



Grow Asia Civil Society Council Meeting at Grow Asia Forum 2018 Wednesday 12 September 2018

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 Grow Asia Forum which was held in Hanoi, the 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:

- The Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade has given Grow Asia a no-cost extension until December 2019
- Grow Asia is exploring expanding its country partnership to Papua New Guinea
- A key objective of Grow Asia in the next few months is to look for a constellation of funders and donors. The concept of requesting a membership fee to be paid to the Grow Asia Secretariat in Singapore was raised at the Grow Asia Business Council meeting, which was received positively as long as Grow Asia was able to "address the needs" of paying partners
- The primary discussion topics revolved around (1) fundraising, (2) a "big idea" for Grow Asia looking forward and (3) how we work together with our members and councils.

Key Points from the Discussion

1. Improving farmer representation to encourage a neutral multi stakeholder partnership platform was echoed by the Civil Society members in response to the concern raised by Grahame Dixie, about overly relying on the private sector to fund Grow Asia. While it is important to engage the private sector, the council stressed the importance of managing the interests of the private sector to ensure corporates do not dominate or influence the agenda. Additionally, the council expressed concern that though examples exist, civil society organizations (CSOs) are not always included in the design and implementation of value chain projects in the Grow Asia network and requested that CSOs get involved with these interventions from an earlier stage, with Grow Asia continuing to create platforms and avenues for this partnership.

Action: Grow Asia agreed to spend larger proportion of funds to sponsor more farmer associations/cooperatives to attend Grow Asia meetings and engage in dialogue.

2. Government/policy engagement is a great opportunity for further influence. Civil Society members reiterated their enthusiasm about this approach, recognizing that policy and government engagement is a necessary precursor to successfully addressing policy issues in a more concerted effort and on an ASEAN level. Civil Society members articulated that the policy conversation is currently disjointed, which makes it challenging for multi stakeholder partners to come together on a unified advocacy message or to bring suggestions or ideas to government on the country level. Members suggested that Grow Asia think about the most dynamic points of engagement and continue to convene dialogue which brings together and aligns the interests of donors, CSOs and private sector representatives, instead of one party dominating or influencing the agenda to suit their interests only. One of the members suggested that Grow Asia explore these conversations based on (1) commodities in short supply, (2) issue/sector-based conversations, or (3) sub-regions as the countries are incredibly diverse.



Action: Grow Asia agreed to explore these suggestions in more detail especially how we might help convene greater Civil Society influences in policy dialogues.

3. **Digital Extension was cited as a key component for Grow Asia to reach scale.** Grahame asked for feedback from the Council on a proposal from the Steering Committee for Grow Asia convene a digital platform. The Grow Asia team outlined a proposal to create a digital library of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) which could be used by digital solutions providers across the ASEAN region. The council agreed that such a platform could help farmers access better advice. However, the members also highlighted that the platform would need a strong business model in place, clear principles embedded into its design, and a strategy to ensure women could access to the advice.

Action: The council is open to creating a more formal arrangement to enable the knowledge and experience of the Civil Society including other stakeholders in the Grow Asia network to contribute to project design missions.

Meeting Participants

- Harm Haverkort, Country Director, Agriterra
- Jose Romeo Ebron, Cooperative Development Program Manager, Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development
- Fiona Lynn, Director, Agricultural Development and Food Security Section, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Lisbeth Jespersen, Head of International Partnerships and Fundraising, IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Huynh Tien Dung, Country Director, Vietnam, IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative
- Zaw Win, Land Administration Director, Landesa
- Jennifer Bielman, Country Director, Mercy Corps Indonesia
- Drew Johnson, Program Director, Market Development, Mercy Corps Myanmar
- Lilian Mercado, Regional Director for Asia, Oxfam
- Stephen Krecik, Senior Manager, Palm Oil, Rainforest Alliance
- Alison Rusinow, Country Director, SNV Vietnam
- Stephen Watson, Specialist, Markets Practice, WWF International
- Grahame Dixie, Executive Director, Grow Asia
- Paul Voutier, Director, Knowledge and Innovation, Grow Asia
- Ishwinder Kaur, Manager, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Pranav Sethaputra, Manager, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Somang Yang, Manager, Partnerships, Grow Asia
- Nadia Soerjanto, Associate, Knowledge and Innovation, Grow Asia