



## Grow Asia Civil Society Council Virtual Meeting

Wednesday 13 December 2017

### Meeting Summary

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 Phnom Penh earlier this year, 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.

#### ***Key Points from the Discussion***

1. **Measuring and aligning success.** There is an appreciation within the Civil Society Council that Grow Asia has progressed over the last twelve months. Performance numbers in terms of partners, working groups or value chain projects reflect growth and is supported by success stories from the Country Partnerships. Mercy Corps, as the Civil Society representative in the Steering Committee, reflected the positive messages given to Grow Asia from private sector, ASEAN, donors, and WEF during the Steering Committee call. Civil Society members understood the need to measure the influence of the Grow Asia network, and are willing to share the role in bringing their skills of impact measurement. Grow Asia and members agreed that the aggregation of all the networks impact numbers is important to reflect the overall impact of the community's work, as well as to encourage learning and innovation.
2. **Presentation of the twin-track strategy.**
  - a. Track one: building competence of Country Partnerships to enable better delivery, and become the go-to interlocutor with government (e.g. measure results, enable multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnerships, effective working groups, draw in a wider range of stakeholders, etc.). The Grow Asia Singapore based Secretariat is uniquely, experienced, positioned and staffed to lift the capacity, mode of operation and effectiveness of the five individual Country Partnerships.
  - b. Track two: enabling the delivery of results at scale through a limited number of focused activities, i.e. policy engagement, innovations in agricultural finance, digital solutions, creating connections and linkages between companies and other stakeholders. Such acceleration and amplification could only be carried out by a specialist group operating regionally – like Grow Asia.

Representatives from the civil society supported the twin-track approach as being practical, strategic, and well aligned with stakeholders' definitions of success.
3. **Learnings and knowledge transfer potential** within the network is tremendous interest in gaining knowledge, particularly around emerging good practices. Civil Society members have a robust private-sector portfolio, engagements in various global commodity value chains and a number of new and innovative interventions, particularly on environmental issues. Grow Asia is keen to distil some of those learnings and share them with the network. Grow Asia expressed its intention to do more around the environmental sustainability aspect of its goals and will seek further discussions with Civil Society members who have successfully embedded environmental impact into their project designs.



4. **Government/policy engagement** is a great opportunity for further influence. Civil Society members were notably enthusiastic about this approach, recognizing that policy and government engagement is a necessary precursor to successfully addressing rural prosperity and environmental issues. They encouraged Grow Asia to work and influence sub-national government bodies as well, and believed that there was a role for Grow Asia in serving as a platform to provide support and layout policy options for policy-makers.
5. **Scaling up** is an area that needs to be tackled. There have been encouraging developments particularly from the most mature Country Partnerships of Indonesia and Vietnam (e.g. Indonesia Palm Oil, Vietnam Coffee). Civil Society members appreciate the attention to reach scale and are open to exploring new approaches (e.g. jurisdictional/landscapes approach) with Grow Asia. The Grow Asia platform is a useful way of spurring and catalysing innovation and learning, from which scale can be delivered by partners.

### ***Grow Asia's Response***

1. **Measuring and aligning success.** One of the important 'off-line' conversations we have had with members of Civil Society Council has been around Grow Asia's policy on what indicators we use. Grow Asia collects two types of data: Firstly, we aggregate the results from all the different projects / sub-projects under the networks' Working Groups. Grow Asia does not claim any attribution for these figures, but they are important in demonstrating to donors and the global community the collective scale of impact of the whole Grow Asia network. Secondly, Grow Asia also measures a number of other factors, more directly effected by our work (e.g. numbers and types of partners, qualitative measures of the capacity of working groups and country secretariats, numbers and stages of development of individual projects, surveys of stakeholder opinions). These serve as useful management information (MIS) to help guide our resource allocation and in selecting the most meaningful activities. Grow Asia will continue to work on improving the robustness of the monitoring and evaluation and MIS results with the aim of using this data to (i) better manage the network, and (ii) monitor and report its performance. Grow Asia has commissioned a study to create a deeper understanding of the capacity, effectiveness and success factors of the individual Working Groups. Currently, there is significant variation in their measured capacity and effectiveness. The work will codify emerging good practices and the lessons will be embedded into 2018's trainings at the Practitioners' Workshops and Secretariat Workshop. Next year, Grow Asia will be putting greater emphasis on 'partnership facilitation' in response to the points made by both the Business Council and Steering Committee on the importance of Grow Asia in creating new connections and helping "join the dots".
2. **Presentation of the twin-track strategy.** Grow Asia is grateful for the endorsement from the GACSC for the proposed twin track strategy going forward. This responds to stakeholders wanting effective Country Secretariats to provide an ongoing platform for the delivery of pre-competitive solutions, both at the individual value chain level and at a sectoral level. With most of the existing Country Secretariats at an early stage in their development, Track 1 aims to improve their operation, lift their capacity, and enable them to become the primary interlocutor with Government and Donors on the issues of modernizing food supply and in linking smaller scale farmers into strong, sustainable supply chains. Meanwhile, Track 2 focuses on important functions that are best undertaken at a regional level to reach scale, which are only possible through a regional Secretariat. What was particularly encouraging was the keen interest expressed by GACSC members in Grow Asia's plans for facilitating deeper and more a deliberative approach for policy dialogues.



3. **Learnings and knowledge transfer potential.** Stakeholder surveys have shown a high level of satisfaction for Grow Asia's learning agenda. Much of these learnings are new and derived from the lessons from the field (i.e. the implicit knowledge that is uniquely based on experience) as well as explicit knowledge (i.e. the factual knowledge generated by studies). These lessons are disseminated at the annual Practitioners' Workshop, included in the trainings of Secretariat staff, via hard- and soft-copy reports, as well as at the Grow Asia Forum and other events. The Grow Asia Learning Alliance (GALA) was launched in May 2017 with the appointment of a Learning Alliance Manager. Looking ahead, the number of case studies will be increased, and generic lessons distilled. New methods of communication will be used including regional webinars, communities of practice, visual mediums, and personal stories. The Practitioners' Workshop will evolve to 5 in-country workshops in 2018 to better meet the Country Partnerships' needs and to increase the number of participants.
4. **Government/policy engagement.** The increasingly important role of the Country Secretariats in policy development has encouraged Grow Asia to develop a strategy for guiding policy development across the region. Grow Asia has commissioned a review of the agricultural policies of all five countries plus ASEAN, and a database of contacts, agencies, and their roles as a core tool for Country Secretariats to be able to take a more strategic and focused approach to policy engagement. Grow Asia will train the Secretariats in government policy engagement techniques and tools and support them to organize their own government engagement events. Grow Asia also notes Civil Society's enthusiasm around policy engagement and will work on assisting them in being able to voice their ideas and innovations in the on-going policy dialogues.
5. **Scaling up.** An important lesson from Grow Asia's analysis is that the target 10 million smallholder beneficiaries cannot be achieved through individual value chain projects alone. The stretch target figure has challenged the Grow Asia team to think creatively as to what are the interventions which offer the greatest possibility of instigating behavioural change at scale. Consequently, Grow Asia has given much greater attention to the alternative routes to reaching larger numbers of smaller scale producers via Track 2. These have included: (i) the pathways through which the initial value chain project successes can reach a greater number of farmers, (ii) working to develop the use of digital tools, and (iii) improving the access to finance, and (iv) the emerging value of policy dialogue.

## Meeting Participants

- Jared Rowell, Regional Manager - South and East Asia, Mercy Corps, Thailand
- Prashant Rana, Regional Director South-East Asia, Swisscontact, Indonesia
- Stephen Krecik, Senior Manager for Sustainable Agriculture, Global Technical Lead for Palm Oil and Rubber, Rainforest Alliance, Indonesia
- Stephen Watson, Head of Corporate Engagement and Asia WWF Markets Practice, WWF International, Malaysia
- Rik van Keulen, Global Horticulture Coordinator, SNV, Netherlands
- Grahame Dixie, Executive Director, Grow Asia, Singapore