

**ASEAN LEADERS' INTERFACE WITH YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES
AT THE 42nd ASEAN SUMMIT**

10 May 2023, Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

RECOMMENDATION BY THE ASEAN YOUTH

“Southeast Asia as an Epicentrum of Digital Development for SDGs”

Good afternoon Excellencies, Honorable Guests, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The power of “technological determinism” where technology has the power to give individuals and businesses more power has successfully fascinated humans. One of the great examples would be the digital transformation and digital economy where it also becomes the juggernaut for individuals including youth in ASEAN making up 33% of the total region’s population.

The existence of these tech-savvy and digital natives’ youth should be utilized as a “powerhouse” by ASEAN Member States to ensure that the digital development for SDGs is aligned with the youth’s and future needs.

We, the ASEAN Youth Dialogue delegates assembled in Jakarta on 11-13 April 2023 have developed policy recommendations that encompass four thematic areas.

The first topic is “Strengthening the Region's Ecosystem for Youth Entrepreneurship”. ASEAN’s digital economy growth merchandise value (GMV) is set to surpass USD 200 billion by 2027 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17%.

The region has materialized as a global hotspot of digital economy and creativity. It is important for the stakeholders to not only put their focus on startups but also on MSMEs which are owned by youth as well as emerging young entrepreneurs. Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) Leverage capacity building and skill development for potential and existing young entrepreneurs;
- 2) Expand access to financing, sustainable markets, and digital channels, and redefine financing pathways in equipping youth enterprises to economically scale their enterprises;
- 3) Develop ASEAN Youth Entrepreneurship Sandbox 1.0 (an ecosystem consisting of initiatives and programs) and coordinated efforts with private sectors, academia, organization, media, and civil society to remain persistent in pursuing solutions to emerging concerns on digital entrepreneurship;
- 4) Conduct multilateral/bilateral and cross-sectoral discussions involving youth from various sectors on the policy-making processes through open and participatory ways to develop an ideal regulatory framework related to youth entrepreneurship;
- 5) Establish a cohesive and inclusive ecosystem that champions growth for both entrepreneurs and enterprises across the region.

The second topic is “ASEAN Citizen's Digital Literacy: What Youth Can Do”. Digital transformation and the digital economy start to become a boomerang for youth, giving them less power to control the future if they are not equipped with adequate literacy and skills to cope with the tools.

Building digital literacy among the ASEAN population can help ensure that everyone has the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the digital economy, and to address potential challenges such as cybersecurity threats, and online misinformation. UNICEF revealed that 6 out of 10 students in Southeast Asia didn't receive digital literacy.

Furthermore, a recent study conducted reflected that the majority of youth in the region still have a moderate level of digital literacy, but the discrepancy is quite huge between AMS. Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) Create a systematic digital literacy-focused education system to give a proper education for students with a comprehensive school curriculum;
- 2) Develop supporting programs that focus on the creation of digital learning platforms such as online learning platforms, workshops, training centers, and camps;
- 3) Establish a special committee to monitor and eliminate the number of fraudulent/illegal platforms, including websites, social media accounts, applications, and any other digital platforms;
- 4) Collectively invest in digitalization to expand connectivity, provide inclusive digital access to remote regions, and enhance online platform accessibility by enabling the streamlined deployment of digital applications for easier access to facilitate administration and improve economic gateways, such as e-payments, e-wallets, and online banking.

The third topic is “Acceleration of Inclusive Digital Transformation in Southeast Asia”. ASEAN countries are well-positioned to compete in the global economy and adapt to the changing nature of work while promoting inclusive and sustainable development that benefits everyone in the region.

However, like the two sides of a coin, digital transformation is widening inequality, especially the digital divide and individual preparedness in a disruptive job market.

A joint survey by ASEAN Foundation, PLAN International, and Google.org showed that 55.4% of youth in the region believe that basic digital skills are the most important skill that should be sharpened.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) Close the digital gap in remote and underserved areas through the enhancement of the ASEAN Free Trade Area Agreements;
- 2) Finance and develop basic internet infrastructure to level out the existing digital divide;
- 3) Implement digital skills, including digital media literacy and advanced digital skills programs customized to the needs of diverse groups of people;
- 4) Hold regular forums to exchange knowledge and technicalities on best practices in the implementation of digital skills in their countries;
- 5) Engage all stakeholders in the design and implementation of digital transformation initiatives. Digital skills programs can advance workforce development and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion, thereby allowing adaptability to digital advancements and creating more job opportunities.

The last topic is “Embracing Opportunities and Anticipating Challenges of Green Economy in Southeast Asia through Digital Platforms”. ASEAN seeks to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability.

Investing in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and eco-friendly technologies can create new opportunities for green jobs and industries, promoting long-term economic development.

Since 2020, there are \$15 billion in cumulative green investments and 3 times the investment value on sustainability-focused start-ups in 2021 within the region. Sustainability and green economy are increasingly valued by investors, customers, and employees, thus not only is this important for Southeast Asia's global competitiveness but also our planet.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

- 1) Promote sustainability and environmental conservation in our economies by committing to provide accessibility to financing platforms and options such as tax incentives, subsidies, and grants based on a set of standards in sustainable green financing;
- 2) Develop a standardized framework or adoption of an internationally recognized framework for emissions reporting;
- 3) Implement comprehensive and interdisciplinary education and training in climate literacy and digital adoption for sustainable development;
- 4) Strengthen Extended Producer Responsibility policy in the region to promote the proper disposal and recycling of waste products by holding manufacturers responsible for the end-of-life management of their products;
- 5) Create a comprehensive policy framework to promote renewable energy infrastructure development to support digital transformation in

ASEAN that addresses the current gaps in the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation 2016-2025.

We, the representatives of ASEAN Youth, called upon the ASEAN to have a strong commitment and noted the policy recommendations for equitable and inclusive digital development for the SDGs in the region.

We welcomed any effective, concrete, direct, impactful, and measurable efforts conducted through multilateralism.

Having considered the role of youth in the public policy realm, we strongly encourage the ASEAN to include youth in the decision-making processes.

Last but not least, all efforts should take into account the existence of youth NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), indigenous, disabled, marginalized, disadvantaged, underserved, and vulnerable groups so no one is left behind.

Thank you, Excellencies.
