Rewiring Digital Systems for People in the AI Era

By Detriana Margita Sari
Global Strategic Partnership Project Leader PT Telkom Indonesia
Best Female Employee of the Year - Stevie Award 2023
Indonesia Young Women Business Future Leader - SWA Magazine 2019

Indonesia stands at the centre of one of the world's most important digital opportunities. Its digital economy is approaching USD 130 billion in 2026—the largest in Southeast Asia—and is projected to grow to between USD 180 billion and USD 340 billion by 2030. This is not incremental growth, but a structural shift in how value, services, and opportunity will be created in one of the world's largest and youngest populations.

The Reality Behind the Data: Growth vs. Inclusion

However, scale does not automatically translate into inclusion. Beneath this growth lies a layered digital readiness gap—across access, skills, trust, and participation. In 2025, **26.3% of Indonesians still lacked internet access, more than 104,000 schools remained digitally disconnected, and women represented only 27% of the technology workforce**. Even before the rise of AI, a significant portion of society is not yet positioned to access or benefit from the digital future.

The challenge extends beyond infrastructure into education and workforce readiness. **Vocational high school graduates (SMK) recorded the highest unemployment rate at 8.63%**, while secondary and vocational graduates dominate overall unemployment due to persistent skills mismatch. This reflects a fundamental paradox: the system designed to produce job-ready talent is not aligned with market demand.

At the same time, Indonesia's challenge is not only one of scale, but of capability. The country requires around **600,000 digital workers annually**, yet the more critical issue is whether the workforce possesses the competencies needed by industry. The risk is no longer just a shortage of talent, but a structural gap between what the system produces and what the digital economy demands.

This gap is most visible in the SME sector. SMEs account for **more than 99% of business units, contribute over 60% of GDP, and employ around 97% of the workforce**. Yet only around **63% have adopted digital tools**, and even then, adoption remains largely basic—focused on social media, e-commerce, and digital payments. Advanced capabilities such as AI, cloud, and data-driven decision-making remain out of reach for many.

This is not a lack of ambition, but the result of structural barriers: limited digital literacy, uneven infrastructure, constrained access to technology, and low confidence in adopting more complex systems. As technology continues to accelerate, the readiness of businesses, institutions, and talent to adopt and benefit from it is not keeping pace—resulting in a widening gap across the digital ecosystem.

For me, this is the real brutal fact of current digital systems: **the gap is no longer only between those who have technology and those who do not. It is between those who are ready to convert technology into**

value—and those who are expected to catch up after the future has already been designed without them.

Driving Change: Shifting from Technology to Capability

That is why I have built my work around capability.

Across different roles—from operations to customer transformation and strategic partnerships—I have consistently observed that technology does not create impact on its own. Without capability, trust, and relevance, even the most advanced solutions remain underutilized. This is why **I approach digital transformation as a capability agenda rather than a technology agenda.**

Through collaborations with global partners across AI, cloud, and cybersecurity (Microsoft, AWS, Fortinet), I have worked to translate partnerships into structured capability-building platforms—combining training, certification, and real implementation pathways. Across multiple initiatives, I estimate that these efforts have reached more than 24,000 students, vocational learners, educators, and professionals. The objective is about ensuring that learning translates into real application and create value.

One of the most important outcomes of this work has been enabling organizations to integrate AI into their business processes. Through automation, data-driven decision-making, and workflow transformation, AI has moved from being an abstract concept into a practical tool embedded in day-to-day operations. In that sense, capability-building is the condition that makes transformation real.

Elevating the Ecosystem: From Local Impact to Global Policy

My exposure at the global level reinforced this understanding—and expanded the way I acted on it.

In 2025, I served as part of Indonesia's delegation in tariff negotiations with the United States, alongside the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs. For me, that role was not simply diplomatic exposure. It was part of a broader effort to help close digital gaps by influencing how digital capability, economic competitiveness, and national interest are understood at the policy level. It highlighted a fundamental shift: global trade is no longer driven only by physical goods, but increasingly by digital services, platforms, and data ecosystems. That means closing the digital gap cannot happen only through implementation on the ground. It also requires engagement with the regulatory, strategic, and international frameworks that shape how value is created and captured. In that sense, I have sought not only to build readiness within organizations and ecosystems, but also to contribute to conversations that influence the environment around them—domestically and at the global level.

A similar realization emerged at Mobile World Congress Barcelona in 2024, I helped led the end-to-end development and launch of a Telkom–Huawei solution for SME digital transformation. Huawei's public announcement described the launch as Asia Pacific's first bundle package for SMEs to help SMEs in Indonesia accelerate digital transformation. The solution focused on concrete business scenarios including

retail chains, hotels, real estate, and education campuses, while integrating connectivity, cloud, and intelligent digital services.

For me, that work was not about appearing at a global event. It was about making sure that global innovation could be translated into something real, adoptable, and useful for SMEs on the ground. From shaping the solution concept and structuring the partnership to ensuring readiness for implementation, my role was to make sure the collaboration was not only technologically advanced, but also relevant to the realities of businesses that are too often excluded from more sophisticated digital systems. This experience reinforced a pattern I have seen repeatedly: **innovation moves globally, but adoption happens locally—and often unevenly. If that distance is not deliberately managed, the gap only widens.**

Redefining Representation: Designing an Inclusive Future

Beyond capability and economics, another gap remains equally critical: representation.

As digital systems evolve, women continue to be underrepresented in technology and leadership roles. This is not only a diversity issue—it has direct implications for how systems are designed, governed, and trusted. I have experienced this imbalance firsthand, which is why my work in digital transformation is closely linked to my commitment to women empowerment.

Through both organizational initiatives and external engagement, including serving as a speaker in women's communities, I actively contribute to expanding access, building confidence, and enabling more women to participate in shaping the digital future. Because one of the deepest gaps in digital systems is not only structural—it is psychological. It is about whether people believe they belong in the future being built.

When I speak about rewiring digital systems for people, I do not mean slowing innovation. I mean **ensuring that innovation is inclusive, trusted, and accessible at scale.** It means **transforming partnerships into engines of capability.** It means **ensuring SMEs are not left behind.** It **means enabling talent not just to learn, but to apply.** And it **means ensuring that women are shaping the future—not simply adapting to it**.

As AI reshapes economies, **leadership will not be defined by who adopts technology the fastest. It will be defined by who closes the gap between innovation and inclusion.**

That is the work I am committed to—ensuring that digital transformation expands capability and participation across society.

Because ultimately**, the true measure of progress is not how advanced technology becomes, but how many people become capable because of it.**

References

1. Indonesia digital economy outlook (2026)
   Indonesia Digital Market Overview 2026
2. Indonesia digital economy projection to 2030
   Indonesia Digital Economy Projection to USD 180–340 Billion by 2030
3. Digital divide in Indonesia
   Addressing the Digital Divide in Indonesia – Teachers College, Columbia University
4. Unemployment by education level (BPS)
   Unemployment Rate by Education Level – BPS Statistics Indonesia
5. Skills mismatch and unemployment (Kompas)
   Why Graduates Are Vulnerable to Unemployment – Kompas
6. Digital workforce gap study
   The Indonesian Digital Workforce Gaps in 2021–2025 – MDPI Journal
7. SME contribution to economy (KADIN)
   MSME Contribution to Indonesia Economy – KADIN Indonesia
8. SME digital adoption (63%)
   Digitalization Trends of MSMEs in Indonesia 2025 – QASA Insights
9. Telkom–Huawei SME solution launch (MWC 2024)
   Telkom Indonesia & Huawei SME Digital Transformation – Huawei
10. Telkom Collaboration with Global Tech Giants for Vocational School and Senior High School
    Telkom Collaboration with Global Tech Giants for Vocational School and Senior High School
11. Digital Talent Activity – Evidence 1
    Digital Talent Activity – Instagram Evidence 1
12. Digital Talent Activity – Evidence 2
    Digital Talent Activity – Instagram Evidence 2
13. Digital Talent Activity – Evidence 3
    Digital Talent Activity – Instagram Evidence 3
14. Global Exposure Evidence (not for published/for judge viewing purpose only)
    Global Exposure Evidence
15. Empowerment Reach Evidence (not for published/for judge viewing purpose only)
    Empowerment Reach Evidence
16. Stevie award Winner 2023
    Stevie Award Winner
17. Indonesia Young Women Business Future Leader Winner 2019
    Indonesia Young Women Business Future Leader Winner 2019