

**Grow Asia Partners' Advisory Council Meeting
Minutes of the Meeting - 29 January 2024 16.00 PM (UTC+8)**

Time and Place

The Grow Asia Partners' Advisory Council Meeting was held on Monday, 29 January 2024, at 16:00 hrs, via Zoom.

Attendance: 49 participants

Members	
Organization	Representative
ASEAN Secretariat	Kanchana Wanichkorn
AsiaDHRRA	Marlene Ramirez
AsiaDHRRA	Cezar Belangel
Australia DFAT	Fiona Lynn
Food Action Alliance	Adam Gerstenmier
GIZ	Wolfgang Weinmann
IDH	Huynh Tien Dung
IDRC	Vikas Kumar
IFC	Marta Bogdanic
IFAD	Liliana Miro Quesada
Mercy Corps	Ade Soekadis
NTU	William Chen
Oxfam	Shubert Ciencia
Rainforest Alliance	Chandra Panjiwibowo
Save the Children	Mei-Ing Cheok
Save the Children	Sabastian Saragih
Swisscontact	Prashant Rana
Swisscontact	Ross Jaax
UK FCDO	Christabel Sadgrove
Viet Nam MARD	Hanh Hong Pham
WOCAN	Nisha Onta

Secretariat Staff	
Beverly Postma	Grow Asia
Pranav Rastogi	Grow Asia
Daphne Wong	Grow Asia

Apologies	
Organization	Representative
Japan JAIF	Naoki Minamiguchi
Singapore EDB	Jacqueline Poh
Switzerland SDC	Marylaure Crettaz

Guests	
CGIAR - IRRI	Dr. Cao Duc Phat
CGIAR - IRRI	Valerien Pedé
CGIAR - IRRI	Benedict Pamatmat
CGIAR - CIAT	Stephan Weise
IISD	Sean Woolfrey
IPSARD	Ngoc Minh Le
Jollibee Group Foundation	Gisela Tiongson
Lao PDR MAF	Thatheva Saphangthong
Mission of Japan to ASEAN	Yosuke Kawamoto
STDF	Marlynn Hopper
USAID	Daniel Whyner

Secretariat Staff (cont.)	
Paul Voutier	Grow Asia
Angel Bautista	PPSA Philippines
Insan Syafaat	PISAgro Indonesia

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Amy Chua	Grow Asia
Ken Maharani	Grow Asia
Fanny Perdu	Grow Asia
Chrissa Borja	Grow Asia
Cherry Cunanan	Grow Asia
Van Tu Hoang	Grow Asia
Tripti Bhadauriya	Grow Asia
Lavannya Sirimanne	Grow Asia

Boreth Sun	CPSA Cambodia
David Stewart	Grow PNG
Thuy Nguyen	PSAV Vietnam

The meeting was co-chaired by Dr. Kanchana Wanichkorn, representing the ASEAN Secretariat; and Marlene Ramirez, representing the Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA).

1. Call to Order

The Co-Chairs opened the meeting, introduced themselves and welcomed all members, and declared that a quorum was present.

2. Approval of agenda

The agenda was duly approved with no further amendment.

3. Approval of minutes from previous meeting

A motion to approve the Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Grow Asia Governance Councils held on 11th September 2023 was proposed by Marlene Ramirez, approved by the Council.

4. Executive Director's Report

Beverley Postma, Grow Asia Executive Director, presented an overview of developments and activities since the last meeting and shared updates on Governance and Membership, Impact Fund Progress, and Program Priorities for 2024.

Governance and Membership

The role and membership structure of the advisory councils were outlined, highlighting the diverse engagement from various sectors. Grow Asia's Partners' Advisory Council is nearing capacity with new interest from impact investors, government agencies, and philanthropies.

Regional and Country Activities

The [Grow Asia Investment Forum 2023](#), held on 12 September 2023, convened 219 senior leaders representing 127 organizations from 20 countries. Notably, 46% of the attendees were women, reflecting Grow Asia's commitment to gender diversity and inclusion. The Forum also featured a strong line up of women speakers, accounting for 63% of the speaker faculty. The forum staged thought leaders on food systems transformation and highlighted expert discussions on digitalization, women's economic empowerment, responsible investing, and climate finance.

Grow Asia's Special Feature at COP28 highlighted engagements that raised the profile of Southeast Asia and the role of the agricultural sector in global climate negotiations. A strong focus was placed on the importance of empowering women as vital leaders in agri-food value chains and the urgent

need for tailor-made blended finance. Key outcomes pursued at COP28 aim to convert commitments into measurable and viable actions at the country and field levels.

Recent agricultural initiatives and developments across Grow Asia's Country Chapters in Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Papua New Guinea highlighted the growth and expansion of the network. Notable activities included Vietnam's International Rice Festival, collaborations with ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture, and projects supporting sustainable rural development in the region. Future plans focus on strengthening partnerships, evaluating impact, and addressing financial challenges that pose a barrier to farm-gate adoption of digitalization and climate-smart technologies. Grow Asia aims to consolidate efforts and scale initiatives to effectively respond to climate priorities and support small agricultural businesses in Southeast Asia.

Grow Asia also welcomed a new Country Director for Papua New Guinea, David Stewart, who is leading the preparations for an investment forum aimed at convening public-private partnerships to accelerate the scale-up of an agricultural growth corridor in the Markham Valley.

5. Global Food Systems Priorities and Opportunities

Adam Gerstenmier, Executive Director of Food Action Alliance (FAA) outlined FAA's partnership with Grow Asia that focuses on addressing the convergence of food systems and climate priorities. Critical efforts include integrating climate considerations into national, regional, and global food system strategies, with four pillars of work identified: national-level action, engagement with non-state actors, innovation, and scaling up finance. He highlighted the outcomes of the COP28 Food Systems efforts, including the signing of the Emirates declaration by 159 heads of state and government, focusing on five intentions for action. Initiatives such as the Convergence Initiative and Technical Cooperation Collaborative were introduced to support implementation at the country level. The goal is to have at least 100 countries enhance their strategies and develop investable programs by COP30 in 2025, with a strategy and work plan emphasizing collaboration and support for countries in improving their techniques and programs. The Food Action Alliance, with Grow Asia as a key partner, aims to scale up flagship initiatives in regions like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia, fostering collaboration and learning across global contexts.

Dr. Kanchana Wanichkorn, Director of Sectoral Development of the ASEAN Secretariat summarized key initiatives in the ASEAN region addressing climate change, agriculture, and food security. She emphasized the endorsement of the ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality and explained the priorities of the Lao PDR Government as they assume the Chair of ASEAN. These include specific initiatives such as the reduction of crop burning, promotion of sustainable agriculture, and using digital technologies to reduce carbon footprints. Dr. Kanchana also discussed ASEAN's efforts to address long term climate change impacts and adaptation strategies in the region.

She highlighted the challenges of scaling small-scale projects into more extensive portfolios that could attract investors. She suggested the need for intermediaries to connect successful programs and projects, making them scalable. She highlighted the importance of addressing gaps in policy implementation and collaboration with Grow Asia's Council members, particularly the private sector, to facilitate the transition towards sustainable practices and policies.

6. Members' responses and Post-COP28 and Davos 2024 priorities for 2024

Pranav Rastogi, Head of Communications at Grow Asia, led an interactive discussion on post-COP28 priorities for 2024 to gather insights from the attendees. This discussion garnered the following takeaways:

- Common barriers that are inhibiting the translation of government commitments into action include a lack of: access to finance for farmers and siloed actions of governments and private sector.
- Priorities for action include accelerating regenerative agriculture and climate smart solutions; building public private partnerships; investing in climate smart and agroecology transitions.

Members were invited to share their insights on challenges and priorities this year:

- CGIAR - IRRI highlighted how their research focuses on five impact areas: nutrition, health, food security, job creation, and poverty reduction. They also prioritize reducing greenhouse gas emissions in rice production and addressing climate-resilient farming. Through partnerships, they disseminate technologies to smallholder farmers in Asia and Africa.
- The WTO's Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) highlighted their ongoing projects, including promoting safe sea trade in the Asia-Pacific region and developing biopesticides to address pesticide-related issues. STDF also emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships, regulatory practices, and certification processes to ensure effective SPS measures while minimizing trade costs. Scaling up initiatives and encouraging collaborative discussions are also considered as key challenges.

7. Progress Report on Grow Asia's Public-Private Impact Funds and Programs

Grow Asia presented updates on the deployment of its [four blended finance facilities](#) **GrowVentures, GrowHer, GrowRight, and GrowBeyond.**

GrowVentures: Agri-Food Innovation

GrowVentures is accelerating the adoption of climate-smart innovations and placing existing digital solutions into the hands of farmers. The Smallholder Economic Empowerment through Digital Solutions (SEEDS) Project kicked off in October 2023. This multi-country initiative is funded by the Government of Korea and delivered by Grow Asia in partnership with IFAD, who together are using a multi-stakeholder approach to expand existing and new digital solutions in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Philippines.

An Innovation Challenge will be launched in line with the priorities of Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). The aim is to identify and scale up existing technologies targeted at low-emissions rice, benefiting both the business sector and farmers. The Members of Grow Asia's Governance Councils will receive priority for collaboration and sponsorship opportunities with the Innovation Challenge.

In December 2023, Grow Asia partnered with Viet Nam's Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture (PSAV), Viet Nam's MARD, and UNIDO to launch a new Food Innovation Hub, the first in Southeast Asia. Grow Asia has been actively engaged in meetings to establish the Hub's framework and identify partners and solutions for Viet Nam's 1 Million Hectare Low Carbon High Quality Rice Project. Members are encouraged to contact the Grow Asia Programs team for connections and involvement.

GrowHer: Women's Economic Empowerment

The GrowHer program has been instrumental in designing impactful projects that strengthen the business case for women's economic empowerment within agri-food systems. These projects focus on scaling actions, practices, and enabling policies that accelerate diversity and inclusion across the sector.

GrowHer:Kakao, implemented with GIZ, Mars, Save the Children, and PISAgro, focuses on empowering women farmers in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The project has already trained 33 women champions in the cocoa value chain, who will further train more than 2,000 women farmers across 40 villages. These champions have received training on financial literacy, and good agriculture and climate-smart practices. Additionally, GrowHer:Kakao has established 45 village savings and loan groups. Grow Asia has been receiving interest and ideas from partners on how to scale and replicate the project in other crops and countries.

The ASEAN Green Recovery through Equity and Empowerment (AGREE), funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), published research outcomes and case studies showcasing how blended investments can generate more inclusive value chains for women. These research activities surfaced the following insights:

- Need for the development of more crop and country-specific financial products
- Enhancement of digital literacy to enable women to access a broader range of fintech products
- Implementation of value-chain financing, particularly in processing and manufacturing
- Need to connect farmers to new potential sources of revenue like carbon credits.

Other results are continuously emerging from the ground works of Grow Asia's Country Chapters, which engage farmers and agriculture entrepreneurs. Members are encouraged to use these findings as resources for their respective ESG commitments.

GrowRight: Responsible Investing

Grow Asia successfully concluded the first cohort of the ASEAN Academy on Responsible Investing in May 2023. The program was supported by the ASEAN Secretariat, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), and NTU Singapore. The Program seeks to embed the 10 Principles of the ASEAN Guidelines on Responsible Investing in Food, Agriculture, and Forestry, which are helpful in de-risking investments while shaping sustainable solutions, into public-private projects to bridge the gap by pre-existing silos. This year, Grow Asia is looking for partners to scale and launch another cohort for the Academy. In collaboration with IISD, FAO, and ASEAN Secretariat, the design for phase 2 is currently underway.

The program has also been engaging in various conversations highlighting the role of public-private sector partnerships in driving food systems, including a webinar with the Working Group members of Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF).

GrowBeyond: Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation

Grow Asia has been working with Bain and Company, Cargill, and Visa to design a fit-for-purpose blended finance mechanism that can provide affordable loans to smallholder farmers and agri-SMEs. The GrowBeyond Fund seeks to leverage US\$1Billion to reach 200,000 MSMEs by 2030, delivering 20-30% improvement in household incomes and 10-30% reduction in carbon footprint per farm through regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration and nature-based solution models. Grow Asia is working with the ASEAN Secretariat and Members of its Business Council to deploy a structured loan facility in a series of closed loop models with an estimated value of \$80M per crop/country. This will be combined with the provision of carefully targeted technical assistance on climate-smart and agro-economic practices for SMEs (req. \$15M), underpinned by fund management support and monitoring and evaluation. (req. \$5M).

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This year, Grow Asia will launch two value chain pilots in Viet Nam and Indonesia to test the proof of concept. Thereafter, GrowBeyond's roadmap is set to scale and replicate the pilots. At present, Grow Asia is engaging with public, private, and philanthropic partners to explore potential collaborations under GrowBeyond Impact Fund.

8. Upcoming Events & Meetings

Grow Asia presented a 12-month calendar of events for 2024. This year, Grow Asia aims to strengthen its presence in high-level events with close coordination with local, regional, and global partners. The annual Grow Asia Investment Forum is planned to be held in October 2024. Grow Asia is also planning to hold the next governance council meeting jointly (Business and Partners' Advisory Councils) in June of this year. The Secretariat will circulate the calendar of events to all the Council members.

ACTION: Members are encouraged to collaborate with Grow Asia by coordinating their participation in upcoming events or suggesting additional events where Grow Asia's presence would be beneficial.

9. Close

There being no other business, Dr. Kanchana Wanichkorn thanked the Members for their time and declared the meeting closed at 17:50 hrs.