



Embracing Digital Connectivity For The Future Of ASEAN Solidarity

Joint Statement of Participants of the Rural ICT Camp 2023, Pulo Aceh - Indonesia

Chapeau from Pulo Aceh!

- We are participants representing community-based and grassroots organizations met at the Rural ICT Camp 2023 from October 11-14, 2023 in Pulo Aceh, Indonesia.
- We considered the multiple intersecting crises (including but not limited to the development paradox of pervasive poverty and inequality despite high economic growth, the climate crisis and the health crisis considering the post COVID-19 pandemic outbreak) in the ASEAN region. We are aware of the implications of these to food, health, education, etc. and its impacts towards poverty, marginalized groups and other vulnerable communities.
- Having considered broad and wide perspectives, including our lived experiences, we are positive that digital connectivity may facilitate opportunities for ASEAN communities to work together to address these challenges. A multi stakeholder approach to enhance cooperation, mutual collaboration, and “*gotong royong*”¹ in between people in ASEAN member states can assist further for a sustainable and inclusive future for the region.
- As a shared expression of awareness, responsibility and solidarity, we formulated this joint statement as a form of contribution to the implementation of the ASEAN Digital Literacy Impact Forum 2023 which will take place from 13 to 17 November 2023 in Bali, Indonesia.

I. Shared Background: Current State of ASEAN Digital Access and Connectivity

- We recognize the work of ASEAN member states on improving digital connectivity and access to technology especially in the less developed countries of Southeast Asia. Initiatives have included promoting digital infrastructure development, improving internet connectivity, and fostering digital literacy. Additionally, various member states have been working on enhancing cross border digital data flow, trade and e-commerce.

¹ Indonesian traditional term for collective work. *Gotong* can generally be understood as 'carrying a burden using one's shoulder', while *royong* means 'togetherness' or 'communally', thus the combined phrase *gotong royong* can be translated literally as 'joint bearing of burdens'. In a general sense it can also be understood as working together, helping each other or mutual assistance for a shared or collective interest.



- We laud the work of ASEAN member states for coming up with the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025: ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc, powered by secure and transformative digital services, technologies and ecosystem.
- We also take note that the ASEAN member states have been focusing on promoting policies and regulatory frameworks that facilitate growth, digital innovation, and emerging technologies. Collaboration among ASEAN member states has been an important key, with efforts to establish common standards and frameworks to streamline digital operations across borders.

II. Future Challenge, Complexity and Multiple Crisis

- While so much progress has been made, there are still ongoing challenges and issues that affect the ability of ASEAN communities to embrace and leverage the potential of digital technologies and connectivity in the future.
- There are significant disparities in digital infrastructure across and within ASEAN member states, in particular to countries and geographies within countries that have well-developed networks while others are still struggling with limited connectivity and inadequate infrastructure. This digital divide poses challenges in achieving uniform digital access and equitable connectivity across ASEAN.
- Divergent regulatory frameworks among ASEAN member states present obstacles to seamless digital integration in cross border data and information flow. Integrated regulations for data privacy, internet security, e-commerce, and digital governance remain a complex issue and need to be jointly addressed by ASEAN member states and related stakeholder as a whole.
- Disparities in digital skill and literacy, which also include gender gap among certain populations in ASEAN member states hinder the effective utilization of digital technologies. This also includes language barriers in the ASEAN region that obstruct the fulfillment of basic rights to gain access to information and knowledge needed by the entire ASEAN community as a whole. Addressing the gap in digital skills and literacy by enhancing formal and informal education, as well as to promote the use of diverse languages in enhancing digital skills and literacy are crucial to ensuring equitable access and effective use of digital tools in the future.



- The rising threat of cyber attacks and digital security breaches, as well as violation of digital rights, the spread of online gender-based violence, illicit content, hoax news, misinformation and disinformation, posed significant risks to the stability and growth of digital connectivity and ecosystem in ASEAN.

III. Community Engagement, Complementary Access and Meaningful Connectivity

- Active promotion of community engagement and complementary access for meaningful connectivity in ASEAN member states is strongly needed to ensure that digital development is inclusive and accessible to all including those with varying levels of digital infrastructure and economic development. Fostering cooperation, mutual collaboration, and gotong royong to bridge the digital divide and connecting the unconnected should be an utmost priority and focus in order to develop an equitable, inclusive and sustainable digital ecosystem in the ASEAN region.
- On community engagement and participation, we look to ASEAN member states to work on initiatives to encourage meaningful participation and engagement of various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations and social movements, academic institutions, business sectors, as well as technical communities in shaping the digital policies and common strategies. This is crucial in ensuring digital development efforts address the needs, aspirations, and shared interest of all segments of society in the ASEAN region.
- We recognize the importance of providing complimentary access solutions to digital technologies and services, especially in underdeveloped areas. This also includes facilitating the integration of digital services and technologies into various sectors, including education, healthcare, and public services, in order to ensure inclusive and equitable access to digital resources for all ASEAN member states.
- We emphasize the significance of establishing meaningful connectivity that goes beyond mere infrastructure development. This includes initiatives to promote the use of digital technologies for socio-economic and cultural development, improve digital skill and literacy, as well as fostering innovation and social entrepreneurship. We call on ASEAN member states to create an enabling environment where digital connectivity and



ecosystem leads to tangible benefits for individuals and communities across the ASEAN region.

- ASEAN's geographic diversity and vulnerability to the impact of climate change and natural disasters, such as tsunami, earthquakes, typhoons, flood and drought has posed significant obstacles to the growth, development and maintenance of digital infrastructures. In this particular context, ASEAN member states need to engage civil society to prevent the negative impacts of disaster events and climate change, including by supporting preparedness and resilience, as well as increasing capabilities to mitigate various forms of disaster events in the ASEAN region.

IV. Way Forward

- During the implementation of Rural ICT Camp 2023 in Pulo Aceh, we have learned and understood that community engagement in enhancing the meaningful connectivity and digital ecosystems are able to increase resilience and ignite citizens' preparedness in addressing various challenges, complexities and crisis situations in everyday life.
- We pledge to work towards empowerment of marginalized communities in addressing the gap in digital skills and literacy among various stakeholders from capital and big cities to rural and underserved regions. This also includes capacity building in developing complementary access, such as deploying community networks infrastructure, as well as operating internet services and other value-added services for the benefit of the community. We ask support from ASEAN member states and other stakeholders including governments, civil society organizations, academic institutions, business sectors, as well as technical communities.

V. Conclusion and Recommendation

- Embracing digital connectivity and the future of ASEAN solidarity must be done with a focus on sustainable and inclusive development. These collective efforts should be made to ensure that digital initiatives are supporting economic growth, as well as addressing social and environmental concerns. Within this particular context, community empowerment and capacity building is strongly needed to enhance community engagement and meaningful participation, so that the benefits of digital transformation and connectivity are equally accessible and integrated to all members of ASEAN society.

Pulo Aceh, October 14th, 2023



Rural ICT Camp 2023 Participants

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Supporting Organizations

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