



Request for Proposal (RFP) Design and Implementation of Grow Asia Innovation Challenge 2025

Introduction

Grow Asia is seeking proposals from experienced partners to support the successful delivery of the Grow Asia Innovation Challenge 2025. The contract duration will be from **15 January 2025 to 31 August 2025**.

In 2022, Grow Asia launched four public-private impact funds to accelerate the transformation of Southeast Asia's agri-food system to become more efficient, sustainable, and resilient to the twin shocks of economic volatility and climate change. Together, these new blended-finance models serve as a co-matching mechanism between public and private-sector donors and investors, aiming to break down silos and improve the efficiency of capital flows into Southeast Asia's food, agriculture, and forestry sectors by targeting the needs of the region's 70 million small-scale rural enterprises.

Grow Asia's newest Innovation Challenge will be funded by the GrowVentures Fund, which is designed to accelerate the adoption of climate-smart innovations and digital tools across Southeast Asia by placing affordable solutions into the hands of farmers and agri-SMEs. Despite a global smart farming market that is expected to reach USD 66.9 billion by 2030, the innovation landscape in Southeast Asia remains highly fragmented, with farmgate adoption remaining stubbornly slow due to well-reported financial barriers, market failures, and supply chain inefficiencies. Most companies and governments recognize that tackling these siloed delivery systems requires an innovation ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders, who can collectively unlock capacity and investments in agri-food innovation and get these technologies into the hands of farmers.

In 2024, [Grow Asia launched its Grow Asia Innovation Challenge](#) (GAIC), targeting the rice value chain in Southeast Asia with a major focus on digital solutions in Vietnam and Cambodia. The challenge received almost 100 submitted ready-to-scale solutions across the globe. The GAIC 2024 focused on leveraging farm-ready technologies to enable smallholder-inclusive, climate-resilient agricultural transformation, empowering smallholder farmers to improve productivity, market access, and climate resilience for agri-SMEs in Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Mekong region.

[CarbonFarm](#) was selected among the high-quality solutions with their innovative approach to science-backed technology—using AI and satellite data to verify sustainable practices from space, quantify emissions reductions, and streamline the Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) process. This enhances transparency and trust in carbon claims with increased transparency that attracts investments from project funders and carbon buyers, accelerating the shift towards sustainable rice farming.

Coming off the successes of the Grow Asia Innovation Challenge 2024, Grow Asia and the Philippines Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture (PPSA) will be launching the Grow Asia Innovation Challenge 2025. The innovation challenge aims to address the following challenges in support of industry development of coconut, cacao and coffee sectors:

- **Farmer Traceability and Logistics Tools:** Enhance product traceability systems to provide stronger logistical support and monitoring for farmers and farmer organizations. Improved traceability for deforestation-free products for compliance with sustainability standards and access to premiums and certifications.
- **Digital Advisory Solutions:** Improve access to and benefit from digital decision-making tools that enable the adoption of climate-smart agriculture practices across smallholders & agri-SMEs.
- **Strengthening Technology Adoption:** Facilitate farmer digital literacy and promote technology adoption with user-friendly innovations tailored for farmers.

Coconut, Cacao, and Coffee Industries in the Philippines

The coconut, cacao, and coffee sectors are vital to the agricultural economy of the Philippines, providing livelihoods for millions of smallholder farmers and contributing to the country's export revenues. The Philippines positions itself as one of the world's leading producers of coconut with 25% of coconuts being exported across the globe contributing an average of 91.4 billion pesos in export earnings in 2018¹. Coconut farming serves as one of the primary livelihoods for smallholder farmers in the country. Despite being a major source of livelihood, many coconut farmers in the country still operate as subsistence farmers. Coconut producers are also plagued with low productivity brought about by increasing senile tree population, natural calamities and pest infestation² as well as limited value addition as most farmers are seen to have been practicing monocropping³.

As for cacao, the global demand for cacao continues to rise, driven by the chocolate industry and consumers' interest in premium, sustainably sourced cacao products. The Philippines has been observed to have favourable conditions to boost cacao production and trade, factoring in its location and existence of cacao value chain players. With a growing interest in boosting the competitiveness of the Philippine cacao industry, government support, including technical and financial assistance, is strengthening the industry and aims to empower cacao farmers, fostering sustainable and resilient cacao communities⁴.

Lastly, the Philippines has a rich coffee heritage, and the crop remains integral to many rural livelihoods. Its coffee production has an average yield of 0.54 MT/ha in 2020⁵, with local production

¹ Philippine Coconut Industry Roadmap 2021-2040. Retrieved from: <https://www.pcaf.da.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Philippine-Coconut-Industry-Roadmap-2021-2040.pdf>

² Coconut Industry Profile. DOST-PCAARRD. <https://ispweb.pcaarrd.dost.gov.ph/isp-commodities/coconut/#~:text=Problems%20in%20the%20Industry,the%20optimum%20maturity%20for%20production.>

³ Strengthening sustainable coconut production in the Philippines. Cargill. <https://www.cargill.com/sustainability/strengthening-sustainable-coconut-production-in-the-philippines#:~:text=Q%20What%20are%20some%20of,coconut%20products%2C%20represent%20the%20market.>

⁴ Philippine Cacao Industry Roadmap. Department of Agriculture. 2022. <https://www.da.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Philippine-Cacao-Industry-Roadmap.pdf>

⁵ Philippine Coffee Industry Roadmap 2021-2025. Retrieved from: <https://pcaf.da.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Philippine-Coffee-Industry-Roadmap-2021-2025.pdf>

only meeting 27% of demand⁶. Coffee production in the country has faced numerous challenges, including declining land area dedicated to coffee cultivation, poor bean quality due to outdated farming practices, and low productivity that leaves farmers unable to earn sustainable incomes. Limited technical skills, lack of quality seedlings, inadequate post-harvest facilities, and weak coordination among stakeholders further hinder the supply chain⁷.

To support farmers within these commodities and industries, the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Rural Agro-enterprise Partnership for Inclusive Development and Growth (RAPID Growth) Project funded by IFAD, strategically selected coconut, cacao, and coffee as focus commodities due to their potential to drive economic growth, enhance rural development, and support sustainable livelihoods in the Philippines. These crops were chosen for their economic importance, the existing local expertise in cultivating them, and their significant market demand both domestically and internationally. The project has supported these industries through various interventions such as direct assistance to enterprises, conditional matching grants, and infrastructure development.

Digital Literacy in the Philippine Agriculture Sector

Data from the 2019 National ICT Household Survey have shown that the Philippines has a relatively low digital literacy rate which has revealed that 2 out of 5 Filipinos have at least 1 of the 6 basic information and communication technology skills that are being monitored for sustainable development goals⁸. Low digital literacy and technology skills, paired with poor connectivity infrastructure in rural areas, hinder technology adoption for agriculture.

To create environments to boost technology adoption, government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Information and Communications Technology aim to build links between producers and technology providers, grant digital technologies, assure stable connectivity and provide financing to improve access to digital innovations to improve farming operations.

Complementing the efforts of the RAPID Growth Project and various government agencies involved in addressing the challenges in digital literacy in the agriculture sphere, Grow Asia and the PPSA are committed to supporting farmers from the coconut, cacao and coffee industries by identifying innovations that can further help strengthen farming operations and improve farmer digital literacy.

During the stakeholder consultation, several key challenges were identified that impact the adoption of digital tools and sustainable practices among farmers. These included:

- Demographic Shifts in Agriculture: An ageing farmer population and the limited interest of the youth in agricultural careers contribute to slower adoption of technology and innovation within the sector.
- Digital and General Literacy Challenges: Low levels of digital literacy rates (compounded by low general literacy) limit farmers from effectively using digital solutions, with smartphones primarily used for entertainment rather than business purposes.

⁶ A call to nurture the next generation of coffee farmers. Retrieved from: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/advertorial/life/10/27/23/a-call-to-nurture-the-next-generation-of-coffee-farmers>

⁷ Bote Central: Creating A Chain Of Happiness For Philippine Coffee Farmers. Habaradas, R. & Mia, I. 2021 <https://publisher.unimas.my/ojs/index.php/IJBS/article/view/3769/1384>

⁸ Why literacy measurement deserves rethinking. Retrieved from: <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn2110.pdf>

- Infrastructure and Logistical Constraints: The remote locations of many coconut, cacao, and coffee farmers create significant logistical challenges, complicating the transport of agricultural inputs and produce. Produce often requires additional services and infrastructure, such as consolidation hubs and specialized hauliers.
- Connectivity Issues: Poor connectivity in rural areas also persists in rural areas, reducing access to information and support networks necessary for effective farm management.
- Need for Support in Sustainable Practices: While there is growing advocacy for sustainable farming practices, farmers require further support to recognise and leverage the business benefits of these practices, as sustainable methods are not yet widely adopted or consistently practised.

The Grow Asia Innovation Challenge 2025

The Grow Asia Innovation Challenge (GAIC) aims to catalyse partnerships and facilitate pilots among existing start-ups, agribusinesses, and smallholder farmers that foster climate-smart agriculture. In 2025, Grow Asia is bringing GAIC to the Philippines with the goal to:

1. Engage start-ups and agribusinesses to build and or adapt existing solutions for smallholder value chains in the country;
2. Accelerate the growth of promising start-ups, catalysing partnerships and facilitating pilots among existing start-ups, agribusinesses, and smallholders; and
3. Build the local and regional pool of innovators and accelerate the adoption of climate-smart innovations and digital tools across Southeast Asia through the Grow Asia Digital Directory and Digital Learning Series.

What do we need?

We are looking for a trusted, full-service innovation partner to work with Grow Asia to design and implement the GAIC. Grow Asia will lead the overall project design in collaboration with members of the Grow Asia Business Council and Partners' Advisory Council. The contracted party will be invited to co-design and execute the Challenge process in consultation with the Grow Asia Secretariat with deliverables including, but not limited to, the following indicative activities:

- Alignment with Grow Asia on timelines, deliverables, and proposed scope of work
- Design of challenge rules, tools and processes, including eligibility criteria, guidelines and templates for applications, mentors and judges, etc.
- Briefing of judging panel and innovation mentors in collaboration with Grow Asia
- Co-design and planning of public launch and call for applications
- Management of appropriate micro-site to collect and process applications
- Processing and shortlisting of eligible applications in collaboration with Grow Asia
- Management of evaluation process and support for finalists
- Coordination of mentoring and assistance with Pitching Event(s)
- Co-organization of the human-centered design training for finalists
- Co-organization of the Pitching and Award Event in collaboration with Grow Asia
- Review of GAIC implementation and next steps
- Recommendations for ongoing technical support and brokering opportunities (this could include a review of Grow Asia's Digital Directory and Learning Series; identifying potential

sources of seed funds for pilots, and design of Grow Asia’s human-centered design training activities)

Eligible Solutions:

To be able to address the challenges of the coconut, coffee and cacao sectors while meeting the needs of the farmers, digital solutions may be clustered into the following categories:

- Digital Advisory Tools that promote Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) (e.g. water management systems, soil health monitoring, integrated pest management, integrated nutrient management tools, etc.)
- Business development and marketability – to enhance market access through digital trading platforms, traceability and certification systems and mobile sourcing solutions; to improve supply chain efficiency and smart logistics; to provide finance and information services such as mobile payment, digital lending, market prices, weather information, technical services and early warning systems, etc.
- Telco-agnostic Agricultural Solution: Initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy among farmers and championing the adoption of intuitive technological solutions specifically designed for their needs such as improving planning processes and effectively managing the costs and financing of farming operations, ultimately empowering farmers to optimize their productivity and profitability.

Indicative Timeline

ACTIVITIES	2025											
	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	
Pre-GAIC 2025 Preparations												
Call for Implementing Partners												
Signing of Agreement with Partner Implementer												
Onboarding of Innovation Challenge Partners												
Preparation for Innovation Challenge (postings, materials, etc)												
GAIC 2025 Launch & Challenge Proper												
Launch of the Innovation Challenge												
Selection and Screening of Innovators (Top 20)												
Onboarding of Selected Innovators (Top 10)												
Business Matching & Pairing with Mentors (Top 10)												
Human-Centered Design Training (Top 10)												
Innovation Pitch & Announcement of Winners												

