Highlights of Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar 2025
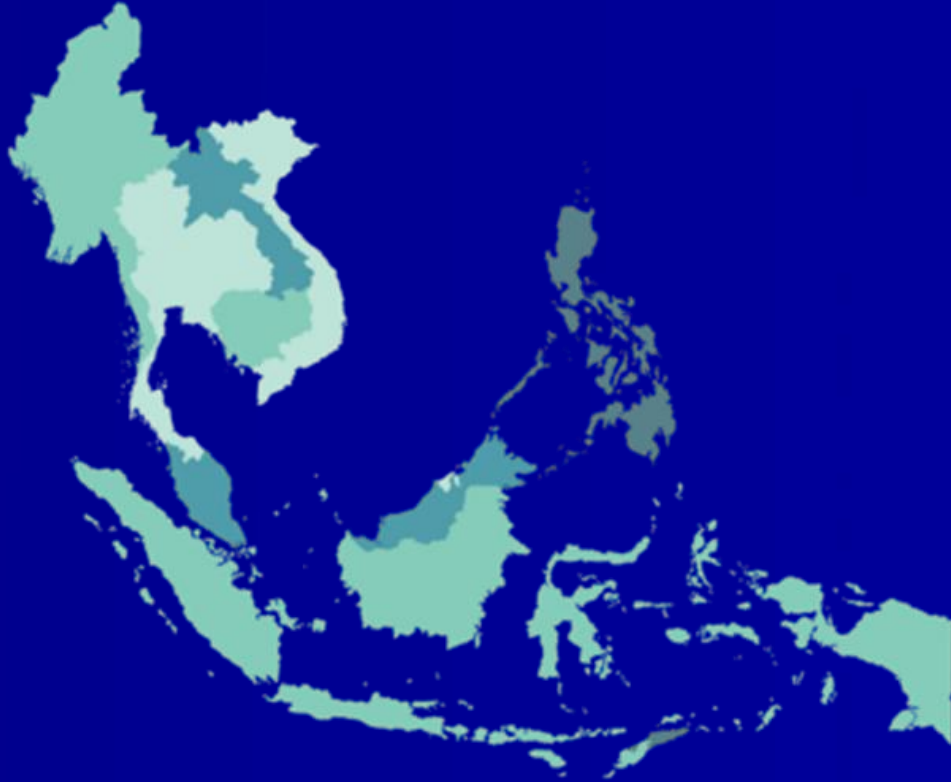
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Highlights from 2025 Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar

- Social cohesion is generally positive in Southeast Asia (SEA). Regional average across all indicators was **72.4%** (Strong).

- There is a broad acceptance for cultural differences based on measurements of social ties across ethnicities, religions and language groups. Overall, more than 7 in 10 are confident that people from diverse communities will help each other regardless of their identity.

- Opportunities for SEA countries to promote institutional trust and perceived policy fairness.

Why a Social Cohesion Radar for Southeast Asia?

- Southeast Asia is culturally diverse, but no dedicated approach to track social cohesion in the region and to provide basis for longitudinal studies

- Religion, ethnicity, and language diversity could be incorporated in measurement and analyses

- Social cohesion is integral for harmony, stability, sense of nationhood, and progress in the region

Unpacking Social Cohesion

- Social cohesion - broadly refers to the state and strength of the social bonds in societies

- Social cohesion is multi-level (e.g., communities, institutions, state) and multi-dimensional (e.g., network, identification, trust)

- "…cohesive society is characterised by resilient *social relationships*, a positive *emotional connectedness* between its members and the community, and the pronounced *focus on the common good*" (Dragolov et al, 2016)

Adapting Social Cohesion Research in Southeast Asia

Bertelsmann Stiftung Framework (BSF) used widely to assess social cohesion

Enhancing Rigour

- In 2022, a pilot study measuring social cohesion in SEA
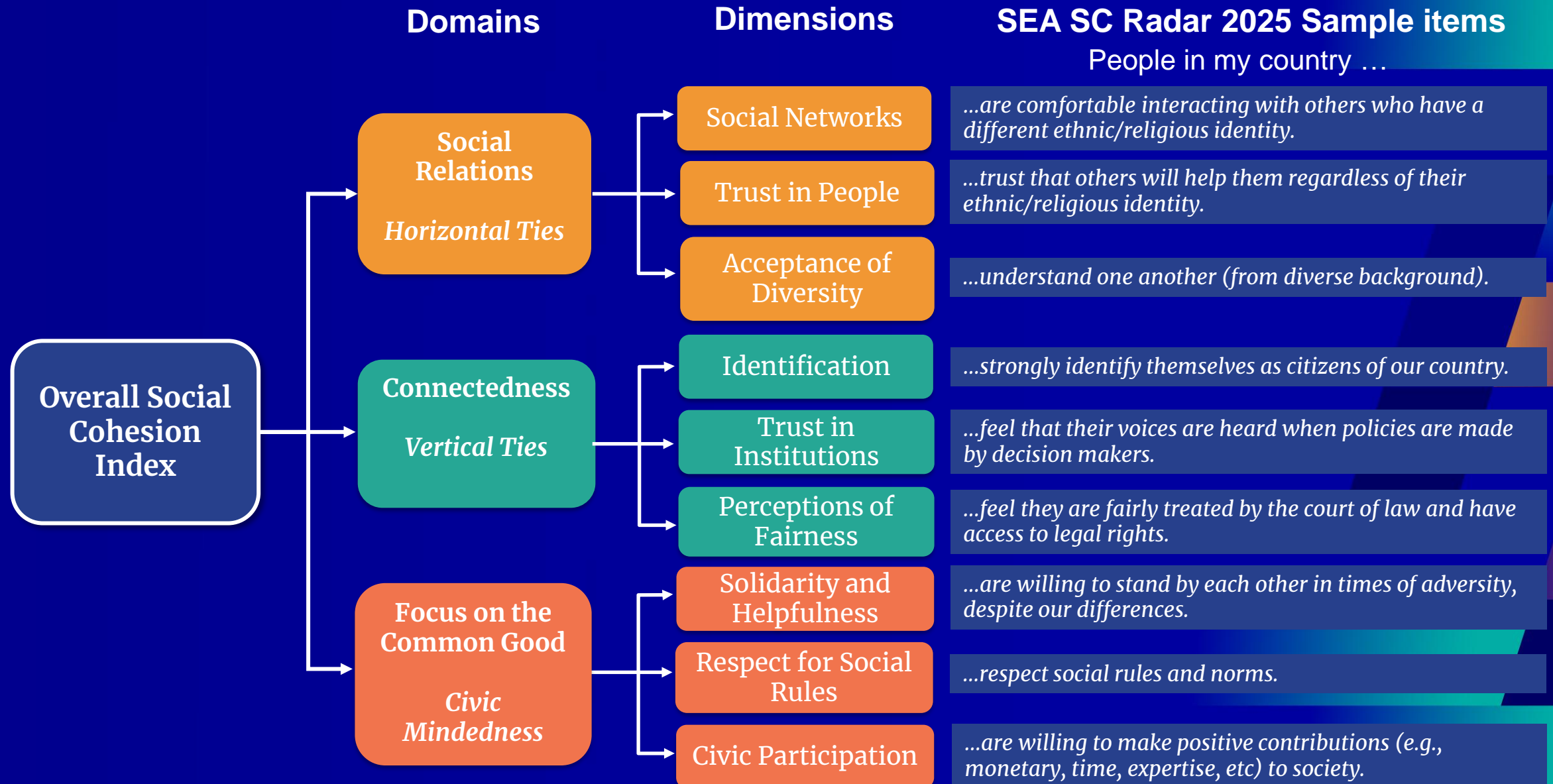- In 2025, validated with national samples from all countries

Objectivity

- Stringent survey language and data quality control
- Surveyed 1,000 individuals in each country, ensure demographic representations with hard (age and gender) and soft quotas (ethnicity, religion, urban-rural)
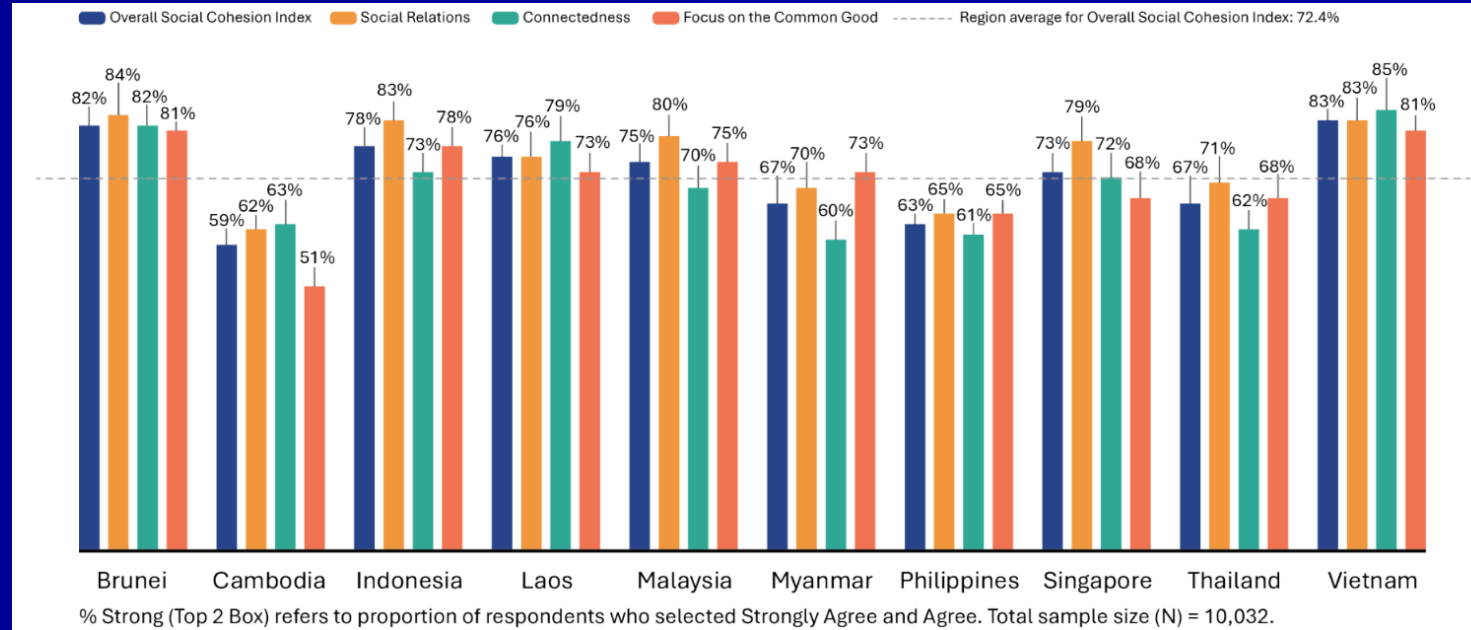
Relevance

- Fieldwork period from January to May 2025
- Empirical data to enrich discussion

Regional Highlights

Figure 1: Summary of ASEAN States Overall Social Cohesion Index and Domains by Top 2 Box (% Strong)

Overall Social Cohesion Index

• Generally positive in all countries (i.e., regional average of 72.4%; most indicators 60% and above)

Connectedness

• Refers to the vertical ties that link communities, institutions, and the state

• Helpful if countries can promote greater institutional trust and perceived policy unfairness

Social Relations

• Refers to the horizontal ties that link communities from different ethnic, religious, and language background

• Broad acceptance of diversity, suggesting baseline of trust between communities

Focus on Common Good

• Refers to civic mindedness, how likely for people to work together to tackle common challenges

• Greater civic involvement in some countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar); and some countries can do more to promote civic contribution (Cambodia, Singapore)

Selected Typologies of Social Cohesion

Robust cohesion across all domains, including horizontal and vertical ties

Mutual respect between diverse communities (horizontal ties)

Confidence between communities, institutions, and the state (vertical ties)

Sense of civic mindedness and participation (civic mindedness)

BRUNEI   VIETNAM

MALAYSIA   SINGAPORE   INDONESIA
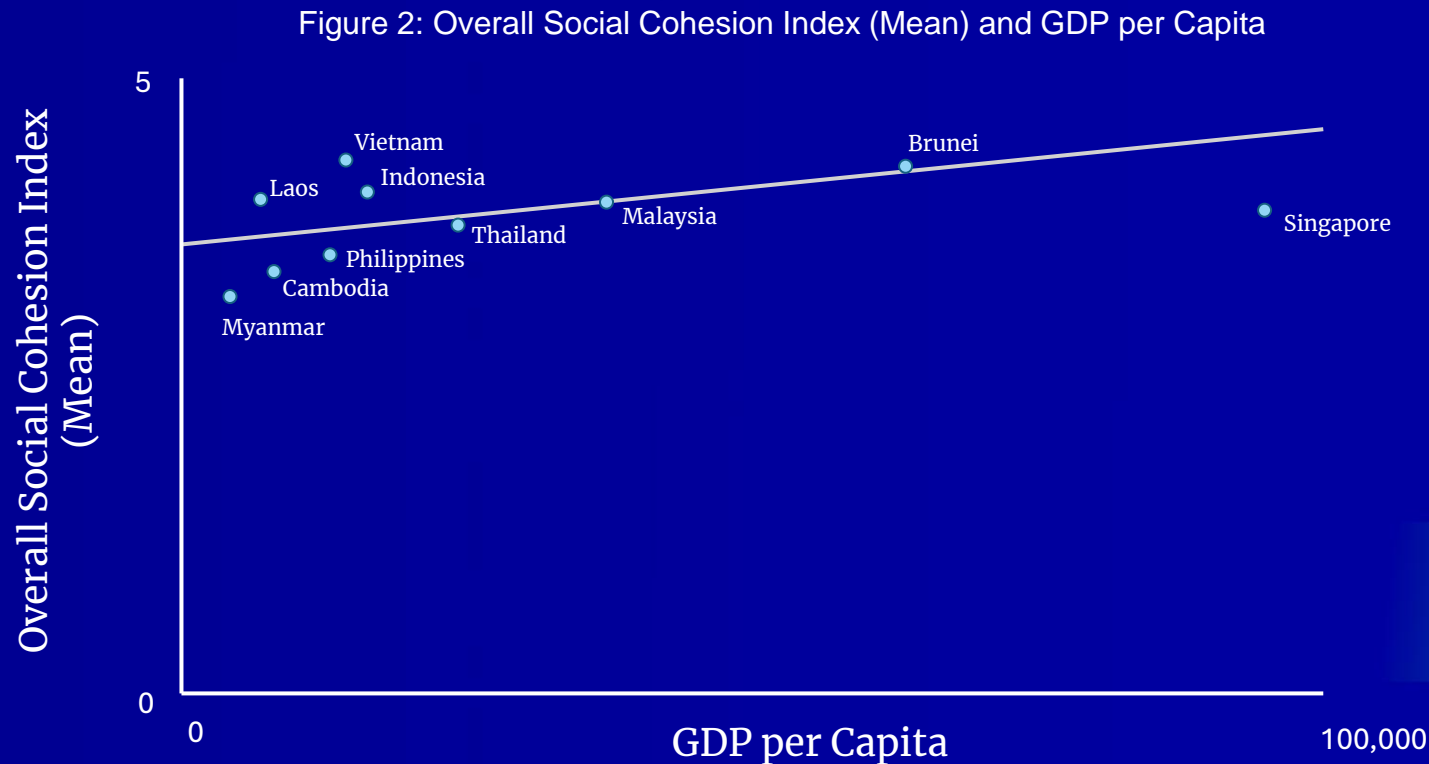
LAO PDR   CAMBODIA

PHLIPPINES   THAILAND   MYANMAR

Relations with economic development and stability

- SEA Social Cohesion Radar scores correlate with economic development (e.g., GDP per capita)
- Positively associated with economic development and stability
- Not related to the type of political systems/structure
- Cohesion can be supported by other variables apart from economic resources

Figure 2: Overall Social Cohesion Index (Mean) and GDP per Capita

Build on strong foundations
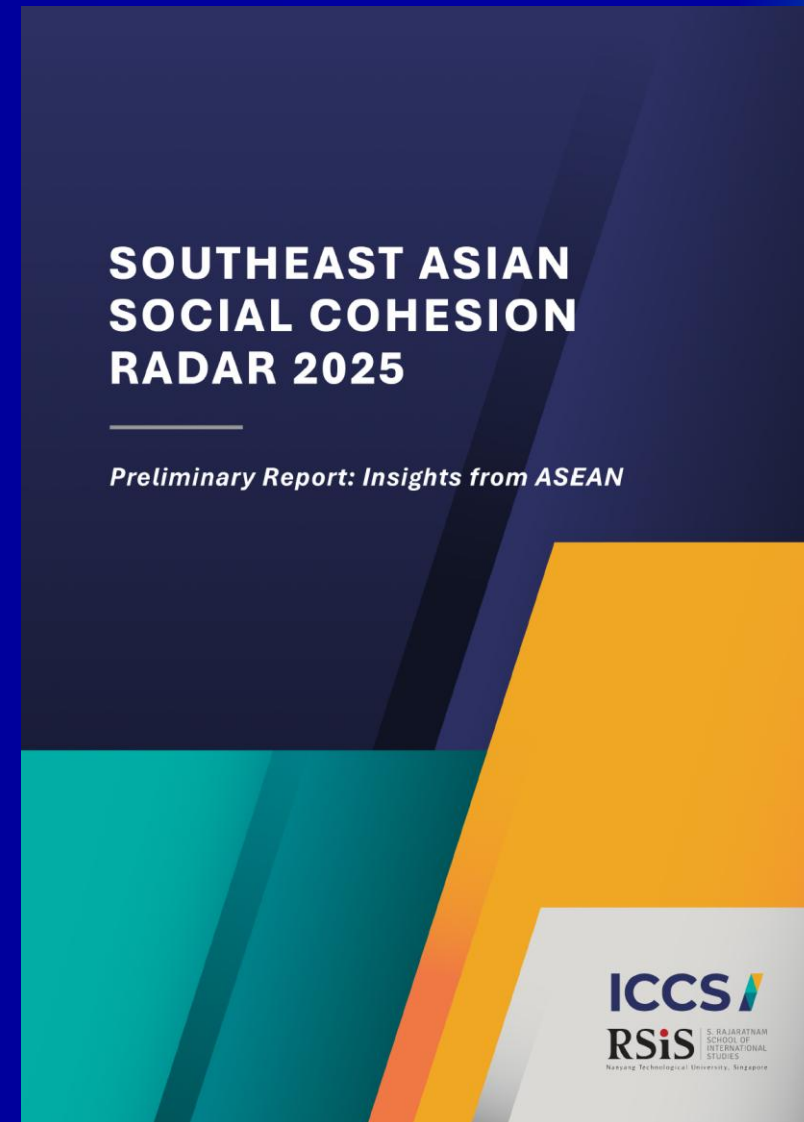
1. **Foster proactive engagement**
   - Between communities and policymakers
   - Across everyday life and locations, e.g., workplace, neighbourhood, public space, urban-rural
   - Important because it fosters emotional ties, and people are more likely to stand together with each other during crises

2. **Harness community ties**
   - Institutions can leverage existing strong community ties as a stepping-stone towards fostering institutional trust
   - Policymakers can partner with civic and religious organisations to tap the community's understanding of local challenges
   - Lead to mutual understanding on how community voices can contribute to policymaking

3. **Develop strategic goals**
   - Achieve consensus in areas of priority, common good, and contemporary challenges
   - Focus on income equality, rural development, civic participation, promoting cultural preservation and inclusion are most important

SOUTHEAST ASIAN SOCIAL COHESION RADAR 2025

Preliminary Report: Insights from ASEAN

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Build on strong foundations

Partnership with regional academics, civic leaders, and public intellectuals to deep dive into the key findings and for outreach, specifically but not limited to:

1. **Analyse** culture-specific challenges that affect the social fabric of ASEAN member states

2. **Identify** the drivers for cohesive norms and the community-specific policy levers that can promote harmonious coexistence

3. **Uncover** subgroups that may benefit most from multicultural dialogues and regional programmes, such as skills development workshops

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Thank You