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With the global technology sector worth c.\$5 trillion and growing at just over 4%, it seems surprising that the sector lags behind others in terms of diversity and inclusion.

Within the US, even major players such as Microsoft under-represent women; only 29% of their workforce are women, accounting for 26% of leadership roles and 23% of the tech jobs. And in the UK, it's a similar story, with 22% of tech directors being women and 19% of tech workers being female.

A Shift to Action in Southeast Asia

Encouragingly, things are beginning to shift in Southeast Asia, where the technology industry is starting from a relatively more robust baseline in terms of both the number of women graduating from college with technology degrees and within the tech workforce.

A 2020 report from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) highlights this shift in gender diversity in Southeast Asia, where companies have a strong track record of hiring women compared to global averages.

While there is still a way to go to reach true gender parity -

Southeast Asia is outpacing more developed western countries with 32% of women in the tech workforce compared to 28% globally and 39% studying technology in higher education compared to 35% globally.

The research also finds that a gender-diverse workforce helps a business bottom line. Companies where women account for more than 20% of the management team have approximately 10% higher innovation revenues than companies with male-dominated leadership.

Becoming an Active D&I Organisation

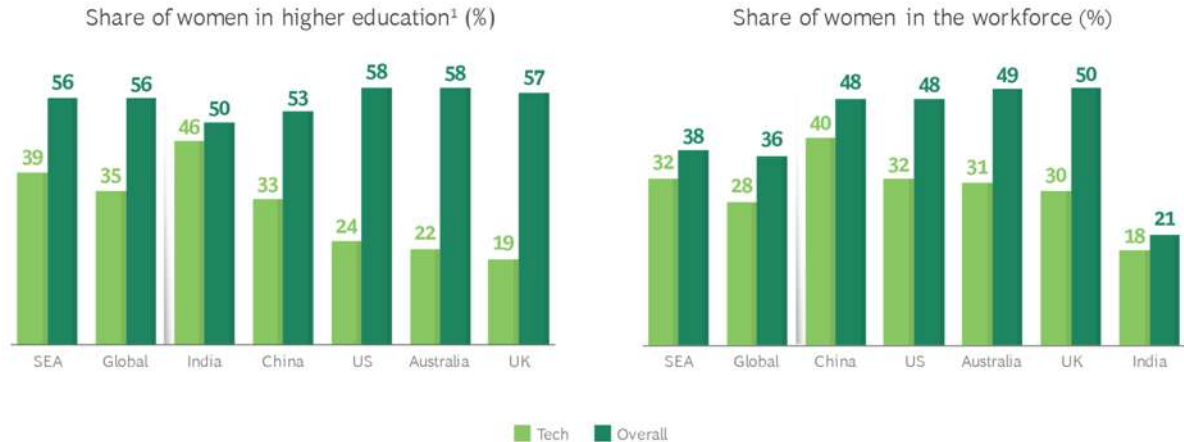
While there are some positive signs that action is being taken in Southeast Asia to address gender inequality in the technology sector, there is still a long way to go in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world.

Building diversity in the workplace is crucial to success.

Recent studies show that companies actively embracing diversity and inclusion are likely to deliver over 30% more returns than others in their field.

But for any company wanting to reap the benefits of a diverse organisation, it requires a cultural journey that entails raising awareness, educating teams, and showcasing cultural gains.

Exhibit 1 - Southeast Asia's Tech Sector Has a Relatively Strong Start in Terms of Women's Representation Compared with Other Countries



Sources: UNESCO; World Bank; Department of Statistics Singapore; Department of Statistics Malaysia; press search; BCG analysis.

Note: Official data from China about technology graduates is not available; this analysis uses one-third as a proxy. Comprehensive global data is not available, so the numbers here are an average of the countries that do report their data.

¹Includes education at universities or similar educational institutions.

Source : <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2020/boosting-women-in-southeast-asia-tech-sector>

The cultural journey needs to be Executive-led, acknowledge under-representation, and companies need to be prepared to focus time and resources on specific deliverables.

There is also a need to understand that the journey will not be quick – it requires a cultural transformation. This means equipping staff to understand the importance of the D&I agenda when interviewing, hiring, onboarding, training and developing teams.

Adopting a three-stage process can help embed diversity and inclusion within tech companies:

1. Set out your D&I strategy

- a) Help existing teams to adopt a D&I culture
- b) Adopt a D&I approach for recruitment
- c) Consider where D&I can help improve product innovation
- d) Encourage teams to challenge traditional talent pools

2. Empower employees

- a) Allow teams to identify how they will adopt D&I
- b) Help create mobility and fluidity for all members of the organisation
- c) Create cultural ambassadors
- d) Celebrate success stories

3. Become part of the DNA

- a) Continual equality education
- b) Board level active support
- c) Promote D&I innovations
- d) Build an environment of inclusivity

Insights from the Inside :

Celebrating Success in Southeast Asia

Looking at the global picture, it is apparent that the tech industry is witnessing a growth in D&I within Southeast Asia where the gender balance is more closely aligned.



Swati Rai, Chief Product Officer at Hubble Connected, has seen the Southeast Asian technology industry shift.

“ As a Chief Product Officer, I see more women holding tech jobs now than at any other time in my career. I think this is down to the home-grown unicorns and larger corporates with head offices in Singapore and Jakarta who are hungry for talent. The simple rule of supply and demand means that product teams are looking outside the traditional talent pools to find suitable candidates.

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"While women have not traditionally been attracted to studying STEM, new opportunities are opening up for them to upskill, whether at internship level or later on in the career. This internal mobility is good for both the employees and for the retention of talent by the company.

"When you are involved in product management, having different perspectives, experiences and outlooks are invaluable. It means the product is considered from a number of different angles that previously just weren't considered.

If I'm building a team, then I am looking for holistic diversity – covering ethnicity, colour, gender and cerebral. We've all heard the stories of companies creating products designed for men and women, but with only male options available, or the online games where all the female avatars have to be paid for.

"If we want products that are attractive to our customers, then we need our teams to understand what they really want. Having a diverse team facilitates this, and as AI becomes more embedded into products, we need to make sure that this technology isn't replicating the negative D&I bias of individuals.

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"It's important that companies are tackling this, not just as a brand reputational piece but also creating clear, accountable goals and objectives. Those companies who are actively managing their D&I are moving the needle.

"Having D&I ambassadors is useful. That is one of the reasons I try to be a mentor to other women. Women helping women is a powerful tool; helping another female advance her career and fulfil her potential demonstrates my commitment to having a diverse workforce.

”

Swati Rai

Chief Product Officer, Hubble Connected

Meet the team



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Covers Technology and Product roles in Southeast Asia, with a specific focus on high growth consumer tech.

- Product Managers / Heads of Product / CPO
- Product Designers /Head of Design / Digital Design Directors
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