovation can play a pivotal role in facilitating this transformation. Innovating for safety will centre on enhancing physical safety, ensuring energy security, and improving cyber security in alignment with our Digital Strategy. In addition to prioritising safety, we are dedicated to providing a continuous supply of electricity to energy consumers. As a responsible business, we place high importance on the safety and well-being of our employees to enable them to effectively maintain this supply. This commitment is underscored by our Safety, Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Furthermore, as a service provider, we must also ensure that our network supports the increasing number of renewable energy generators in the North of Scotland and remains resilient, reliable, and protected from emerging threats. In this context, innovation holds the potential to significantly benefit energy consumers and contribute to the overall sustainability of our operations.

#### Case study: AIM High

This project aims to install and test an autonomous robot system for conducting continuous monitoring within our expanding number of High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) valve halls. This innovation not only eradicates the necessity for personnel to enter these hazardous environments but also implements a continuous monitoring programme to prevent unexpected outages, consequently bolstering network safety and reliability. This proactive approach to asset maintenance can bring about substantial savings for energy consumers by reducing the overall maintenance costs of our network.

Beyond helping to mitigate these risks our Innovation Team strive towards the vision of giving everyone the opportunity for innovative thinking and action through facilitating challenge groups, fostering partnerships, and cross business collaborations to ensure all innovation projects across our business have the support and resources they need.

Through stakeholder feedback the plan to achieve our safer objective is through projects in the following five areas:

- 1. Asset Condition Monitoring
- 2. Physical Network Security
- 3. Cyber Security
- 4. Climate Change Impact Mitigation
- 5. Autonomy- AI/ Robotics







er Faste



**Objective**: Develop new strategic partnerships and collaborations for Innovation projects to increase operational efficiency and improve knowledge retention in the business. We will make better use of people, tools, and data for further improved asset management and increase project delivery.

Smarter innovation is focused around getting the right people, right skills, and best data, assets, and equipment functionality so that we can harness and expand knowledge and then develop how we use it to build in efficiencies and resilience. We are smart so we are aligned with our Sustainable Workforce and Digital Strategies, but we can always be smarter and use Innovation to build one inclusive and engaged team. Over the price control period, we have been working hard to keep the lights on, and through innovation, we have been exploring several new methods to support this and make efficiencies which benefit our customers and ultimately the energy consumer. We want to grow a sustainable business, and that is why we see it as a fundamental principle that we look after the relationships, organisations, and the people around us.

#### Case study: NIMBUS

With the threat of climate change and severe weather impacting our network, the NIMBUS project aims to use meteorological data to allow for smart decision-making around the design and maintenance of our assets.

In achieving this, we aim to mitigate against severe weather or climatic changes that increase the risk of system outages and provide savings to the energy consumer through the reduction of costly repairs.

Acknowledging that there is a lot more to be done as we progress towards 2030, we are building on those mitigations and expanding our ways of working and collaborations to increase the knowledge and talent available to the whole business. We design our network to be resilient, and we work hard to ensure we get the best out of the system today and for years to come. Our Asset Management Strategy seeks us to be world leading and through using more data in smarter ways for an efficient whole asset lifecycle cost we hope innovation can aid that.

Smarter is about increasing efficiencies, so we encourage all our stakeholders to collaborate with the Innovation Team to maximise the talent we have in our business. Our smarter objective will be achieved through projects in the following five areas identified through stakeholder feedback:

- 1. Talent recruitment & retention
- 2. System Performance
- 3. Asset Data Acquisition & Analytics
- 4. Future Control Room Capabilities
- 5. System Stability







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**Objective**: Making our processes, fleet, materials, and sites more efficient, environmentally friendly, and accepted by the communities that house them. We will therefore prioritise innovation projects that focus on the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and cut down on waste.

Making our business greener is focused on sustainability in everything we do, build and operate. Our strategic objective of enabling the transition to a low-carbon economy permeates through everything we do as an organisation. We are making progress towards our goal of a one third reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions by 2026, but we have a big task ahead of us which is why this strategy has been closely aligned with our Sustainability Strategy and what it aims to achieve. Our network will grow significantly to meet the demand of renewable energy sources being connected and we must deliver this without compromising the security of supply for the consumer, as well as protecting and restoring the biodiversity and environment around our assets.

#### **Case study: OHL Foundation Uplift**

The current design methods for our Over Head Lines (OHL) foundations are compliant with legacy standards that overdesigned to cover all metrics and events our foundations could be situated in, resulting in high levels of materials to achieve structural confidence.

The OHL Foundation Uplift project is looking at researching a new foundation design that is compact, provides structural confidence, but overall is using considerably less material and returns significant carbon savings and cost savings to the consumer.

We see innovation as a supporting and enabling tool to help us address these challenges that can enable us to deliver net zero, without compromising the security of our network while enabling a smart, sustainable energy future. We want to grow a sustainable business, and that is why we see it as a fundamental principle that we protect what we have and strive to learn what more we can do for the communities and the environment around us.

Our stakeholders told us what was important to them and we would like that conversation to be enduring so that we are innovation in the right places. Our plan is to build the network needed faster but also greener by making our processes, fleet, materials, and sites more environmentally friendly through innovation and R&D in the following areas::

- 1. SF<sub>6</sub> Condition Monitoring and alternatives
- 2. Substation and construction site efficiencies
- 3. Circular Economy initiatives
- 4. Community benefit from greener initiatives
- 5. Environmental impact- land carbon





Greene

**Objective**: All innovation projects will increase productivity, minimise delays and streamline infrastructure development and delivery. We will apply new tools and assets, focus on the output to remove barriers and champion collaborative and efficient ways of working.

Faster is about streamlining our own processes and ways of working, and pushing the boundaries out of our strategic planning so that we are proactive and always on the front foot. In setting our horizons in the now, near and next we are broadening our horizons to understand the impact of what may be heading towards us and enabling the business to stretch further with relevant research and development, ever increasing our knowledge base along the way. This approach ensures that we are equipped to deliver what is expected of us and in turn creating an efficient network that returns the greatest value for the consumer.

The concept of "Faster" entails streamlining our internal processes and methods of operation and extending the boundaries of our strategic planning to ensure proactivity and a constant proactive approach. By expanding our horizons in the now, near, and next, we are enhancing our ability to anticipate potential challenges and opportunities, enabling the organisation to extend its reach with pertinent research and development activities, thereby expanding our knowledge base. This strategy ensures that we are well-prepared to meet expectations and, consequently, establish an efficient network that provides maximum value for the consumer.



#### Case study: Low Profile Poles

The North of Scotland presents significant challenges with a large number of our windfarm connections being at high altitudes (+300m). Standard specification dictates that only large lattice towers are suited to this environment. The Low-Profile Poles design is a smaller design, using a smaller foundation with a simplistic method of erecting, but meeting the required standard.

Once deployed, it is expected that we can make our customer connections faster through the efficiencies that this new structure brings and by mitigating the need to large lattice towers, we can return significant savings to the consumer.

We recognise that over the coming years our network will grow significantly, and we have a big task ahead of us as we will need to connect all the planned and future renewable energy being developed onto our network on time, so we must ensure that our focus on achieving this on time sits as a main priority. We will use innovation to support the growth of our network that can enable net zero where it is needed most: Delivering towards a network accommodating 20GW of onshore wind and 11GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030 and laying the foundations for scaling up construction and operation beyond that.

Our plan is to go faster through exploring more efficient ways of constructing assets to enable the steps needed for standardisation, scaling up construction, and to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy onto the grid. Sharing and collaborating can be the first step our stakeholders take towards this acceleration. This will be achieved through prioritising innovation and R&D in the following areas:

- 1. Supply chain efficiencies
- 2. Asset Utilisation Efficiencies
- 3. Land acquisition and consenting
- 4. Design Efficiencies
- 5. Construction Efficiencies

### **Transmission Innovation Horizons**



# Our Innovation Focus Areas

**New Horizons- Now, Near & Next.** We understand that while we may innovate today, it may take some time to realise the benefits. As we continue on the energy transition journey, our Innovation Strategy consists of objectives that span three horizons: now, near, and next. The now being today and up to two years ahead, such as lower-risk operational and maintenance innovation projects as part of business-as-usual activities; near spanning two-five years which routinely would be innovation within the regulatory price control; and next being five-ten years and beyond for large-scale and transformational innovation that could have long-term benefits. The timescale for the realisation of benefits from our innovation projects determines which horizon they sit in as some already in development may not be rolled out across the network until 2030 or beyond. Working in this way allows us to priortise the challenges we face today and explore business opportunities for the future. This allows us to blend quick win projects with longer-term innovation goals.

Although not an exact science and subject to market dynamics, our current aim is to have 60% of our Innovation portfolio in the now space, 30% in near, and 10% in next. Indeed, internal engagement has highlighted the need to focus on the here and now. Our current projects – depicted in this diagram – reflect these ambitions and align with research into with market trends within electricity networks that innovation must span both short-term and long-term needs.

The Innovation Focus Areas portray **what** we are going to achieve through innovation, sitting at the heart of our overall purpose, and **why** we place importance on innovation. The **who** and the **where** are built into our vision and **when** is spread across the time horizons of now, near and next. The innovation **projects** are the transmission lines and will change as the energy transition develops and moves forward but they will remain supported by the enduring Innovation Strategy tower.



# **Our Innovation Objectives**

Each of the four Innovation Focus Areas relate to objectives we have for Innovation. They help to achieve our business goals in a timely manner, as well as facilitating innovation and R&D across the business and prioritising projects now to accelerate what we do in a collaborative manner.



**Safer-** Use processes and people to design out risk and design in safety from the start. Prioritise Innovation projects that improve the security of the network, reduce physical hazards, and promote safe and efficient behaviours.



**Smarter-** Develop new strategic partnerships and collaborations for Innovation projects to increase operational efficiency and improve knowledge retention in the business. We will make better use of people, tools, and data for further improved asset management and improve project delivery.



**Greener-** Making our processes, fleet, materials, and sites more efficient, environmentally friendly, and accepted by the communities that house them. We will prioritise innovation projects that target the reduction of CO2 emissions and cut down on waste.



**Faster-** All Innovation projects will increase productivity, minimise delays, streamline or accelerate operations. We will apply new tools and assets, focus on the output to remove barriers and champion collaborative and efficient ways of working.

innovation

Gate 0: Research -

Gate 1: Develop

Gate 2: Approve



opportunities. We aim to give you multiple channels to get your ideas into

This is the initial test, does it have potential, does it align with the strategy? Can

. . .

# The Innovation Process

The innovation process is how we can take the objectives, identify the opportunities and possible ideas to take them forward, prioritise the ideas and then take an idea and turn it into part of the business. This process means that all ideas can be handled correctly and with uniformity regardless of where they originated from or who has ownership or responsibility for the projects. This approach facilitates the journey towards our vision where everyone has the opportunity for innovative thinking and action. This strategy has identified that we need to push our horizons out further and that we can benefit from more collaborative ways of working, both of which have been woven into our innovation strategy. Our strategy also gives clarity to where our priorities lie so that only projects that fall into our focus areas and contribute towards our objectives are progressed, and our governance framework ensures we remain responsible innovators working for our customers. The only part that is missing in this process, is you! We need your creative ideas and collaborative spirit to bring this strategy to life. The innovation process is here to help support and guide you in transforming your ideas into real solutions. Whether you are an experienced innovator or new to the concept, we encourage and invite you to actively participate in this journey.



Gate 4: Review -

У	ou prove we need it and that no one else has a solution?		transfer to the business. What are the benefits to different business areas and
- V	Ve now start to add more detail to it, what are we trying to do, who is involved,		progress towards other business strategies and goals?
k – V	nd what will it cost? Is there a wider appetite across Transmission and is there a oudget for it? Vith a fully developed project there are various steps of approval concluding vith the Innovation Governance Board.	Gate 5: Deploy –	Support the business through deployment and collate and disseminate all the learnings and reports. Seek opportunities to scale up. Collaboration so the benefits are widespread.

analysis, track progress, and prepare for deployment. How can the Innovation

Full planning for deployment and business readiness. Final benefits case and

Team facilitate and embed innovation into SSEN Transmission best?



# Implementing our Strategy

#### How do we identify new projects?

Using the new Innovation Vision- A culture for innovation where everybody has the opportunity for innovative thinking and action. We will reinforce this new strategy regularly using multiple mediums and different tools. This is a change, making Innovation more central to our business and will support how anyone can identify the next new thing we innovate on. This will be done through the following:

- Annual Innovation Action Plan to be published internally.
- Formation of internal Challenge Groups against our four Focus Areas to drive collaborative thinking.
- Launch of an Innovation Hub to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- Updated content for internal and external web pages.
- Quarterly spotlight on innovation newsletters.
- Innovation project blogs.

#### Horizon Scanning

- Coordinate and manage a horizon scanning programme that is designed to identify emerging trends, threats and opportunities.
- Provide and infeed of new horizon scanning signals to our Challenge Groups to enrich innovative thinking.



# **Innovation Projects**

#### How our Innovation Strategy translates into innovation projects

At the beginning of 2024, we had 20 active innovation projects in either development or delivery, all of which will make our business better, enabling us and our network to work safer, smarter, greener, and faster. We have been prioritising smarter but we now want to add more weight to faster. As we look to increase the number and scale of projects, we strive to be better so all will need to fulfil our criteria and align with two or more of our innovation focus areas.



#### You can learn more about these projects here.

Think we could be doing more? Let's innovate together. CONTACT US: <u>transmissioninnovation@sse.com</u> ssen-transmission.co.uk @SSETransmission

#### Looking to the horizon: building an Innovation Action Plan

Taking the Innovation Strategy, Objectives, and Process we can build an Action Plan of what Innovation activities and projects we will be developing and delivering over the next year. This will also involve internal and external stakeholders, ensuring these collaborations achieve the best results and make the most progress towards the Innovation Objectives and our strategic goals. We will be prioritising projects in each focus area that enable us to deliver innovation now and in the next few years which help us to move faster towards our 2030 targets. The following sections go into more detail about each of the innovation focus areas (safer, smarter, greener and faster) including development and delivery these will be reviewed regularly as part of the Innovation Process.





Our innovation purpose is to deliver a reliable and resilient network safer, smarter, greener, and faster.

Our Vision for innovation within transmission is for everybody to have the opportunity for innovative thinking and action.



Ideas good, great, and small are all welcome. Let's innovate together.

CONTACT US: transmissioninnovation@sse.com ssen-transmission.co.uk

# Next Steps

We have a lot of work to do over the next 20 years to achieve our national energy and net zero targets. Our Innovation Team and our partners are ready to play our crucial part in the task ahead. This Innovation Strategy will enable our organisation to deliver and operate safer, smarter, greener, and faster.

#### **Innovation Action Plan**

Each year we will develop an innovation action plan laying out the details of the projects and areas of research we need to develop and deliver and how these will be funded. These innovation and R&D projects will be identified through horizon scanning and stakeholder engagement and will always link back to this Innovation Strategy, ensuring we stay on track and meet the objectives on the way. We expect that the plan will consist of the following areas and workstreams:

- Governance structure including accountability and responsibility for identifying and assessing Innovation projects
- Review and stocktake of projects at various stages of development, from identification to delivery
- Collaboration across all business areas via four Focus Area Challenge groups
- Ways of working including timeline monitoring, funding assessment, and benefits mapping for the innovation project portfolio.

This plan will be the bridge between the Innovation Objectives and the objectives we set our teams and people each year. The Action Plan will also continuously drive our vision forward for a stronger innovation culture within the business through greater collaboration, transparency, and communication. Established horizon scanning and governance will ensure we continue to deliver what the business and our customers need, and our plan and actions will be measured for success in the <u>SSEN Transmission - Annual Innovation</u>. Report. We acknowledge that a lot can change in a year, so as part of this action plan, we will also look to review our innovation priorities to ensure that we continue to focus on the areas that matter the most.

#### **Innovation Report**

When we look back at the previous year, our measurements of success will be three-fold; the benefits we have delivered through innovation projects; the progress towards our strategic goals; and the progress towards our strategic vision. The benefits our projects can deliver are measurements against our focus areas of safer, smarter, greener, and faster as laid out in this strategy and tracked by the business. Our progress towards our goals will be measured by how our innovation projects have facilitated others within the business to achieve their goals and the progress towards the innovation vision can be measured through improved empowerment, better communication, and a growing culture of innovation.



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