



Grow Asia Roundtable Outcome Report

# Creating Opportunities for Women in Agriculture:

Investing in women along agribusiness value chains

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Until recently, the topic of women in agriculture has mainly been viewed as a gender rights issue. Today, the economic argument for closing the gender gap is clear and undisputed.

Gender equality makes good business sense. Closing the gender gap could add as much as \$28 trillion to global annual GDP by 2025, and in South Asia could increase regional GDP by 48%<sup>1</sup>. In agriculture, it has been proven that countries with more equality produce better yields<sup>2</sup>.

Women's economic empowerment is defined as both the ability to succeed and advance economically, and the power to make and act on economic decisions<sup>3</sup>. By giving women farmers more and better choices, businesses will not only address gender inequality from an ethical standpoint but will increase profits and grow the regional economy.

A core part of Grow Asia's strategy to advance the productivity, incomes and sustainability of smallholders in South East Asia is to increase the range and suitability of choices offered to women by businesses.

Businesses perceive women as workers, suppliers, intermediaries or customers, and local partnerships include women in their growing businesses. The opportunities facing business is to increase the range and relevance of market opportunities they offer to women. This requires innovation and investment based on an understanding of the influence of gender in the marketplace. This is where Grow Asia's partners and stakeholders will be critical in engaging with the issue and mobilizing greater action.

Grow Asia helps its agribusiness country partners to consider the way that gender affects the participation of women in a value chain, and helps businesses incorporate gender sensitive thinking and practices in their ways of operating.

## Roundtable discussion

Following Grow Asia's 2017 report on the [agricultural gender gap](#), Grow Asia hosted a discussion at the 2018 Responsible Business Forum on Food and Agriculture in Jakarta to review progress and continue to give attention to this important topic. This year's conversation moved to specific strategies for women's economic empowerment and the identification of cultural challenges and tactics. Grow Asia encouraged participants to collaborate, be ambitious and consider how we can create systemic change.

The roundtable drew a diverse mix of participants from the private sector, government, NGOs, aid organizations, research and financial institutions. This report is the outcome of the discussions, and is intended for our partners, stakeholders and peers to provide context, information and ideas to drive action.



<sup>1</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, 2015. The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion To Global Growth

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations (FAO), 2011. The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development

<sup>3</sup> International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), 2016. Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment

# INSIGHTS: IFC PRESENTATION

Setting the context for the roundtable discussions, Eriko Ishikawa explored the social and economic factors linked to gender equality in agriculture and described IFC's commitment to supporting women in agribusiness. Acting as an investor, IFC will fund private-sector led projects that improve gender participation in the value chain and train smallholder farmers.

Reflecting on an IFC report produced in 2017, [Investing in Women Along Agribusiness Value Chains](#), Eriko stressed that the global business case for applying gender-equal practices is clear. IFC is leveraging the knowledge and economic data provided by the report to provide recommendations to agribusinesses and implement change.

**“ A value chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Recognizing women as a customer market will result in market opportunities. ”**

Eriko highlighted the importance of investment at all stages of the value chain to facilitate inclusive business. She observed that, currently, most agribusinesses focus inclusion at the production stage. To alleviate poverty and uplift the entire sector, inclusive thinking is required at all stages of the value chain. We must support emerging markets and early-stage entrepreneurs and, importantly, look through a gender lens while acknowledging specific social and cultural settings. Businesses should also apply gender mapping within the context of their own company and country.

Rural agricultural communities should be key targets for agribusinesses, with approximately 40% of women already employed in the workforce but left out of the loop when it comes to the business of agriculture and vocalizing their part in, for example, farmer cooperative meetings – which is broadly seen to be the man's role.



**Eriko Ishikawa**

Global Head, Inclusive Business,  
International Finance Cooperation (IFC)

Many of the challenges to women's economic empowerment are deep-set in cultures or, in some cases, there is a lack of knowledge, or wrong assumptions lead to missed opportunities. Eriko highlighted an observation from a recent study which identified that women in rural communities are often in charge of a family's financial decisions, which was surprisingly unknown to many agribusinesses in the region. As an underserved customer segment, businesses should invest in targeting women smallholders to build business demand. This would also lead to increased production levels by providing women with the information and practical agricultural solutions they need to manage their farm effectively.

**“ This is not a woman's problem. Men and all family members must be involved in any change. ”**

For widespread change to occur, Eriko called for active participation from the agribusiness community and stakeholders.



### Case study: Inclusive business practice

Eriko shared a case study of an IFC-funded [coffee project in Nicaragua](#), which identified that female smallholders benefited from having female trainers.

The project coordinators realized that it was usually men turning up for training, yet it was the women who typically took care of harvesting and composting.

After reviewing the gender of trainers – which was majority male – the business introduced a female “train the trainer” scheme to uplift skillsets and provide women with female role models.

This greatly improved training effectiveness, encouraged behavioral change and an increase in females attending training.

In the end, farming households that received this “gender-smart” training showed increased incomes more than in areas where this had not been done.

# ACTION PLANNING



Roundtable participants broke into four groups to explore specific issues which can improve collaboration to address women’s economic empowerment. They focused on practical ways to make change, opportunities that can be created, core stakeholder groups to engage, and shared thoughts on why things have not worked in the past.

The discussion was a natural continuation of the ideas developed at the 2017 [Grow Asia roundtable](#), where participants brainstormed around 30 initiatives that would benefit businesses and women. This year’s action planning took the conversation one step further

by focusing on how and who should be implementing these ideas.

A consistent theme was the importance of inclusiveness – ensuring that it is women training women, women incorporated in business data and measurement, and women involved in early stage conversations.

The following is a summary of participants’ recommendations on how to get women involved, what activities should be done differently, and by who in three ways: business innovation, better representation and better data and awareness.

## Businesses innovation

### How?

- Understand how agribusinesses currently market business opportunities to women, and identify changes needed to branding or marketing strategies
- Introduce gender specialists as a profession in businesses
- Solutions should be championed from the top
- Roll out a gender campaign in businesses and the local community
- Exercise creativity and pilot before implementing big change, but take a long-term view to ensure sustainability
- Map government policies/services and how to align other plans against them
- Identify more areas for collective action at multi-stakeholder forums and assign to champions

### Who?

- Private sector
- Government
- NGOs

## Better representation

### How?

- Increase women's participation in sales and training forces
- Cooperate with local authorities to amplify training practices for women
- Involve women in the identification of solutions
- Branch out of analyzing only farmer organization and members, which are usually male dominated
- Tap into more informal cultural or religious groups which might have a larger female representation with a strong network

### Who?

- Women entrepreneurs
- Civil society and NGOs
- Businesses
- Social, religious and cultural organizations (including "artisan")
- Women's groups
- Local governments

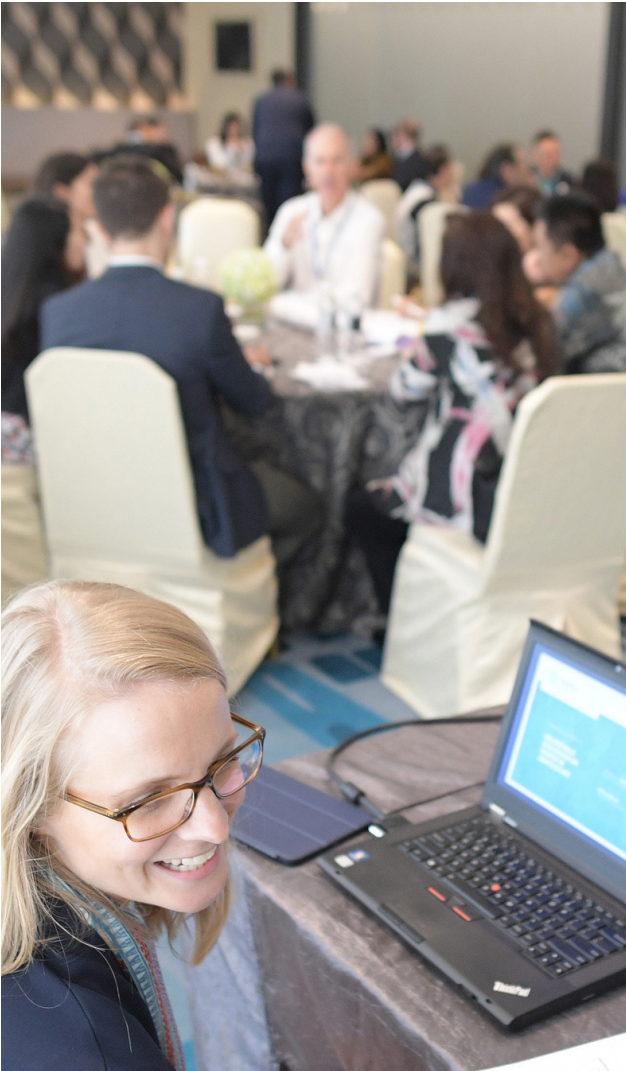
## Better data and awareness

### How?

- Use technology and data exchange platforms to collect data at a field and household level to better understand gender roles and participation
- Identify and share good practices and case studies
- Recognize differences between men and women, and how this varies by community. Country-level segmentation is not enough
- Communications campaign to change mindsets and address any misconceptions about women's roles

### Who?

- Field staff
- Private sector: agribusinesses, buyers and sellers
- Researchers
- Government
- Media



## NEXT STEPS

Grow Asia will continue to raise the importance of women's role in the agriculture sector. At the country-level, Grow Asia's regional secretariat will assist interested Working Groups with a consultant to better consider the way that gender affects the participation of women in a value chain, and to help design business arrangements that are appropriate to women. It will also support Country Partnership secretariats to establish Working Groups in sectors that are particularly relevant to women, and to help existing Working Groups to design and implement projects that increase women's jobs and incomes.

Grow Asia is interested in hearing from businesses with experience of successfully integrating women into value chains, or organizations which would like support doing so.

Please contact [info@growasia.org](mailto:info@growasia.org) to share your perspectives.

## PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS



“ We realized that decisions about agro-inputs were always made with the woman’s approval, yet they were not involved in training and exposed to sales. We were missing an opportunity. When you open up markets to women, you create more incentives for the whole family, and they are more likely to buy products. ”

**Rick van der Kamp**  
Senior Operations Officer  
Agribusiness and Forestry  
IFC



“ We need to approach farming as a family business. There can be resistance from men when involving women in business discussions, and sometimes women can’t relate. Introducing more female trainers would increase empathy and level the playing field. ”

**Rubens Marques**  
CEO President Director  
Louis Dreyfus Company Indonesia



“ To be more gender sensitive, we need to better understand processes within the agricultural value chain which will allow us to target with the right intervention and involve women. ”

**Ganesh Satyagraha**  
Head of Business, Crop Protection  
BASF Indonesia





“ Commitment from the top is essential. Companies must also allow for some experimentation and challenge the way things are done. Rather than making assumptions, ask questions and include everyone. One of the key barriers for women remains a lack of opportunity to express their voices and opinions. ”

**Caterina Meloni**  
Gender & Social Inclusion Adviser  
USAID Green Invest Asia



“ It’s important to track the right information. When thinking about households and who does what on farms, we need to measure and ask about everyone’s role because relying on one household representative won’t provide the full picture. I urge companies in the room to please look at households as more than one unit in measurements. ”

**Tiffany Talsma**  
Climate Resilient Value Chains Specialist  
International Center for Tropical Agriculture



“ It’s not easy to change behavior. One way to start is to involve the husband, wife and children in farm training sessions, for example on safe storage of chemicals in the house. This gets the whole family on the same page. ”

**Mala Ekayanti**  
Head of Corporate Affairs  
BASF

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# APPENDIX

## Research

**IFC report:**

[Investing in Women Along Agribusiness Value Chains](#)

**Business & Sustainable Development Commission discussion paper:**

[Behind Every Global Goal: Women Leading the World to 2030](#)

**McKinsey Global Institute report:**

[The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \\$12 Trillion To Global Growth](#)

**FAO report:**

[The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development](#)

**OECD paper:**

[Evidence for Action: Gender Equality and Economic Growth](#)

**CSR Asia report on behalf of Oxfam's GRAISEA program:**

[Agribusiness and the SDGs](#)

**CSR Asia report: Agribusiness in ASEAN:**

[Making the Case for Smallholder Inclusion](#)

## Other useful resources

**Grow Asia report:**

[2017 Women in Agriculture Roundtable Report](#)

**Grow Asia blog:**

[Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in South East Asia](#)

**International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) webinar:**

[Women in agriculture: Four myths](#)

**UNESCAP opinion editorial:**

[Closing Gender Gaps in Asia and the Pacific Requires Transformative Change](#)

## Report photos

**Front cover image:**

Su Su Aung, a coffee entrepreneur and the smallholder farmers she works with in Southern Shan State, Myanmar

**Photo credits:**

Grow Asia and Global Initiatives

# PARTICIPANTS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>Annisa Sekarintias</b>	PT HM Sampoerna
<b>Arunika Anggradewi</b>	Dow AgroSciences
<b>Athina Triyananda</b>	SNV
<b>Azucena M. Dayanghirang</b>	Republic of the Philippines Department of Health, National Nutrition Council
<b>Boreth Sun</b>	Cambodia Partnership for Sustainable Agriculture (CPSA)
<b>Caterina Meloni</b>	USAID Green Invest Asia
<b>David Ball</b>	Second Muse
<b>David Brickey Bloomer</b>	Save the Children
<b>Dewi Kurniawati</b>	PISAgro
<b>Dwi Arrisandi</b>	CAPSA UNESCAP
<b>Eko Setyo Utomo</b>	Mercy Corps Indonesia
<b>Eriko Ishikawa</b>	IFC
<b>Ezca Putri</b>	PT. SMART
<b>Ganesh Satyagraha</b>	BASF
<b>Ishwinder Kaur</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Julian Peach</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Mala Ekayanti</b>	BASF
<b>Melissa Yeoh BC</b>	Golden Agri-Resources
<b>Nadia Soerjanto</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Nur Isravivani</b>	Delegation of the European Union to Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam
<b>Paul Voutier</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Pranav Sethaputra</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Priscilla Teo</b>	Louis Dreyfus Company
<b>Puri Dewayani</b>	IFC
<b>Retno Ayudiati</b>	PT HM Sampoerna
<b>Retno Damayanti (Della)</b>	Foodbank Indonesia
<b>Rick van der Kamp</b>	IFC
<b>Rubens Marques</b>	Louis Dreyfus Company
<b>Shirley Pranoto</b>	PWC
<b>Sinta Kaniawati</b>	Unilever
<b>Somang Yang</b>	Grow Asia
<b>Sonia Akter</b>	Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS
<b>Tessa Rouse</b>	Global Initiatives
<b>Tiffany Talsma</b>	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
<b>Wida Septarina</b>	Foodbank Indonesia
<b>Widya Listyowulan</b>	UNDP