

■ PROGRAM ON ESCAPING THE MIDDLE – INCOME TRAP: CHAINS FOR CHANGE

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN FOR INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION

Lessons from Regional Peers and the Tatak Pinoy Act

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ABSTRACT

Despite longstanding aspirations to deepen domestic industry, the Philippines' industrial policy has historically lacked enforceable mandates, strong implementation capacity, and institutional alignment. Drawing on comparative experiences in Southeast Asia and recent frameworks emerging from the *Tatak Pinoy* Act (Republic Act No. 11981), this policy brief analyzes how effective industrial policies are structured and sustained. Regional examples such as Malaysia's binding targets and centralized oversight, Vietnam's procurement-led coordination, Thailand's spatial-industrial diagnostics, and Indonesia's more coercive content rules, offer concrete institutional designs. The policy brief highlights that while the passage of R.A. No. 11981 signals renewed commitment, implementation will depend on how the Philippines addresses persistent fragmentation, limited monitoring tools, and weak inter-agency coordination. Insights from the World Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) underscore the urgency of building institutional capacity and policy coherence, particularly amid global disruptions and tightening fiscal space.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the Philippine government has launched successive initiatives aimed at industrial upgrading, from the early postwar push for import-substitution, through liberalization and export promotion in the 1980s–1990s, to more recent attempts to revive manufacturing via sectoral roadmaps and innovation programs. However, these efforts have largely failed to produce deep structural change. Manufacturing value-added as a share of GDP has remained stagnant, research and development (R&D) investment remains among the lowest in ASEAN, and most industrial zones function as enclaves with weak domestic linkages (World Bank 2024, 15; UNCTAD 2024, 22). The challenge has not been the absence of policy

ambition, but the persistent gap between strategy and execution.

Scholars and policymakers alike have pointed to institutional weaknesses as the core constraint. Philippine industrial policy frameworks, such as the Comprehensive National Industrial Strategy (CNIS), and the Inclusive Innovation Industrial Strategy (i3S), are well designed but have typically operated across fragmented agency silos, lacked enforceable performance targets, and failed to integrate procurement, training, and supplier development in a coordinated way (Balaoing 2025, 8; Malaluan 2023). Fiscal incentives dominate the

toolkit, absorbing more than 80 percent of investment promotion resources (CPBRD 2024, 3), but are rarely conditioned on capability-building or technological upgrading.

The enactment of the Tatak Pinoy Act in 2024 (R.A. No. 11981) represents a potential inflection point. Sections 4-6 of the law mandate the formulation and funding of a comprehensive multi-year strategy, backed by a multi-agency Tatak Pinoy Council, and anchored in specific industrial goals. While the full strategy has not yet been officially adopted, the law itself, together with public statements by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI 2025), reflects a shift toward a more structured and institutionalized policy framework. At the same time, the operational challenge remains formidable. As with earlier efforts, implementation success will hinge on whether the new mandates can overcome entrenched coordination failures, build technical capacity, and integrate instruments (e.g., procurement, regulation, finance, training), into a coherent and sequenced architecture.

The Philippine case stands in sharp contrast to regional peers. Malaysia has institutionalized a central industrial council with budget authority and performance enforcement. Vietnam leverages its procurement system to align industrial priorities with investment. Thailand uses spatial-industrial authorities and firm-level diagnostics to target support. Indonesia enforces content requirements using integrated digital licensing. These systems, while distinct in design, all feature mechanisms, which the Philippines has historically lacked: cross-agency enforcement power, diagnostic tools, medium-term procurement planning, and outcome-linked incentives. The following sections examine each of these institutional lessons in detail and explore how the Philippines, starting from the legal basis provided by R.A. No. 11981, might reframe its approach to industrial policy implementation.

COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Countries in Southeast Asia that have sustained industrial transformation did so not merely through policy declarations but by embedding industrial strategy into the legal, fiscal, and administrative machinery of the state. Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia each offer examples of how institutional structures, ranging

from centralized coordination bodies to diagnostic instruments and content regulation, support the long-term execution of industrial goals. These cases reveal design elements absent or only weakly present in the Philippine context.

Malaysia's approach is anchored in a legally mandated, performance-driven framework. The New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP 2030) defines measurable targets for manufacturing growth and research and development intensity. These targets are enforced through the National Industrial Development Council, a cross-ministerial body chaired by the Prime Minister, with authority to oversee implementation, resolve agency overlaps, and align budgets with strategy (MDBC 2023, 13). The plan is linked to key performance indicators and is reviewed annually to ensure accountability. This institutionalization marks a departure from earlier plans that were aspirational but unenforced. In contrast, Philippine industrial strategies have not been historically tied to binding legal instruments or monitored through institutional mechanisms with budgetary control (Balaoing 2025, 9).

Vietnam's model illustrates how procurement planning can serve as a tool for industrial development. The Ministry of Industry and Trade issues five-year procurement plans aligned with sectoral development goals, particularly in electronics and heavy industry. These plans serve as demand signals for firms and are coordinated with state-owned enterprises and domestic suppliers (Vietnam Briefing 2023). This mechanism ensures that public purchasing is synchronized with the country's industrial priorities. In the Philippines, while the New Government Procurement Act (R.A. No. 12009) has introduced the legal basis for developmental procurement, the rules remain general and underutilized. Public agencies continue to follow the lowest-cost principle mandated under Republic Act No. 9184, without sufficient policy guidance or tools to integrate industrial objectives (GPPB 2025, Sec. 2; Rosellon and Medalla 2017, 4). Even after the passage of R.A. No. 11981, procurement remains disconnected from sectoral policy and capability development, with no centralized planning process or medium-term procurement strategies in place.

Thailand's policy regime places strong emphasis on spatial coordination and firm diagnostics. The Eastern Economic Corridor Authority was established by law with financial and regulatory autonomy. It manages investments in advanced manufacturing clusters by coordinating infrastructure, skills, and incentives

within a defined geographic area (Ambashi et. al. 2020, 8). A central feature of Thailand's industrial policy is the use of the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI), a diagnostic tool that firms must complete to access targeted support. This assessment measures operational technology adoption, data systems, and sustainability readiness. The tool allows the government to match support instruments to firm-specific upgrading needs. In contrast, Philippine agencies do not require any capability audit or diagnostic assessment prior to granting incentives through the Board of Investments or the Philippine Economic Zone Authority.¹ Programs such as the Regional Inclusive Innovation Centers (RIICs) are innovative and collaborative but they lack the same level of national mandate and institutional integration that Thailand's spatial-industrial policies demonstrate (Balaoing 2025, 14). They operate more as networked initiatives than as pillars of a unified, government-driven spatial-industrial strategy.²

Indonesia's experience demonstrates how rules on local content, combined with digital governance, can reinforce industrial policy. Since the 2010s, the country has implemented a 30 percent minimum domestic content requirement in several sectors, including energy, construction, and manufacturing. These requirements are enforced through the Online Single Submission (OSS) system, which integrates 27 licensing agencies and allows real-time compliance tracking (Walker and Palaon 2025, 6). By linking procurement eligibility to verified domestic content performance, the system encourages supplier development and disincentivizes reliance on imports. In the Philippines, content rules authorized under R.A. No. 12009 remain weak. Agencies may grant exemptions if local suppliers are deemed lacking in adequate "capacity," a term left undefined in law or policy. The lack of digital compliance tools further limits monitoring and enforcement, undermining the potential of content rules to foster domestic industry (Malaluan 2023).

All four countries exhibit a common feature: the alignment of industrial policy mandates with enforceable tools and institutional authority. Whether through centralized councils, procurement planning, firm

diagnostics, or digital compliance, these governments can translate strategy into coordinated action. By contrast, Philippine agencies continue to operate with dispersed mandates, limited diagnostic instruments, and weak integration between procurement, incentives, and industrial development programs. The passage of the Tatak Pinoy Law (R.A. No. 11981) provides a legal framework for change, but institutional design remains the critical missing link.

DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

While regional peers have gradually institutionalized industrial policy through legal mandates and cross-functional planning bodies, the Philippines continues to face longstanding implementation bottlenecks. These are not simply issues of resourcing or regulatory design, but structural limitations with how public agencies plan, coordinate, and deliver industrial development functions.

One core constraint is the overreliance on fiscal incentives as the default policy tool. More than 80 percent of investment promotion resources have historically gone to tax-based incentives rather than to direct support for innovation, skills upgrading, or supply chain development (CPBRD 2024, 3). Incentive regimes administered through the Board of Investments (BOI) and the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) are not linked to firm-level diagnostics or performance-based reviews. Unlike Thailand, where firms must undergo a SIRI assessment before qualifying for advanced support (Ambashi et. al. 2020, 9), Philippine agencies have no equivalent system to match incentives with technological readiness or upgrading needs.

R&D spending in the Philippines remains below 0.4 percent of GDP, well behind Malaysia and Vietnam (World Bank 2023, 15). Public research institutions lack consistent pathways for collaboration with firms, and innovation funding is fragmented across multiple agencies, including the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Department of Economy, Planning,

1 The Philippine Strategic Investment Priority Plan (SIPP) and the CREATE Act focus on defining priority activities and eligibility, but do not require firms to submit a diagnostic profile of their capabilities as part of the application for tax incentives. The emphasis remains on sector/activity eligibility, not firm-specific readiness.

2 RIICs are described as collaborative platforms that aim to link government, industry, and academia, but no mention of a comprehensive, legislated national mandate or deep institutional integration. The approach is more about mapping, linking and aligning sectors.

and Development (DepDev). Despite the creation of the Innovation Fund under the Philippine Innovation Act (R.A. No. 11293), project financing has been unpredictable, and few programs link innovation efforts to industrial policy objectives. The country's higher education institutions are also unevenly equipped to support firm-oriented technology development, particularly outside Metro Manila (World Bank 2023, 15).

Procurement, which could serve as a strategic lever for local industry development, remains limited in scope. R.A. No. 9184 prioritizes lowest-cost compliance, and while R.A. No. 12009 authorizes developmental procurement, most agencies continue to interpret their mandates narrowly. A 2025 resolution by the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB 2025, Sec. 2) reiterates the potential for public procurement to support local industry and innovation, yet offers no mandatory planning requirements or coordination mechanism. As a result, there is no system for linking medium-term procurement pipelines with local supply development efforts, unlike the structured procurement plans seen in Vietnam (Vietnam Briefing 2023).

Another institutional challenge is the fragmentation of industrial support functions across multiple agencies. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and various state universities and colleges (SUCs) implement overlapping programs in workforce training, research, extension services, and business incubation. However, these programs rarely share data systems, common objectives, or synchronized delivery schedules. A sectoral roadmap for electronics, for instance, may exist within the DTI but remain disconnected from relevant curriculum development in TESDA or product development support from the DOST. This fragmentation has led to duplication, underutilization of facilities, and inconsistent service delivery, particularly in secondary cities and rural production hubs (Balaoing 2025, 11).

Finally, monitoring and evaluation remain underdeveloped. Despite past efforts to install performance-based budgeting, agency-level scorecards often track outputs rather than outcomes. There is no unified monitoring framework for assessing how industrial strategies translate into measurable gains in domestic value-added, firm productivity, or technological deepening. This limits the government's ability to refine

programs or redirect resources based on evidence. Even the reporting provisions under R.A. No. 11981 rely on agency self-reporting unless further institutionalized through an inter-agency monitoring and learning system (Sec. 11).

The passage of R.A. No. 11981 marks an important shift in legal authority, establishing the Tatak Pinoy Council and mandating the formulation and funding of a multi-year industrial strategy (R.A. No. 11981, Sec. 4–6). However, legal enactment is only the first step. Without addressing the domestic constraints identified here (i.e., weak diagnostic systems, fragmented implementation, underutilized procurement, and shallow monitoring), policy coherence will remain elusive. Philippine industrial policy will continue to be aspirational rather than operational unless institutional capabilities are restructured to support execution.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Philippine government now has a legislative foundation for a more structured industrial policy approach, following the enactment of the Tatak Pinoy Act. The law mandates the formulation of a multi-year strategy, the establishment of a Tatak Pinoy Council, and the alignment of government resources toward defined national competitiveness goals (R.A. No. 11981, Sec. 4–6). However, institutional reform, rather than legislative intent alone, will determine whether this effort succeeds where previous strategies faltered.

First, industrial performance targets should be anchored in budgeting and oversight. Malaysia's experience with the National Industrial Development Council shows the importance of a coordinating body that holds legal authority to monitor performance, adjust implementation, and influence inter-agency budget allocations (MDBC 2023, 13). For the Tatak Pinoy Council to play a similar role, it must be empowered not only to coordinate but also to enforce alignment across agencies. This requires access to disaggregated performance data, influence over fiscal programming, and structured implementation reporting. The Council must function as a central node of industrial governance rather than as a purely advisory platform.

Second, the procurement system needs to be redesigned to advance industrial development objectives. Vietnam

demonstrates how public procurement can shape firm behavior and investment decisions through structured planning and predictable demand (Vietnam Briefing 2023). In the Philippines, although R.A. No. 12009 and GPPB Resolution No. 02-2025 provide a legal basis for developmental procurement (GPPB 2025, Sec. 2), implementation remains weak due to the absence of medium-term procurement pipelines and sectoral coordination. Agencies should be required to develop multi-year procurement plans aligned with industrial goals, including local content and supply development objectives.

Third, the government must link incentives to diagnostic assessments. Unlike in Thailand, where firms complete the Smart Industry Readiness Index before receiving advanced support (Ambashi et. al. 2020, 9), Philippine agencies rely on activity-based eligibility without structured evaluation of firm capabilities. A national diagnostic tool should be developed and institutionalized to assess operational readiness, technology adoption, and innovation capacity. Administered jointly by the DTI, DOST, and TESDA, this tool could serve as a prerequisite for accessing fiscal incentives, grants, and technical assistance.

Fourth, local content rules require clearer standards and enforcement mechanisms. Indonesia has implemented a digital licensing platform that tracks content compliance in real time and links it to eligibility for public procurement and permitting (Walker and Palaon 2025, 6). The Philippine system, by contrast, permits exemptions based on undefined assessments of supplier capacity, with no centralized tracking or audit system. A more effective framework would include a supplier registry, phased content thresholds by sector, and an audit protocol to support consistent implementation.

Fifth, innovation programs must be more explicitly connected to industrial policy objectives. While the Innovation Fund created under R.A. No. 11293 is a promising instrument, current implementation lacks strategic focus. Program criteria should prioritize initiatives that support product development, process upgrading, and commercialization in priority industries. Integration between the Philippine Innovation Council and the Tatak Pinoy Council is also needed to ensure coherent targeting of public resources (Balaoing 2025, 12; World Bank 2023, 15).

Finally, monitoring and evaluation must move beyond procedural compliance. R.A No. 11981 requires periodic review of the strategy, but without an independent monitoring unit or outcome-based evaluation system, reviews may remain superficial. Effective industrial policy requires feedback mechanisms that guide adjustments in program design, funding allocation, and sectoral prioritization based on real outcomes such as value-added generation, technological diffusion, and firm survival rates. These evaluations should inform both executive decisions and congressional oversight.

The Tatak Pinoy Act provides an opportunity to reconfigure the institutional structure of Philippine industrial policy. Lessons from regional peers make clear that legal mandates must be paired with governance systems that align plans, instruments, and actors around measurable results. Without these institutional foundations, policy ambition will continue to outpace implementation capacity.

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