Investing in the Grow Asia Network

Catalyzing Working Groups

February 2018

ananda PARTNERS

Introduction to this work

At the end of 2017, the Grow Asia Regional Secretariat reached out to representative members of the network to compile best practices for working groups operating across the network. The objective was to listen to working group members and country secretariat teams about what is working and what can be improved, in order to identify practical steps to support working groups and scale the impact of the network.

This is a summary of the findings of the report and recommended next steps.
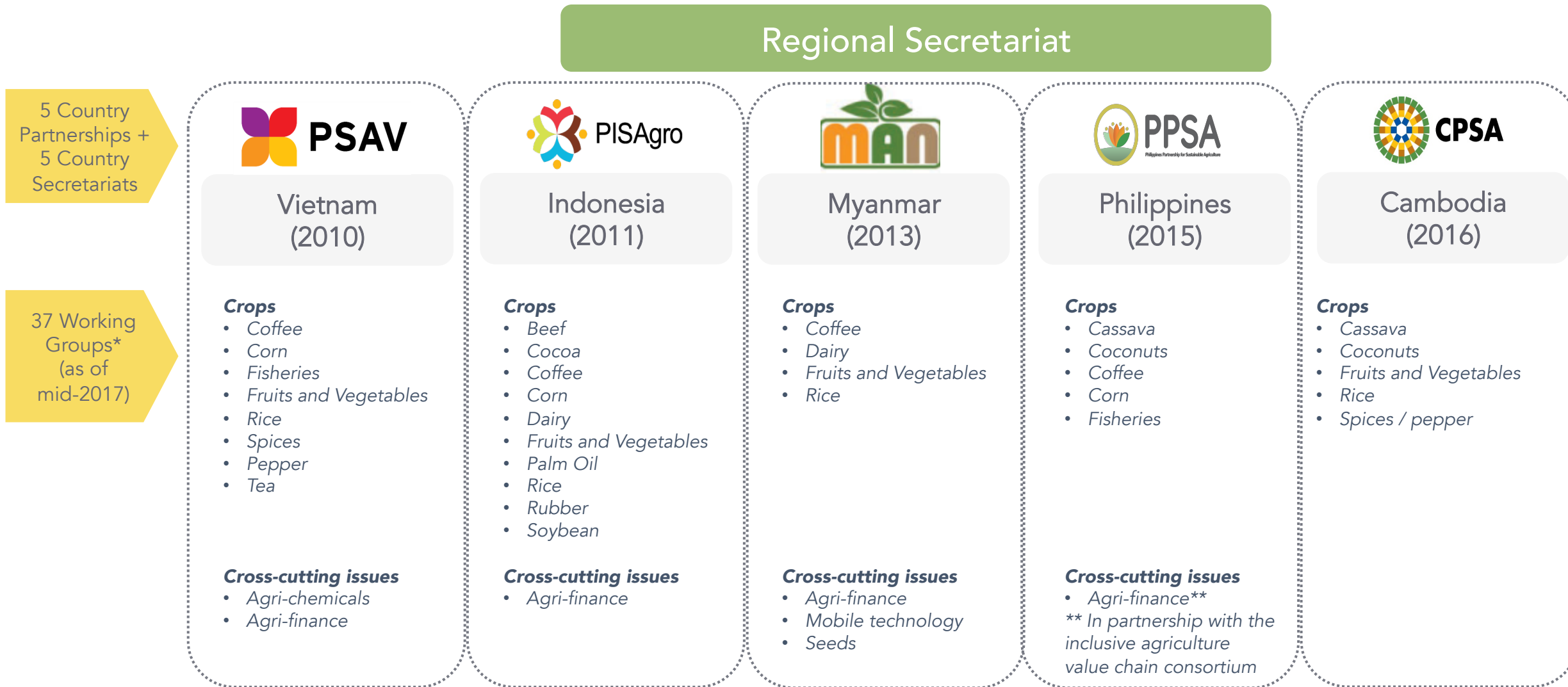
Structure of Grow Asia Network

There are currently 5 Country Partnerships and 37 Working Groups supported by Grow Asia

Regional Secretariat

5 Country Partnerships + 5 Country Secretariats

37 Working Groups* (as of mid-2017)

PSAV
Vietnam (2010)

Crops
- Coffee
- Corn
- Fisheries
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Rice
- Spices
- Pepper
- Tea

Cross-cutting issues
- Agri-chemicals
- Agri-finance

PISAgro
Indonesia (2011)

Crops
- Beef
- Cocoa
- Coffee
- Corn
- Dairy
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Palm Oil
- Rice
- Rubber
- Soybean

Cross-cutting issues
- Agri-finance

MAN
Myanmar (2013)

Crops
- Coffee
- Dairy
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Rice

Cross-cutting issues
- Agri-finance
- Mobile technology
- Seeds

PPSA
Philippines (2015)

Crops
- Cassava
- Coconuts
- Coffee
- Corn
- Fisheries

Cross-cutting issues
- Agri-finance**

** In partnership with the inclusive agriculture value chain consortium

CPSA
Cambodia (2016)

Crops
- Cassava
- Coconuts
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Rice
- Spices / pepper

* The term "Working Group" is used in most of the Grow Asia country partnerships, whereas in Vietnam these groups are referred to as "Task Forces." For the purposes of this report, we will be using the term Working Groups.

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Insights and observations from key participants in the Working Groups operating across Grow Asia's network clustered around the following themes:

- Forming new Working Groups
- Working Group Membership & Leadership
- Working Group Operations
- Government Role & Relationship
- Grow Asia Role & Relationship
- Country Secretariat Role & Relationship
- Country Partnership Role & Relationship
- Working Group Approach / Strategy
- Success Factors for Working Groups

Many of the working groups are not working as expected. Those that are working, are working on their own, with limited perceived value from being apart of the Grow Asia network

- In many of the interviews, WG members expressed concern about the formality of the relationship and attribution of their work to Grow Asia.

- Fundamental questions were raised including:

  - "What is Grow Asia's objective in terms of their role?"

  - "What are their specific roles and responsibilities?"

  - "What can we hold them accountable for? If they want to be relevant, they need to demonstrate tangible value."

- A significant number of these working groups and projects were in place before Grow Asia, some members interviewed feel uncomfortable with how GA initially entered into work already underway, attached itself and then made demands around reporting.

- For measurement, there are concerns on the process and validity of the numbers. Some members expressed concern that they really couldn't be sure if the numbers are actually legitimate.

- Numerous working groups are essentially stand-alone, vertical value chain projects led by just one off-taker. This structure limits the scope and scale of impact to just the farmers that can participate in that value chain

- There is an opportunity to enable a transition from the value chain model of engagement to adopt a sector-wide approach that addresses a more comprehensive agenda and engages with key decision-makers to improve the conditions for investment and productivity growth

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Different working groups have been formed/engaged for different reasons. Adopting a process for assessing the need for the WG and criteria for formation/selection will bring consistency of selection and engagement across Working Groups and countries

- ■ Assess the need for a WG based on a clear set of criteria: This may involve assessing the sector along various criteria, including but not limited to: (a) priority given by the government, (b) market demand for the crop or cross-cutting service, (c) potential to impact smallholder farmers, (d) existence of champions in the public and private sectors, (e) sector challenges which require collective action, and (f) presence of pre-existing or competing sector forums.

- ■ Conduct a comprehensive stakeholder mappings prior to formation: A rapid stakeholder mapping can ensure better, more inclusive representation on WGs. It can also help identify the interests and incentives of potential members.

- ■ Support the development of accurate TOR for WGs in the CP Charter:

  - Individual membership agreements can define the roles, responsibilities, and benefits for a member.

  - The WG TORs in the Charter can provide clarity around the WG's purpose/mission; operating guidelines; membership and leadership criteria, roles, responsibilities, and benefits; success criteria; relationship with other WGs; etc.

  - WGs should draft a Strategy document that outlines their mission/objectives/strategy and work plan. The strategy should be aligned with the overall CP Strategy

- ■ Consolidate existing groups and assess their relevance in their current form before scaling up the model to additional sectors

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Working Group Membership & Leadership

Number of participants in WGs varies widely across the network. There is no ideal size; however, smaller groups risk being less representative and inclusive. Ensuring the right mix of stakeholders is more important than absolute size. Local private sector participation was highlighted as a gap in representation in several CPs

- *Number of participants in WGs varies depending on the sector and country* (ranging from < 5 to > 50 participants). Some organizations participate in multiple WGs; lead or co-lead multiple WGs; or have multiple representatives in the same WG.

- *There is no ideal size for effective WGs.* Pros and cons exist for larger and smaller groups. The appropriate size for the group will often depend on the purpose/mission of the group, and the stage of group formation.

- Similarly, there is no agreement as to whether WGs should have an open or restrictive membership.

- Although participants may have varying levels of commitment/participation depending on the membership criteria of a WG, *strong senior-level commitment at the CP Governance level is a necessary pre-condition for representatives to be effective* (e.g. from CEOs for the private sector and from the Minister for the public sector)

- *Ensuring a good selection of the right mix of stakeholders is more important than the size or openness of WGs*. As a result, numerous informants have noted a need to rethink the diversity and relevance of the membership of existing WGs:

- *Core Group or Steering Committee within the WG can be an effective way to streamline decision-making and action*, especially for larger groups

Models for WG Leadership vary. Many WGs are currently led by a large international firm. Adopting a shared or rotational leadership model would support inclusion and a broader agenda

- *Differences exist across countries in terms of (1) whether there is a single leading entity or co-leads for the WG and (2) where there is a shared leadership model, the type of co-leading entities.*
  - In Vietnam, groups are co-led by a public representative and a private representative.
  - In Myanmar, Philippines and Indonesia, emphasis is being placed on having one international co-lead (multi-national or iNGO) and one local co-lead (local company/association/NGO).

- *Potential benefits of a shared leadership model* include: (1) enabling diversity of views and perspectives (especially when groups are co-led by different types of stakeholders), (2) better management of power and politics within the WG, including potential conflicts of interests, and (3) smoother leadership transitions should one of the co-leads have to step down.

- *Rotating and/or alternate co-leads can also bring about similar benefits*, as well as inject new energy and insights into the WG and foster more shared responsibilities among WG members. Several informants (including current WG leaders) have expressed interest in leadership rotations.

- *However, many of the WG are currently lead firm led and revolve around a particular project that primarily benefits the lead firm.* This can create a dynamic of exclusivity and discourage participation from other key stakeholders in the sector.

- *There is currently no standard process or formal set of criteria for the nomination or selection of WG leaders*

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The approach of the WG leader can determine the strategic trajectory of the WG. There is no consensus on the precise role of a leader/co-leader, but current WG leaders are mostly seen (and expected) to play a more administrative role, with few seen as strategic facilitators

- Many of the informants (including current and former WG leaders) described the role as being primarily administrative (arranging WG meetings and reporting performance results). However, there are also leaders who take on more active roles (facilitating discussions, developing draft proposals, etc.). This can also vary depending on the purpose/mission of the WG.

- **Potential responsibilities** include the following:

Most Commonly Mentioned by Informants	←→	Rarely mentioned by informants
• Coordinating the collection and aggregation of performance indicators on an annual basis • Coordinating WG meetings (set the meeting agenda, send invitations, arrange meeting logistics, follow-up with members or their superiors to ensure attendance, etc.) • Presenting performance results and project updates at CP meetings	• Identifying and recruiting new members • Drafting meeting minutes • Ensuring follow through on WG decisions/ plans • Collecting and summarizing member views • Developing draft proposals • Collecting membership fees • Organizing activities in the WG implementation/action plans	• Facilitating discussions and decision-making during meetings • Ensuring a diverse, inclusive group of WG members • Identifying choke points and solutions • Ensuring there is sufficient data to make decisions

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There is confusion about the role of the WG leader and the role of the Country Secretariat. There was wide consensus that more attention is needed around group management processes/tools. Most working groups expressed a need for more support from the Country Secretariat

- There are differences across WGs as to whether the lead/co-lead is expected to be the general secretary within the WG (e.g. setting agenda, sending out invitations, recording and circulating meeting minutes) or whether other group members or even the Country Secretariats are expected to take on or share these responsibilities.

- There is, however, agreement that there should be **strong, dedicated group management processes and skills** within each group. Not all WGs are using basic group management tools to ensure a psychology of delivery and engagement. This includes:

  - Drafting and circulating meeting agendas in advance of WG meetings

  - Drafting and finalizing meeting minutes with agreed actions (including deadlines and responsible parties) shortly after each WG meeting

  - Reviewing progress against agreed actions in subsequent meetings

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Working Groups want more engagement with government. Government engagement currently varies significantly by country. Strong government commitment and relationships is often critical for achieving WG objectives, delivering value to WG members and reaching scaled impact targets

- *Nature of government involvement varies depending on the country and how the CP has been set up.*

- *Strong government commitment and relationships is often critical for achieving WG objectives* and delivering value to existing and potential members of WG.

- *Governments are giving varying levels of attention to different WGs*. Attention is determined by WGs alignment to/influence over government priorities in Agriculture as well as the formalization of relationship through representation and MOUs.

  - *Government priorities in agriculture:* When the topic or crop is a priority for the government, they are like to be more engagement. The relevant technical departments tend also to be more dynamic and better resourced.

  - *Formalization of the relationship with government:* Where the WG has been formally integrated into a government entity or committee (e.g. Sector Coordination Board overseen by the government), relationships with the government is strong.

- *Government-related challenges range from access to government plans/policies and high-level decision-makers to government setting up separate, competing forums*

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Overview

- Across the network, Grow Asia has been commended as a **strong brand**, which is well respected by governments, has the power to convene at the highest level and with which members are eager to associate.

- In addition to the Grow Asia brand, the value that WGs see from being part of the Grow Asia network includes Grow Asia's access to regional/international banks and sources of financing; access to government and ASEAN; relationships with the donor community; and relationships with foreign investors.

- There is, however, confusion and direct questioning of **the role and value of services** provided by the Country Secretariats, Regional Secretariat and other member of the Grow Asia network.

- As a result, more could be done to level set across the entire network the vision of Grow Asia and the role it plays with all its stakeholders. This includes exploring the nature of network services that could be provided by Grow Asia (and through the Country Secretariats) and how that could be optimized for the benefit of all WGs.

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Based on informant interviews, and in-line with the recent partnership survey, potential service offerings to the Working Groups in the network are listed below

- ■ *Strengthening government relationships:* e.g. ensure continued commitment from government; promote the value of WGs to government; help government understand the necessity of starting with smaller numbers when piloting projects

- ■ *Supporting advocacy with government and other institutions:* e.g. by capitalizing on their relationships with government; support WGs in building advocacy case; link WGs to external parties/experts that can help push policy issues

- ■ *Matchmaking services with international companies:* e.g. potential investors through the WEF network

- ■ *Promotion of members:* e.g. share member publications (case studies, publications, newsletters) or develop new case studies where this does not duplicate member efforts

- ■ *Support on the strategic orientation of sectors:* e.g. use Grow Asia's influence with government to ensure key government plans, policies, priorities and sector data are shared with WGs as a starting point for the group; aggregate existing sector documents or analysis or commissioning new studies if these studies do not already exist

- ■ *Support on project design, implementation, and scale-up:* e.g. support WGs to find partners for projects once members have identified the issues to be addressed; provide more targeted technical guidance and mentoring to help WGs identify and design projects and scale-up strategies

- ■ *Knowledge sharing and expertise:* e.g. around managing smallholder networks; tools and technologies (including digital technologies) that can help organizations more effectively engage with smallholders; inclusive business models; cross-country learning with WGs from other countries

- ■ *Support on performance measurement and reporting:* e.g. through a common results framework adapted across working groups and country partnerships; digital tools to facilitate results measurement

- ■ *Networking and informational sharing*: sharing relevant news, opportunities and 3rd party events via a newsletter

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Role and responsibilities of the Country Secretariat vary by country and across Working Groups. Working Groups consistently expressed a need for more support from the Country Secretariats

- There is widespread recognition of the opportunity for Country Secretariats to expand network services to enhance the activities of the Working Groups

  - *Strengthening government relationships:* e.g. ensure continued commitment from both Ministerial and technical levels of government; promote the value of WGs to all key government stakeholders, including local level government

  - *Liaising between private sector government:* e.g. conduct regular meetings with each WG to understand and summarize sector concerns/issues; convey concerns to government; convene both parties to resolve challenges; promote follow through on solutions/actions emerging from the public-private dialogue; update WGs on progress related to solutions/ actions; conduct regular meetings with technical departments to find out their policies and plans so that this can be shared with the WGs

  - *Demonstrating the value addition of the CP/WG platform in order to retain and recruit members*

  - *Supporting WG with strategy development and annual workplanning*

  - *Supporting WGs with project design, implementation, and scale:* e.g. through access to more tailored support/guidance around project design, implementation, and scale-up

  - *Facilitating learning across WGs and opportunities to leverage other WGs:* Relationships with other WGs is quite fragmented, with each group working independently.

  - *Sourcing funding opportunities for the Working Groups*

- Not all of these are currently being performed by the Country Secretariats or applicable to all countries. Even where Secretariats are performing some of the functions above, this could be more frequent. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening government relationships and coordination.
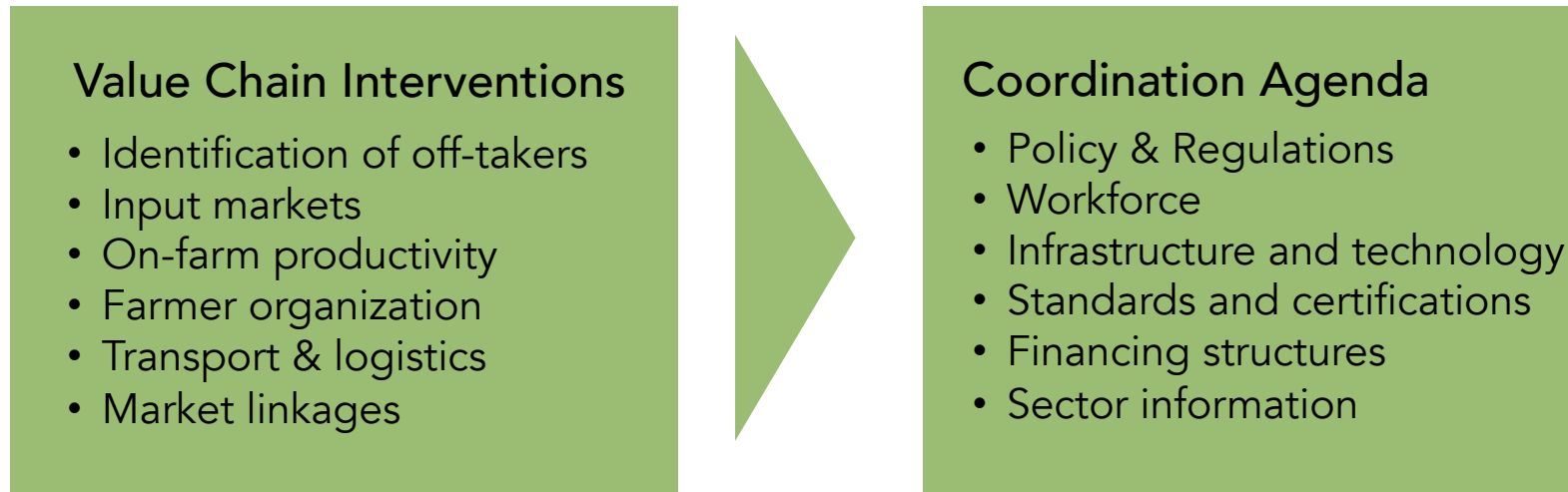
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There is an opportunity to more directly align Working Group agendas and Country Targets with the Grow Asia targets. Governance Bodies and Steering Committees across the network can play an important role in setting more practical targets.

- *Some members have indicated that the 10-20-20 objectives by 2020 are overly ambitious* and that more realistic objectives, along with additional short and medium-term country level priorities and objectives (e.g. priority provinces; priority issues such as food safety, training methodology for sustainable production, etc.) are necessary to improve the performance of WGs.

- *Governance bodies/steering committees can play an important role in setting more practical country targets*; translating overarching objectives into specific WG objectives; prioritizing, adding, or dropping WG sectors; and setting parameters around the scope/ purpose of WGs.

- *In newer CPs, it is not always clear to members whether there is a higher-level governance body and how that interacts with the WGs*. In some cases, this is because the governance body has yet to be established.

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Working Group Approach/Strategy

The broad mandate of sector working groups can include both direct interventions in agriculture value chains as well as coordination of dialogue and action on cross-cutting issues. Most WGs in the GrowAsia network started, and still operate, as value chain projects focused on expanding small holder farmer participation and productivity

Sector Working Group

Value Chain Interventions

- Identification of off-takers
- Input markets
- On-farm productivity
- Farmer organization
- Transport & logistics
- Market linkages

Coordination Agenda

- Policy & Regulations
- Workforce
- Infrastructure and technology
- Standards and certifications
- Financing structures
- Sector information

In an effort to reach a higher scale of impact, some working groups are starting to shift the agenda to coordinating with government on policy, workforce, infrastructure and financing

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Success factors for designing and implementing these interventions include:

- Presence of a committed, active off-taker that has a market demand for the crop

- Focus on on-farm productivity with overarching goal of lowering cost, increasing scale with consistency in quality and attention to sustainability

- Pursuit of solutions that are profitable for all players in the value chain, starting with the farmers

- No one solution fits all value chains, function is more important than than form: farmers collectives, traders networks, etc

- Government is a critical partner in clustering, organizing and engaging with farmers

- In the pursuit of expanded farmer participation and increased productivity, value chains can identify the binding cross-cutting constraints that affect the entire sector

However, the structure of these projects limit the scale of impact. Most projects only benefit a few hundred or even a few thousand farmers, the aggregated impact numbers fall well short of Grow Asia's targets

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Very few Working Groups are operating with a multi-dimensional, sector-wide agenda that encourages collaboration across the sector

■ Many initial projects tend to focus on productivity gains and issues at the production end. However, some of the WGs are also beginning to diversify into other areas and types of initiatives.

■ Opportunities for collaboration among competitors is primarily around policy advocacy, and they have yet to fully explore the set of possibilities for non-policy related collaborations.

■ There can be a bias towards longer-term actions and outcomes, which means that certain quick wins or short-term priorities are being missed by some of the WGs.

■ A number of the WGs are also struggling to identify and design projects:

- For newer CPs, WG members have expressed some confusion about what constitutes a project and how to develop a project.

- WG members are requesting more top-down guidance since the bottom-up approach of pulling sector stakeholders together with the expectation that new connections and interactions would organically lead to WG projects has been slow to yield results.

- Slow progress in translating the mission of the WG into actionable implementation plans (with defined roles and responsibilities for each member) can negatively impact commitment and participation in WGs.

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The literature review and informant interviews highlighted a number of key success factors for the working groups across the Grow Asia Network

- Clear, well-articulated and <u>realistic, attainable</u> **shared vision and strategies**

- **Senior level buy-in** from participating organizations, as well as from government

- **Strong working group governance** (clearly defined roles/systems/processes/ground rules based on transparency, inclusiveness, and continuous communications)

- **Strong, collaborative leadership** (preferably a shared leadership model where leaders are pro-active, influential champions; able to understand broader issues in the sector, have long-term plans in the sector)

- Participants who have a **collaborative mind set, necessary knowledge/skill sets, authority to represent their organizations and are action-oriented**

- Strong systems for **results measurement and learning**, including systems to validate impact results

- Strong **group management and facilitation skills** (which at the most basic level involves using tools such as meeting agendas and meeting minutes to ensure a psychology of delivery)

- **Adequate financial resources**

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