



## Discussion Summary

# Grow Asia x AVPN Networking Lunch on Sustainable Agriculture

Uplifting Smallholder Farmers in Southeast Asia

Singapore | 26 June 2019 | AVPN Conference 2019



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Grow Asia networking lunch on Sustainable Agriculture – held on the sidelines of the AVPN Conference 2019 - was designed to bring together impact and philanthropic investors with an interest in agricultural development. The purpose was three-fold. Firstly, to enable people with common interests to network with one another, and potentially find possible partners with which to work. Secondly, to have learning conversations with one another, so that at the end of lunch we are all a little wiser and better informed about the issues and solutions on inclusive and sustainable agriculture. And lastly, by creating specific conversations on individual tables, we are enabling clusters of common interest to better facilitate the process of networking with those partners with aligned areas of interest.

For Grow Asia, the value of these conversations is to help us keep our fingers on the pulse of issues, ideas, partners and emerging new solutions of regional agriculture.

As the conversations were necessarily clustered around particular issues and countries, we have summarized the discussions points across all 9 tables. The summary of these stimulating conversations is set out here.

**Grahame Dixie,**  
Executive Director,  
Grow Asia

## DISCUSSION TOPICS:

Indonesia (p.2)	Philippines (p.3)	Myanmar (p.4)	Digital Finance (p.6)
Digital Farm Services (p.7)	Social Enterprises (p.9)	Responsible Investment in Agriculture (p.10)	

# 1. INDONESIA

The Republic of Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago, with 190 million hectares of land sprawled across 17,000 islands. 32 percent of this land is currently used for agricultural production – an industry that accounts for about 14 percent of GDP and employs 33 percent of Indonesia's labor force. Given that 97 percent of all farmers in Indonesia are small-scale farmers, addressing the challenges around smallholder production are especially important for poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability in the country.

**Facilitated by:** Toshi Nakamura (Kopernik) and Pranav Sethaputra (Grow Asia)

## Challenge: Access to Finance

### Problem:

Financial services for smallholder farmers and rural Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are critical to achieving financial inclusion goals. Many bank and non-bank financing institutions see potential growth from extending financial services to this segment, but the characteristics of independent smallholders – such as remote location, lack of collateral and legal land title, lack of financial literacy, exposure to production risk, small required loan amounts, and irregular and lengthy repayment schedules - make it difficult for them to access formal financing.

### Solutions:

The public sector must continue to support farmers in securing land titles – the primary collateral used to access finance. This should be expanded from the government's current focus on "clean and clear" land, as excluding those where ownership is disputed denies millions of Indonesian farmers access to finance. Grow Asia and our Indonesia Country Partnership, [PISAgro](#), can support by aggregating/soliciting input from the private sector, civil society, farmer organizations and academe on how to align and improve current efforts.

Development partners, NGOs and larger farmer organizations have a part to play in providing financial literacy training to Indonesia's smallholders. Private agribusiness players – all of which would benefit from engaging Bottom of the Pyramid – should support with funding and/or embedding similar training into their own capacity building programs. Grow Asia and PISAgro, can support by facilitating such partnerships.

There is often misalignment between the financing solutions being developed and the needs of Indonesia's smallholder farmers, including loan size, interest rates and cash-flow considerations. Farmer and civil society voices should be present in the development and testing of these financial products/solutions, as well as that of other solution providers that have learnings to share. Donor agencies/philanthropic organizations also have a key role to play – providing risk capital to develop and experiment with solutions. Multi-stakeholder partnerships like Grow Asia can facilitate such partnerships and amplify the reach of learnings that emerge. Grow Asia has also run [Human Centered Design](#) trainings to help developers build solutions that meet smallholder needs.

## 2. MYANMAR

Myanmar is a largely agrarian country, with 70 percent of its workforce engaged in agriculture which accounts for 37.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). However, the agricultural sector is heavily reliant on traditional farming methods due to the country's history of isolation. The lack of infrastructure and electricity are constraints to the development of processing and value-added produce. Despite the challenges, several regions have worked across their value chains to develop competitive products (such as specialty coffee from the Mandalay region) showing promise for the way forward in the geographically diverse country.

**Facilitated by:** Genevieve Heng (Anthem Asia) and Somang Yang (Grow Asia)

### Challenge: Lack of Formal Land Titles

#### **Problem:**

Myanmar passed implementing deadlines to the 2012 Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VfV) Lands Management Law requesting all those who have current customary land rights to apply for a land use permit by March 2019. The law, aimed at reducing landlessness and clarifying land claims, has sparked concerns that it will dispossess smallholders, those living in conflict zones and will set a legal precedent for expropriation of unclaimed land.

#### **Solutions:**

It is critical for a plurality of farmers to register their customary land rights during the timeframe provided by the new law. Advocacy and civil society organizations should coordinate in spreading public awareness through Facebook and media campaigns to educate the public. A multi-stakeholder partnership such as the [Myanmar Agriculture Network](#) (MAN, the Grow Asia Country Partnership in Myanmar) could design the campaign, with philanthropic funding.

Businesses that provide services to farmers and the wider public (telecoms providers, traders, input dealers) should also be encouraged to spread the word, and, in remote or conflict areas, also act as witnesses/ go-betweens. MAN and UMFCCI could bring together target businesses such as banks, telecom providers and input companies to discuss whether their sales force could play an awareness raising and bridging role.

Encourage local government units to litigate boundaries and land claims disputes at the village level to avoid time-consuming and expensive litigation through the courts. There are digital solutions such as Cadasta that allow use of satellite technologies to store land rights information.

Philanthropic funding could go into supporting and funding organizations that provide technical assistance in helping register land rights and all supporting activities (public awareness campaign, working with businesses that interface with target populations, working with local governments in conflict areas, providing subsidies for professional services to MSMEs or banks assessing their credit worthiness).



## Challenge: Access to Finance

### Problem:

There is a huge “missing middle” in financing options for smallholder farmers looking to expand their holdings or activities, and MSMEs looking to enter new markets. Loan terms are still too restrictive for farmers and businesses that do not have a history of documentation or collateral, constraining growth.

Other challenges that were mentioned include low financial literacy and market knowledge, the power imbalance between farmers and middlemen and the poor state of infrastructure.

### Solutions:

- Grow number of providers of technical assistance for accounting, book-keeping to assist MSMEs to start book-keeping.
- Offer banks and loan providers technical assistance in due diligence of potential borrowers
- Encourage lenders to accept non-traditional types of collateral/ guarantee such as off-taker assurance.
- Scale non-bank lending solutions such as peer-to-peer lending.

## 3. PHILIPPINES

Agriculture remains a central pillar of the economy, involving more than a quarter of the population and contributing a tenth to the country’s economy. It is the leading producer of crops including coconuts, pineapples and bananas; with favorable conditions to expand into new commodities such as coffee and cocoa. The Philippines is also an important producer of staple crops like rice and corn. Regional hubs for agriculture production such as Mindanao offer significant growth opportunities. However, the sector still suffers from low productivity, impact from climate shocks, high production costs and low investment in infrastructure and value chains.

**Facilitated by:** Sharleene Alayan (Jollibee Group Foundation) and Reginald Lee (Grow Asia)

### Challenges:

**Access to Finance:** The Philippines has unsuccessfully tried to coerce banks to increase lending to smallholders by mandating them to commit 25 percent of their loanable funds to agriculture and agrarian credit. Rural small-farm lending is unattractive due to high transaction/delivery costs, low farm incomes, lack of acceptable collateral, and weak financial management of farm households. There is a lack of successful financing models and products.

**Human Capital Development:** Agriculture relies on farmers’ knowledge and understanding of crops, the conditions they require (as well as dealing with climate risks), and their ability to use inputs, technologies and farming methods effectively. In addition, related to finance, they need to be numerate if they are to fully develop the productivity and income of their farms. Finally, human capital determines how well farmers can “value-add” to their products and engage in innovative activities.

**Small-scale Farms:** Land reform has come at a cost of economies of scale. Moreover, a prospective lender will be reluctant to give credit to a small farmer for purchases of mechanical equipment, fearing that his small farm will not be able to generate income sufficient to cover the amortization payments.

**Access to Markets:** Smallholders face asymmetric information in prices and selling opportunities, and limited market access. Many sell through intermediaries--usually their only option--due to the small scale of their production, the high transaction costs involved in reaching more distant markets, and their inability to comply with the stringent requirements relating to volume, quality, and timely delivery demanded by modern agricultural value chains. These also breed distrust between farmers and value chain players.

## Solutions:

Complex challenges demand equally interlinked solutions that are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Participants discussed how multi-stakeholder platforms can bring together partners with complementary expertise to work together.

For example, philanthropic capital, agribusinesses and NGOs can jointly work on capacity building program for entrepreneurship skills, financial literacy (both of which are linked to financial access), and technology usage. Agribusinesses have plenty of incentives to invest in its supply chain--through research and provision of technologies.

NGOs and agribusinesses can explore clustering/farmer aggregation models to address the challenges of lack of economies of scale. Contract farming models can also enable access to loans and encourage more transparent pricing formulas to reduce distrust.

Financial institutions and philanthropic capital are called upon to innovate and create new risk mitigation products (insurance) to act as safety nets and address unexpected stresses on farmers' cash flows/savings, especially since these often tip families' decent to poverty.



## 4. DIGITAL FINANCE

Smallholder farmers in Asia make up the backbone of developing economies, reportedly providing over 70 percent of the food consumed globally. However, they remain some of the poorest people in the world, due to financial barriers that limit their access to productivity-boosting seeds, agrochemicals, machinery and the ability to expand their operations.

Digital finance solutions have the potential to change this, by increasing access funding sources that were previously within reach of only wealthy, large-scale farmers and agribusiness corporations.

**Facilitated by:** Juliet Ler (Covestro) and Adam Lyle (Padang & Co)

### Challenge:

The participants mapped how can impact investors can incentivize the development financial services for BoP smallholders by addressing the following barriers:

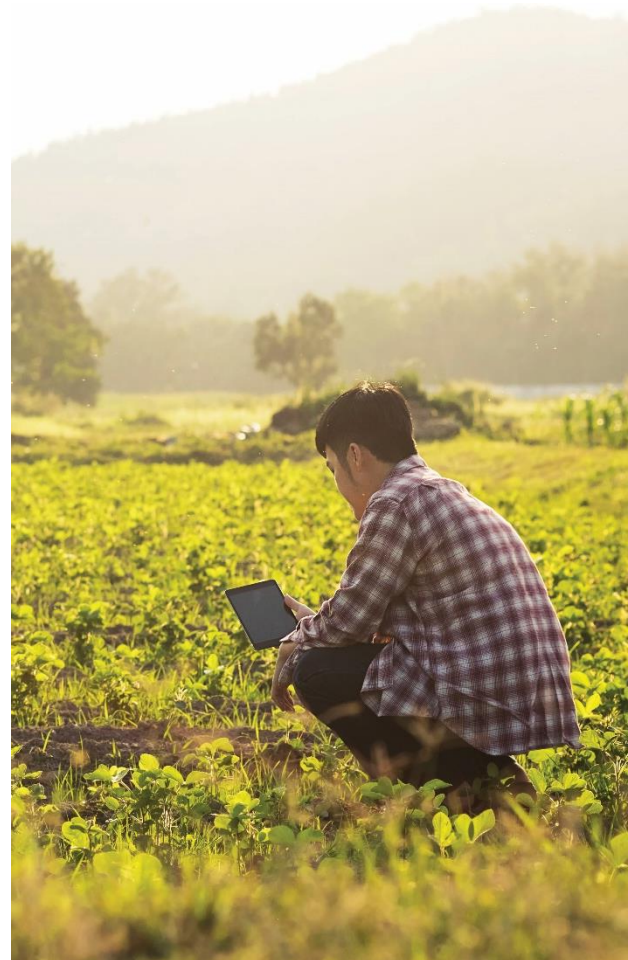
**Lack of land ownership:** Digital finance can help manage the risks of lending to non-traditional borrowers who may not have collateral or a credit history through helping link (and map) the relationships between smallholders and their more credit-worthy value chain partners, such as their buyers or off-takers.

**Farmer aggregation:** Digital finance providers can educate farmers on their financing options

### Solution:

Philanthropic funding could go into ensuring that farm management tool – and information about farm management, including financing options - are available to the regions' smallholders. Presently, the market has not been able to provide these essential services.

On blended finance, philanthropic players need to sustain momentum but also make seed funding more accessible at the very early stage, and tailor the funding to reflect the start-up process of experimentation and prototyping, rather than insist on already proven concepts which may depress the number of solutions that are conceived.



## 5. DIGITAL FARM SERVICES

Digital Farm Services (DFS) – financing platforms, pest trackers, farmer training platforms, to name a few – are set to transform the 71 million smallholder farms in Southeast Asia. The agriculture industry makes up over 10 percent of the region’s gross domestic product and is valued at over U\$620 billion annually. While it is difficult to estimate the future size of the agritech industry, the declining availability of labor in rural areas suggests it could be significant.

DFS have the potential to bring not only greater efficiency to value chains by significantly lowering transaction costs, but also create prosperity for farmers by connecting them to knowledge and markets. As such, digital tools represent one of the most promising means of delivering productivity, profitability and environmental sustainability.

**Facilitated by:** Philipp Klotz (Phandeeyar), Derrick Chiang (Padang & Co), Kevin Robbins (Swisscontact) and Nadia Soerjanto (Grow Asia)

### Challenge: Low Digital Literacy

#### **Problem:**

Low levels of digital literacy among smallholders in Southeast Asia makes it difficult to acquire them as customers to DFS providers. This is especially true for older farmers, who are still the majority of smallholder farmers in Southeast Asia. Although there is a small cadre of younger farmers who understand how to use digital services, this is a small group that does not show significant growth.

#### **Solutions:**

NGOs have the role of providing capacity building programs for farmers to equip them with basic digital literacy. Government needs to provide the infrastructure required to enable the use of technology solutions at a large scale in rural areas. The government needs to work with telecom companies to ensure that internet connectivity is available nation-wide, even in the most rural areas. Agribusinesses could also play a role in providing capacity building programs to improve digital literacy of farmers.

### Challenge: Difficulty of Affecting Behavioral Change

#### **Problem:**

The aging population of smallholder farmers in Southeast Asia leads to another challenge relating to behavior change. Many of them are very set in their ways, and most do not understand the value/benefits that digital solutions could provide to their work on the farm



### **Solutions:**

NGOs have the role of providing capacity building programs for farmers, especially around helping them to transition into adopting a more entrepreneurial mindset. Once farmers are able to shift to becoming more entrepreneurial and business-minded, digital solutions could significantly help them build up their business.

“Champion farmers” in local communities need to show the benefits of DFS to other farmers to help them understand how DFS can help them with their work. Leveraging existing social networks is one of the most effective ways to disseminate knowledge and influence farmer behavior.

Technology entrepreneurs/start-ups need to better understand the local context to design solutions to fit real challenges on the ground.

## **Challenge: Access to Finance**

### **Problem:**

Farmers lack access to easy and affordable financing due to their lack of relationships with the formal banking sector as well as professional bookkeeping and credit history. There are currently many DFS providers in Southeast Asia who are focused on providing financing solutions to smallholder farmers – from peer-to-peer lending, crowdfunding, to name a few. These options are starting to provide an alternative means of financing for smallholder value chains, but they are still limited in terms of scale.

### **Solutions:**

DFS providers should prioritize providing user-friendly tools on farm management in a way that helps the farmers build records of their finances, which can then be used to secure financing. Women of the farming family should be expressly targeted as farm finance management is, in many cases, an extension of the family budget.

Current DFS providers who are collecting data on farmers (and their land) need to work with financial institutions to build a viable digital credit scoring system for smallholder farmers. Financial institutions have a critical role in supporting the efforts of DFS providers in building appropriate credit scoring mechanisms for farmers and providing necessary capital to support the process.

## **Role of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms & Philanthropic Capital**

Philanthropic actors need to make seed funding more accessible at the very early stage, and tailor the funding to reflect the start-up process of experimentation and prototyping, rather than insist on already proven concepts which may depress the number of solutions that are conceived.

The role of multi-stakeholder platforms is to elevate the farmers' voices in the conversation and to ensure that their needs are addressed in the design of digital solutions. Multi-stakeholder platforms are well-positioned to play a role in facilitating a policy dialogue to promote regulatory control to protect the customer (in this case – the smallholder farmer). Regulations around data collection on smallholder farmers is very underdeveloped, which could put them in a very vulnerable position with the increase of technology penetration in smallholder farms.

Another role that multi-stakeholder platforms can play is in bridging start-ups and small technology providers to large agribusinesses. Agribusinesses have the resources to scale the potential impact of digital innovations and reach more smallholder farmers. Through facilitating open innovation events, keynote presentations and networking events, Grow Asia's Digital Program focuses on connecting promising agtech start-ups across the region with our corporate partners.

## 6. SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A range of Social Enterprises have emerged in the agriculture industry in Asia. Like any social enterprise, they seek to solve a social challenge by embedding the solution in a scalable business model.

One of the most common models these social enterprises are adopting is as a trader linking farmers to markets. Approaches vary, but once established as a trading enterprise they can help farmers migrate over to higher value crops, provide training and/or offer farmers high prices. An example of this model is a social business marketing basil from a farmer group in Vietnam, supported by Villgro, who was represented by Kasia Weina in the discussion.

These social enterprises represent an exciting, scalable approach to many of the most pressing issues faced by smallholders, including access to finance, knowledge and quality inputs. The approach is a promising alternative to grant driven projects, which have long been the go-to model for addressing these issues.

**Facilitated by:** Priya Thachadi (Villgro Philippines), Kasia Weina (Evergreen Labs), Paul Voutier (Grow Asia) and Ishwinder Kaur (Grow Asia).

### Challenge: Access to Finance

#### Problem:

These social enterprises face many of the same changes as other small businesses; attracting finance, converting customers and securing the regulatory licenses they need. However, they typically face two additional constraints; firstly by necessity they need to deal with large numbers of suppliers in isolated locations. Secondly, the complexity of attempting to realize two potential incongruous goals, financial performance and social outcomes.

The table group identified several challenges which specifically confront these businesses:

- Recruiting qualified team members to work in rural areas.
- Defining and measuring social targets to the satisfaction of impact investors
- Finding appropriate impact investors
- Maintaining profitably while also addressing social targets.
- Changing perceptions related to farming
- Lack of market access to technology and education

## Role of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms & Philanthropic Capital

Some of these issues are best addressed by each individual social enterprise, while others can be addressed at an ecosystem level. That is, actors such as AVPN, Grow Asia or governments can work at a systems level to enable social enterprise at scale.

The group highlighted to such systems interventions with potential:

- Establishing new tertiary education programs or modifying existing programs to provide graduates who are qualified to either found or help build rural social enterprises. While many current programs provide technical agronomy training, more programs are needed to teach business planning, finance and digitization for agricultural value chains.
- Better networks are needed to help social enterprise founders find investors whose objectives are aligned with their own. The group highlighted the value of networks like AVPN in matching founders and investors.
- Defining tangible targets and demonstrating the impact of investment on livelihoods
- Applying international frameworks to local contexts and demonstrating attractive business models for farming.

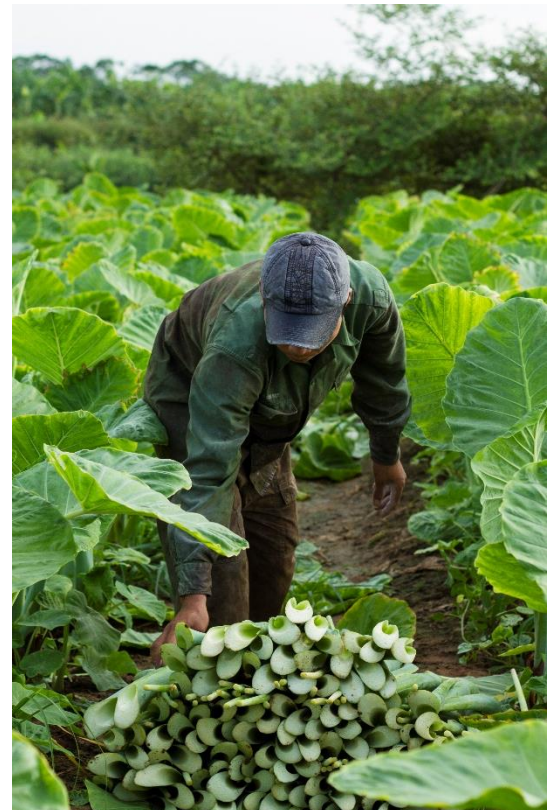
## 6. RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE

There has been an ongoing and long-term shortfall in investment in Agriculture and farming. This is especially an issue as food demands change, products must be moved greater distances, and the market is demanding higher quality and safe food products. Agribusiness are showing a greater interest in making more significant investments in strengthening their supply chains. How can we encourage larger scale investing to become more inclusive, more environmentally sustainable and more socially responsible? Without disincentivize these important investors by trying to impose difficult guidelines and processes.

**Facilitated by:** Margot Quaegebeur (Capital 4 Development) and Grahame Dixie (Grow Asia)

### Challenge: Access to Finance

**Problem:** Finding the right financial backers and partners is a challenging process, so there is a need for creative/innovative funding. This is even more acutely felt by smallholder suppliers, who often cannot meet the demanding monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements of some investors. Examples of innovative funding include patient capital, first-loss cover, and blended finance.



**Solutions:**

Facilitating more efficient & effective partnership brokering/deal making between entrepreneurs and investors. Working with the better and more experienced impact investors – those (like Acumen, Root Capital, Omidyar, Village Capital and C4D) that understand, and, often, can carry out the necessary but painful M&E process of the investments on behalf of the businesses. Tri-parted, hypothecated loans could be yet another pathway, whereby the financier funds the input supplier(s), and the producers are provided in kind the input needed instead of cash. Through this model, the working capital loan is recovered by the agribusiness on behalf of the financier, whereby the loan repayment is deducted from the income from the sales of product to the agribusiness. The payments of farmer suppliers using digital processes, such as e-wallets, has the potential to expedite payments and reduce cash flow deficits and side selling.

## Challenge: Supply & Aggregation

**Problem:**

Smallholder agriculture is typically plagued by low productivity, high unit costs of production, and quality issues - especially around unacceptable agro-chemical residues and high bacterial counts.

**Solutions:**

Investment into digital solutions around advisory services (i.e., Good Agricultural Practices) and traceability. This would be rolled out using leading farmers, demonstration plots, farmer field schools or other communication routes that farmers are most comfortable with. This would also loosen a singular dependence on government extension services.

The 10 thematic areas addressed in the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry. More information can be found at [www.aseanraiguidelines.org](http://www.aseanraiguidelines.org)

 <b>1. Food nutrition security</b>	 <b>2. Economic development</b>	 <b>3. Women &amp; young people</b>	 <b>4. Tenure rights</b>	 <b>5. Natural resources</b>
 <b>6. Technology</b>	 <b>7. Climate change</b>	 <b>8. Rule of law &amp; governance</b>	 <b>9. Impact assessment &amp; accountability</b>	 <b>10. Regional approaches</b>



# THE ORGANIZERS:

## Grow Asia

Grow Asia was established by the World Economic Forum, in collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, to bring together farmers, governments, the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders in Southeast Asia to convene, facilitate and help scale inclusive agriculture value chains as well as multi-stakeholder sectoral coordination. At the core of our work are three goals: to lift the productivity, profitability and environmental sustainability of smallholder agriculture in the region.

Grow Asia currently comprises the regional Grow Asia Secretariat in Singapore; six Country Partnerships, each supported by an in-country team; and 44 Working Groups, organized around specific value chains (such as coffee) or cross-cutting issues (such as agri-finance). The network now engages 480+ partners and is reaching close to 1.4m smallholders in the region.

To learn more, please visit:

 [www.growasia.org](http://www.growasia.org)

 [@Grow\\_Asia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/grow-asia)

 [@Grow\\_Asia](https://twitter.com/Grow_Asia)

## AVPN

As the only comprehensive funders' network in Asia, AVPN is a leading ecosystem builder for the social investment sector with 550+ members globally. AVPN's mission is to catalyze the movement toward a more strategic, collaborative and outcome focused approach to social investing, ensuring that resources are deployed as effectively as possible to address key social challenges facing Asia today and in the future.

To learn more, please visit:

 [www.AVPN.asia](http://www.AVPN.asia)

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