



Grow Asia Civil Society Council Meeting 2019

Tuesday 17 September 2019

Meeting Overview

The Civil Society Council is made up of representatives of non-governmental organizations who are willing to share their expertise and advice on social and environmental challenges to Grow Asia and its partners and projects. Following the in-person meeting of the Grow Asia Civil Society Council at the Grow Asia Forum in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2018, the virtual meeting shared updates and defined next steps on the joint action agenda to be taken through this multi-stakeholder platform. Key points are summarized below, as an input to the Civil Society Council's on-going discussions.

Opening Remarks from Grahame Dixie, Executive Director of Grow Asia

Grahame Dixie articulated the following three major areas of progress for Grow Asia in 2019:

- Launch of the 6th Country Partnership, Grow PNG, with support from Australia's DFAT.
- The Digital Program, through financial and technical support from private sector partners, included a [Hackathon](#) in Jakarta and Singapore and the [Digital ASEAN Program](#) (DAP). Several winning teams from the Hackathon began conversations with corporate partners to conduct proof-of-concepts, and start-ups in the first cohort of the DAP are partnering with corporate partners to conduct pilots.
- Deepening relationship with the ASEAN Secretariat, which requested Grow Asia to develop the ASEAN Guidelines for Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (ASEAN RAI Guidelines). Grow Asia conducted a series of public consultation events and gathered feedback which led to the adoption of the ASEAN RAI Guidelines in 2018 by the ASEAN Secretariat and new opportunities in 2019.

Key Points from the Discussion

- 1. Leveraging Lessons from the Digital Program.** Digital technology was recognized as one of the most effective ways to help smallholder farmers because of its potential to reach scale while reducing transaction costs. Members expressed tremendous support for the Digital Program and were interested in how learnings from the program can be used to invigorate other equally important—but perhaps not as exciting—areas of Grow Asia's work. Success factors for the Digital Program include: 1) the enormous momentum in digitization within the agribusiness sector (pressure on agribusinesses to respond to disruptors and fast-paced change facing the industry), 2) the layering of different activities (thought leadership series, open innovation events, accelerator program, and training opportunities) that creates multiple touch points at different levels within one organization (from CEO to technical staff), and 3) proximity to regional executives and VCs who are based in Singapore. While it might be difficult to replicate the Digital Program (without the same type of momentum driving the sector), the layered value approach can be used across other Grow Asia programs.

Action: Grow Asia will continue building relationships with start-up and corporate partners developing digital solutions for smallholders through different elements of the program, from open innovation events (i.e. Hackathon) to thought leadership workshops (i.e. Digital Learning Series) to continue building the smallholder digital ecosystem. IFAD is supporting a scoping study for Grow Asia to create a more comprehensive regional program.



2. Building Connections with Private Sector and Farmers. Council members recognized the value Grow Asia brings to build partnerships between farmers, policymakers, and the private sector. Following the adoption of the ASEAN RAI Guidelines, Grow Asia will pursue two workstreams related to the Guidelines: 1) the alignment of private and public investment policies/regulations with the Guidelines and 2) the development a regional blended learning program (which includes e-learning and face to face modules) to create a cadre of people from public, private, and CSO sectors who are trained to integrate the Guidelines into their individual job scopes. This follow-up work is likely to be funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), among others. IFAD may possibly support farmer organizations and CSOs to attend the blended learning program. IFAD is also in discussion with Grow Asia to build a database of farmer organizations to facilitate connections with agribusinesses.

Action: Grow Asia will link Council members to opportunities in the region and welcome their engagement to operationalize the RAI Guidelines and boost farmer cooperatives' engagement with the private sector.

3. Collaborations with Civil Society Council Members. Members pointed to specific projects in PNG and Vietnam where they saw room for collaboration, such as to introduce the RAI Guidelines to Vietnam, and to leverage digital tools in PNG to distribute information for more inclusive development. Further, members were interested in areas of collaboration related to the Tropical Forest Alliance, on topics of urban resilience and agriculture particularly related to indices/best practices in Indonesia and Myanmar. Other platforms such as the Sustainable Rice Platform are seen as less effective among members. Finally, there may be ways for Civil Society Council members to engage in the growing challenge of the Fall Armyworm (FAW), a pest that attacks maize crops and recently arrived in ASEAN. There is need for collaboration to communicate essential information about spread, controls and treatment of the FAW to millions of smallholders.

Action: Grow Asia Secretariat and CP staff will reach out to Council members to identify country-level or regional cross-collaborations (i.e. PNG, Vietnam, Myanmar), and explore collaborations with organizations that are delivering similar programs in the region (i.e. Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE)). Grow Asia will develop and present a set of recommendations on FAW management including exchange of best practices.

4. Opportunities for Funding. Australia has indicated continued support for Grow Asia in its next phase. Notwithstanding, Grow Asia will face a shortfall in funding over the next 12-18 months. Regional programs, including Digital, will be reduced as Grow Asia streamlines its operating costs while continuing to seek other sources of funding. IFAD's scoping study could potentially unlock a further US\$3-3.5 million for a more comprehensive Digital Program. In parallel, Grow Asia is in discussion with Enterprise Singapore on an agri-innovation lab (S\$3 million + S\$7 million start-up grants) and has also submitted proposals to Korea's MAFRA for digital program expansion and core funding (which will only be available in 2021 at the earliest). SDC, in principle, will support the continuation of the RAI work and Grow Asia will leverage their commitment to request support from IFAD and JAIF.

Action: Grow Asia will employ cost-saving strategies such as reducing rent, fewer secretariat staff while continuing to seek other sources of funding (IFAD, Korea, JAIF). Grow Asia welcomes further ideas or feedback on areas of interest for other CSOs to develop and grow regional programs.



Meeting Participants

- Harm Haverkort, Country Director, Agriterra
- Simon Badcock, Senior Advisor, Sustainable Land/Seascapes, Conservation International
- Huynh Tien Dung, Vietnam Country Director, IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Lisbeth Jespersen, Head of International Partnerships and Fundraising, IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Ade Soekadis, Executive Director, Mercy Corps Indonesia
- Tuan Anh Vu, Asia Private Sector Advisor and Coordinator, Oxfam
- Alison Rusinow, Country Director, SNV Vietnam
- Prashant Rana, Regional Director, Southeast Asia, Swisscontact
- Fiona Lynn, Director, Agricultural Development and Food Security Section, Development Economics, Private Sector and Agricultural Branch, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Grahame Dixie, Executive Director, Grow Asia
- Reginald Lee, Director, Country Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Paul Voutier, Director, Knowledge and Innovation, Grow Asia
- Pranav Sethaputra, Manager, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Nadia Soerjanto, Manger, Knowledge and Innovation, Grow Asia
- Erin Sweeney, Associate, Partnerships, Grow Asia