



TECH FOR
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Working Paper

A Framework for Confident Digital Society

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About This Working Paper

In 2023, the Tech for Good Institute conducted research across six countries in Southeast Asia — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — to understand ambitions of the public, private and public sectors for the next phase of digital development following the rapid digitalisation catalysed by the pandemic. The resultant report *From Tech for Growth to Tech for Good* highlighted a shared broadening of goals, from a primary focus on digital economy growth to that of sustainable digital development.¹ Central to achieving such development is fostering a **confident digital society** as a parallel objective to industry transformation and economic growth.

This study builds on the 2023 report to propose a conceptual framework for understanding “Confident Digital Society” as both a foundation and outcome of digital economy growth. To support discussions around this framework, preliminary indicators are proposed to illustrate each pillar of the framework so that progress may be monitored, and to inform discussion and decisions on investment priorities.

This proposed framework is an early iteration, as are the identified indicators. By sharing early thoughts, we invite dialogue to refine and improve this concept, framework and indicator selection. We particularly welcome views from across the public, private and civil sectors; please send feedback to info@techforgoodinstitute.org.

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About the Tech for Good Institute

The Tech for Good Institute is a non-profit organisation working to advance the promise of technology and the digital economy for inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth in Southeast Asia.

With a population twice the size of the US and strong demographics, Southeast Asia's digital economy is evolving rapidly. At the same time, the region's trajectory is unique, shaped by its diverse cultural, social, political and economic contexts. The Tech for Good Institute serves as a platform for research, conversations and collaborations focused on Southeast Asia while staying connected to the rest of the world. Our work is centred on issues at the intersection of technology, society and the economy, and is intrinsically linked to the region's development. We seek to understand and inform policy with rigour, balance and perspective by using research, effective outreach and evidence-based recommendations.

The Institute was founded by Grab, to advance the vision of a thriving and innovative Southeast Asia for all. We welcome opportunities for partnership and support, financial or in-kind, from organisations and individuals committed to fostering responsible innovation and digital progress for sustainable growth in the region.

More information about the Institute can be accessed at www.techforgoodinstitute.org.



Executive Summary

Southeast Asia's rapid digital transformation is continuing to drive growth in the region. In 2024, the region outpaced global growth, recording real GDP growth of 4.6%. Governments across the region recognise the potential for digitalisation to boost productivity, increase efficiencies, and improve service delivery in both the public and private sectors. Key industries such as e-commerce, digital payments, transportation and online services have seen increased adoption and growth in total gross merchandise value in 2024.



Beyond economic growth, digitalisation can, and should, enable development goals. This paper builds on the 2023 report *From “Tech for Growth” to “Tech for Good”*, in which the Tech for Good Institute (TFGI) consulted over 130 policymakers and stakeholders across six countries in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) on the next phase of their countries' digital development. One common area of investment is fostering a confident digital society for a trusted, inclusive and resilient digital ecosystem, nationally and regionally.

This working paper reviews the evolving definitions of and existing efforts to measure digital societies, before proposing a framework for Confident Digital Society. The proposed framework identifies two important perspectives: Foundations and Future-readiness. The former refers to the current state of digital transformation, while the latter assesses a society's ability to seize opportunities and respond to future challenges. Sub-areas for each include:

Foundations

-  **Quality Access:** Affordable, reliable and high-quality digital connectivity.
-  **Meaningful Participation:** Leveraging technology to improve daily lives, increase access to goods and public services, and strengthen e-citizenship for active civic participation.

Future-readiness

-  **Productive Potential:** Economic empowerment in the current and future digital economy through skills development, readiness for emerging technologies and a vibrant innovation ecosystem.
-  **Digital Resilience:** Ability to respond to challenges posed by innovation and digital transformation through policy innovation, safety and sustainability.

To clarify each perspective and sub-area, illustrative indicators are proposed. These indicators reflect both longstanding and emerging issues, from digital platform penetration to attitudes towards AI and other emerging technologies, response to online scams and the integration of digital and sustainability roadmaps. Indicators not only enable measurement, but also to identify areas of strength, growth potential and investment to support sustainable digital development holistically.

This working paper is just the first step, serving as the foundation for stakeholder consultations across the digital ecosystem. Some indicators identified in this paper may not be readily available and will require additional data collection efforts. Therefore, this paper is also an invitation for potential data partners to collaborate in support of nurturing confident digital societies across Southeast Asia.