

PS 1.4

HEALTH TECH RISING: YOUTH EDITION

| BACKGROUND

In the contemporary health landscape, "innovation" has become a pivotal buzzword, often touted as the solution to myriad challenges. Yet, the true essence and impact of innovation remain subjects for deeper scrutiny and discussion. This session, "Health Tech and AI Rising: Youth Edition," aims to dissect the concept of innovation, challenging conventional perspectives, such as the idea of "reverse innovation". The concept of innovation in global health often conjures images of cutting-edge technology and digital solutions. The session aims to explore the full spectrum of innovation, from the latest technological advances to the revitalization and integration of traditional medicine, arts, and narrative medicine.

This session will delve into these questions and showcase transformative ideas from young innovators across the globe, highlighting their significant impact on public health and health system strengthening. Throughout the session, speakers will address critical issues such as the scalability of grassroots innovations, the role of technology in democratizing health access, and the impact of young leaders in reshaping health landscapes, particularly in the Global South. We will discuss the dynamic interplay between innovative technologies and cultural practices in shaping health systems that are not only effective but also equitable, thus advancing the discourse on what truly makes an innovation effective in the public health sphere.

| OBJECTIVES

1. To showcase examples of both successes and failures of health tech and AI driven by young leaders from various regions, particularly those from the Global South or underrepresented communities in the Global North. This includes discussing the unique challenges they face, the solutions they have developed, and their journeys to making a significant impact on health systems.
2. To analyze efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and scalability of innovations, highlighting their potential to offer high-quality outcomes at lower costs. This includes a discussion on how the integration of local insights and resource-efficient methodologies can lead to more sustainable and cost-effective products and services that benefit a broader audience.
3. To define and deconstruct "innovation" by critically examining what constitutes true innovation in global health, challenging conventional narratives such as the concept of reverse innovation.
4. To foster collaborative learning among young innovators and health professionals, encouraging a dialogue that bridges geographical differences and amplifies underrepresented voices.



Keynote

Mechai Viravaidya

Chairman

Population and Community Development Association (PDA)
Thailand

After serving as an economist at the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) for eight years, Mechai Viravaidya founded the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) in 1974 to address the unsustainable population growth in Thailand of 7 children per family and an annual growth rate of over 3 percent. A variety of innovative methods were applied in conjunction with mobilizing and training a network of 320,000 rural school teachers and 12,000 village community members to make contraceptives available throughout rural Thailand. This resulted in Thai families having fewer than two children and a more sustainable annual population growth rate of 0.5 percent today.

When HIV/AIDS first appeared in Thailand in the late 1980s, similar approaches were used to initiate a major prevention program. According to UNAIDS, this endeavour achieved a 90 percent decline in new infections and, according to the World Bank, an estimated 7.7 million lives were saved during the period of 1991-2012.

While acting as Chairman of PDA, Khun Mechai was made a member of the Senate during 1987-1991, 1996-2000, and 2000-2006. He was also appointed to such key positions as Thailand's Cabinet spokesman, Deputy Minister of Industry, Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister, and Chairman of several of Thailand's largest government-owned enterprises including Krung Thai Bank, The Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT), and PTT-EP. In addition to these responsibilities, he also served as a Research Associate at Columbia University, as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University and as a Council Member at several Thai Universities. In 2014, the National Reform Assembly elected him as a member of the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Following his success at promoting family planning and HIV prevention, Khun Mechai has aggressively approached the problem of rural poverty by empowering the poor through the Village Development Partnership, to build sustainable entrepreneurial capacity, community empowerment, income generating activities and environmental protection at the village level. This project, which is a partnership between a rural village and a sponsoring company, is marked by extensive community involvement as beneficiaries, planners, managers, and most importantly – as partners and leaders.

In 2008, he established the Mechai Bamboo School in Buriram province, Northeast Thailand, to re-engineer rural education and to enable the school to be a life-long learning center as well as a hub to improve the quality of life of all community members. The Bamboo School aims to foster a new generation of rural youth who are honest and innovative social entrepreneurs and community development leaders. Today, with the help of the private sector, two hundred and forty small rural schools have begun to adopt this concept and have begun to take on a greater role in their surrounding communities.

For his efforts in various development and educational endeavours, Khun Mechai Mechai has been awarded numerous awards, recognition, and honorary doctoral degrees, including those from Melbourne, Monash Universities in Australia and The University of Warwick in England. He was presented with the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service (1994), recognized as one of Asiaweek's "20 Great Asians" (1995), the United Nations Population Award (1997), one of TIME Magazine's "Asian Heroes" (2006), the Bill and Melinda Gates Award for Global Health (2007), the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship (2008). More recently, he was honoured with the Prince Mahidol Award for Public Health (2009) and was selected as the first recipient of the Geelong Grammar School Medal for Service to Society in Australia (2014).

Khun Mechai was educated at Geelong Grammar School, Victoria and the University of Melbourne. He was born in 1941 in Bangkok, Thailand, and is married to Thanpuying Putrie. They have one daughter, Sujima, and two grandchildren.