



## Grow Asia Civil Society Council Meeting 2019

Wednesday 5 August 2020

### Meeting Overview

The Grow Asia 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. 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.

### **Synthesis of Grow Asia Key Progress Points**

Grahame Dixie articulated the following major areas of progress for Grow Asia in the last twelve months:

- Launch of the 6<sup>th</sup> Country Partnership, Grow PNG, with support from Australia's DFAT
- Continuation of funding from Australia's DFAT, with a second tranche of funds coupled with new funding from Switzerland for the ASEAN Responsible Agricultural Investing (ASEAN-RAI) program
- Nearly 1.8 million farmers reached and 970,000 participating in the network's projects. The numbers continue to increase, with an aggregate incremental income increase now more than US\$80 million per annum
- Close engagement with the ASEAN Secretariat - now accredited as an Entity Associated with ASEAN, and coordinating a regional response on COVID-19 and pest and diseases

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

**1. Gender Mainstreaming.** Civil Society partners expressed strong support for the increased focus on this important agenda. Council members observed that more can be done to raise awareness of women's rights in the household and beyond to other disadvantaged communities. The public sector do not necessarily recognize this as a central issue to their work and Grow Asia can provide guidance for stakeholders. They provided two timely reminders: (i) to ensure that gender is integrated into all of Grow Asia's work, not as a stand-alone program, and (ii) to broaden inclusion to other marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, indigenous communities, etc.

**Action:** Grow Asia is finalizing its gender strategy that will identify opportunities for gender mainstreaming at the farmer-, partner- and network-level. Grow Asia will seek to contribute as a facilitator, convener and sharer of best practices. A mapping exercise will commence to survey what partners are already doing in this space and in-country training (especially to understand the business case for being more gender inclusive) will be conducted towards the end of this year. As Grow Asia seeks new partnerships with donors and other partners (notably WOCAN which recently joined the Civil Society Council), we invite partners to share current projects that they are doing around gender and explore ways to collaborate in this workstream.

**2. ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (ASEAN-RAI).** Council members expressed their backing for the guidelines but also pointed to the need to translate such guidelines and policies--of which there are already many--into practice and adoption. Ideas raised included a stocktake of existing case studies or policy studies, as well as support to NGOs/CSOs working on ASEAN-RAI.



**Action:** Grow Asia recognizes the importance of ensuring that the ASEAN-RAI is locally-grounded for partners to be able to apply it back to their respective communities and contexts. Case studies of positive (and negative) examples will be undertaken to build up a repository of best practices. Grow Asia will also be developing a learning program targeted at practitioners from the public and private sector. This learning program will be embedded into a regional host institution to ensure continuity beyond the project.

- 3. Regional Response to COVID-19 and the Role of Digital.** Civil society partners expressed appreciation for Grow Asia's leadership in convening multi-stakeholder Working Groups to provide an action plan to "build back better". Members see digitalization playing a bigger role in the post-COVID new normal, e.g. disseminating information to farmers on health and hygiene, as well as transmission and prevention. Gender considerations are paramount: who has access to mobile phones and are they using it to get information about health/finances/marketing. The supporting ecosystem is also important: would farmers who have mobile money get improved services?

**Action:** Grow Asia agrees with the above considerations and will continue to incorporate them as part of the design of the COVID responses as well as to its Digital Programs (e.g. using chat rooms and mediums that farmers are using to guide conversation). The preliminary outcomes of the multi-stakeholder Working Groups have been shared with the SOM-AMAF and will be shared at the Grow Asia Forum with an aim towards an ASEAN endorsed event by 4Q2020.

- 4. Other comments.** Council members drew attention to the work they are doing at a landscape level, especially on sustainable practices for climate change adaptation. Partners see Grow Asia as playing a role in supporting farmers to engage in sustainable production while meeting requirements of end-market buyers. Related to this is ensuring that farms are productive especially as jobless factory workers move back to rural areas. Ensuring access to land and livelihood will act as a shock absorber for COVID layoffs.



### ***Meeting Participants***

- Marlene Ramirez, Secretary General, Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA)
- Fitriani Ardiansyah, Country Representative for Indonesia and Malaysia, IDH-Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Tran Thi Quynh Chi, Regional Director, Asia Landscapes, IDH-Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Carin Smaller, Director, International Institute for Sustainable Development
- Mark West, Regional Director, Southeast Asia Program, Landesa
- Zaw Win, Land & Agriculture Administration Lead, Landesa
- Robert Cole, Responsible Agricultural Investment Adviser, Mekong Regional Land Governance
- Ade Soekadis, Executive Director, Mercy Corps Indonesia
- Prashant Rana, Director, Southeast Asia, Swisscontact
- Nisha Onta, Regional Coordinator for Asia, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & NRM (WOCAN)
- Denise Westerhout, Specialist, Markets Practice, WWF International
- Grahame Dixie, Executive Director, Grow Asia
- Reginald Lee, Director, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Pranav Sethaputra, Manager, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Erin Sweeney, Manager, Sustainable Business & Investment, Grow Asia
- Nadia Soerjanto, Manager, Innovation, Grow Asia