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## **Learning from Land Rights so Data Rights are Right from the Get Go**

*Mei Lin Fung* - People-centered leader advancing regional digital public infrastructure for MSME financing

The painful history of poorly defined land rights, which in the past led to displacement through lack of formal documentation, offers a crucial lesson for the digital age. As people create online content, they often lack the means to claim ownership, leading to uncredited use and a drain on talent. To avoid repeating this exclusion at a greater scale, we urgently need digital public infrastructure with shared building blocks for identity, ownership, and traceability. This will ensure fairness, respect, and the ability for individuals and communities to protect and build upon their digital contributions, fostering meaningful participation for everyone by design.

I grew up in Singapore, where I saw how bold public investment in infrastructure and people enabled a small, resource-poor nation to become a vibrant, resilient society. That experience shaped my lifelong belief: that when people are equipped with tools to help themselves and treated with respect, the energy is unstoppable.

As the world gets more digitised, we must adapt this learning. Though the Internet has expanded access and opportunity, it has also brought to light fresh vulnerabilities and deepened divides. We must make sure people have the rights and means to benefit from what they create and are protected while doing so. People everywhere are creating digital content: music, stories, designs, innovations. Their contributions are copied, scraped, monetized — often without consent or credit. The talent pipeline is

drained before it matures. Local entrepreneurial teams cannot get financing.

We urgently need *digital public infrastructure* built on shared digital building blocks — including identity, ownership, and traceability — to support participation with *fairness and respect*. These systems must be designed so that people can protect, reuse, and build upon their own contributions, individually and collectively.

We still have time to shape the digital future so that it reflects the dignity of everyone it touches — and ensures meaningful participation for *anyone, anywhere*.

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