

# SOUTHEAST ASIA TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT FORUM

TRADE THRIVES,  
AI DRIVES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

OCTOBER 29, 2024

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# **Key Takeaways**

## **Southeast Asia Trade and Development Forum 2024**

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#### **Introduction**

The Southeast Asia Trade and Development Forum 2024, under the theme “Trade Thrives, AI Drives,” marks a pivotal gathering to explore the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within Southeast Asia’s trade and development landscape. This year’s forum, hosted by the International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD), focuses on how AI can drive a more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable global trade ecosystem. The event brings together policymakers, industry leaders, academics, and stakeholders to discuss strategies for leveraging AI’s potential while addressing challenges such as data privacy, bias, and ethical governance.

#### **Key Takeaways**

##### **Session 1: New AI Economy and Technology Diffusion for Economic Value Creation**

*Speaker: Mr. Maciej Surowiec, Head of ASEAN Government Affairs, Microsoft*

Key takeaway from Session 1 is that the widespread adoption and democratization of AI technology can drive significant economic and societal benefits, similar to past transformative inventions like electricity and the printing press. Mr. Maciej Surowiec emphasizes that it is crucial not only to innovate but also to effectively disseminate AI across various sectors, such as healthcare and education, to create tangible values. He advocates for strong regulatory frameworks and international cooperation to ensure the responsible use of AI while encouraging local governments to leverage AI for innovation and economic growth, ultimately aiming to bridge existing economic and social gaps.

##### **Session 2: The Future Reimagined: AI’s Influence on Today’s World**

*Speaker: Mr. Dennis Trawnitschek, Chief Technology Officer, SCBX*

*Moderator: Dr. Titipat Achakulvisut, Lecturer, Department of Biomedical Engineering, Mahidol University*

Advances in AI have made technology more accessible, boosting productivity, but the rapid growth faces challenges due to limited computing resources. Southeast Asia has the chance to become an AI innovation hub through investments in data centers and cooperation on data sharing and supportive regulations. However, there are concerns about sustainability as the demand for computing power increases, which can harm the environment. It's essential to develop technology responsibly while ensuring that AI tools remain accessible. Balancing the benefits of AI with potential risks, like job loss and skill shortages, underscores the need for organized education and training. Additionally, governments must create rules for safe data sharing to help both large and small businesses thrive in the AI landscape.

## **Special Session: Unlocking AI Potential in International Trade and Development: OECD's Insights and Lessons for Southeast Asia**

*Special keynote speaker: H.E. Mr. Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*

H.E. Mr. Mathias Cormann stresses the need for strong AI policies that ensure everyone can access technology. For example, while the number of broadband subscriptions in Southeast Asia has jumped from 74 million in 2010 to over 800 million in 2023, there are still gaps, especially between cities and rural areas. This shows that we need better rules to improve internet access and digital skills, particularly for groups that are often left out. Additionally, Thailand's progress in digital trade rules highlights the importance of creating a good policy environment to improve data sharing and manage risks from new technologies. It also shows how essential it is to help the workforce gain digital skills, as only 28% of people in Southeast Asia have the basic skills needed for jobs in an AI-driven market. Additionally, OECD supports sustainable AI practices that tackle climate issues while encouraging countries to work together to create trustworthy AI governance.

## **Special Session: Empowering Trade, Achieving Inclusive Growth: The Implications of AI Technology in Thailand's Trade and Development Pursuits**

*Special Keynote speaker: H.E. Mr. Pichai Naripthaphan, Minister of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand*

The Minister outlines how artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the economy in Southeast Asia. AI can boost growth in important sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, and finance, potentially adding \$1 trillion to the region's GDP by 2030. For example, AI can improve farming techniques to help crops grow better. However, there are challenges, such as smaller businesses struggling to adopt AI while larger companies thrive. His speech highlights the need for better education and skills training to prepare workers for new AI jobs. It also focuses on the importance of Southeast Asian countries working together to create fair rules for using AI. Additionally, Thailand has welcomed the investment over \$5 billion in data centers, showing its commitment to leading in AI and technology. Lastly, the key objective is to use AI's advantages while ensuring everyone benefits from its growth.

## **Session 4: AI-Powered Startups: Driving Southeast Asia's Tech Revolution**

Panelists:

- *Dr. Tiago Ramalho, CEO, Recursive Inc, Japan*
- *Dr. Hung Bui, CEO, VinAI, Vietnam*
- *Mr. Raunak Mehta, Co-Founder & CEO, Igloo, Singapore*
- *Mr. Korawad Chearavanont, Executive Chairman & Founder, Amity Solutions, Thailand*

*Moderator: Ms. Chawisa (Wendy) Chen, CEO & Co-Founder, Talk to PEACH*

Panelists discussed the transformative impact of AI on businesses in Southeast Asia and globally. Dr. Tiago Ramalho from Recursive Inc. emphasized the importance of adapting products to meet diverse regional needs, leveraging Japan's reputation for quality to gain market trust. Mr. Korawad Chearavanont highlighted Thailand's neutral reputation, which eases data privacy concerns and facilitates Thai companies' entry into strict regulatory markets like Europe. Dr. Hung Bui from VinAI

noted AI's potential to bridge language barriers in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the need for authenticity in AI-generated content. Lastly, Mr. Raunak Mehta from Igloo pointed out that AI can help reduce inequality by addressing income gaps and climate challenges through predictive solutions, while advocating for a cautious approach to ensure that AI benefits are shared more evenly across communities.

### **Session 5: Future of Trade: Unveiling Power of AI Innovations in Southeast Asian Markets**

*Speaker: Mr. David Roger Mould, Solution Engineering Director & Country CTO for Thailand and Vietnam, Salesforce*

Thailand's digital transformation has led to rapid technology adoption, with cities like Bangkok moving toward cashless economies and young workers favoring startups over traditional jobs, aided by technologies like PromptPay and QR payments. This shift, alongside an aging population and language barriers in tech use, highlights a demand for AI in filling labor gaps and enhancing efficiency across sectors. For example, AI-driven tools in contract management are making business processes more efficient, with platforms like Salesforce enabling secure, tailored AI integration to manage data while reducing operational costs. Ethical frameworks in AI, as seen in Salesforce's policies, help manage risks, balancing innovation with data security and responsible AI practices.

### **Session 6: Technology for Change: Balancing Economic Development and Sustainable Prosperity**

*Panelists:*

- *Dr. Sak Segkhoonthod, Senior Advisor, Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA), Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Thailand*
- *Dr. Antonio Vezzani, Economic Affairs Officer, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Section Division on Technology and Logistics, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*
- *Mr. ByeongJo Kong, Digital Technology Specialist (AI & Data Analytics), Asian Development Bank (ADB)*

*Moderator: Ms. Chaowarat Yongjiranon, Global Editor, Techsauce*

The panelists discussed key guidelines for integrating technology, particularly AI, into global economies while ensuring alignment with sustainable development goals. Dr. Antonio Vezzani emphasized the importance of contextualizing AI to fit diverse national capabilities and cultural aspects, noting that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Mr. ByeongJo Kong highlighted the Asian Development Bank's focus on enhancing public services through AI and building capacity among users to facilitate smooth integration. Dr. Sak Segkhoonthod stressed the need for awareness rather than regulation in Thailand, advocating for an AI master plan that promotes ethical principles and guidelines. Both emphasized the importance of a human-centered approach to AI design that addresses specific needs and inclusivity while balancing innovation with governance and capacity building to navigate the complexities of technology integration effectively.