

Growing Together in Bangladesh

Syngenta and VSO report 2015-16



syngenta





Cover page: Teresa Wyatt, Business Development and Planning Head, UK, group five member and a farmer at Birampur.

This page: Daily laborers sorting long beans at the Farmer Center at Mithapukur in Rangpur.

Photos: Abir Abdullah.





A van cart driver carries long beans to the Farmer Center at Mithapukur in Rangpur.
Photo: Abir Abdullah.



Contents

1	Glossary	6
2	Executive summary	9
3	Introduction	15
4	Progress and impact	21
	4.1 Pillar one: Community development	22
	4.2 Pillar two: Farmer training on good agricultural practice	27
	4.3 Pillar three: Value chain development	35
5	Impact on employees	41
6	Leveraging insights for a new kind of business	55
7	Looking ahead	59

1 Glossary

Accenture Development Partnerships	A “corporate social enterprise” that channels the core business capabilities of Accenture to organizations in the international development sector on a not-for-profit business model basis.
ACI	Advanced Chemical Industries. Bangladesh based food and chemical company with over 7,000 employees.
Agro-inputs	Agricultural products and techniques applied to the land for specific farming benefits.
Bangladeshi Taka (BDT)	The official currency of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (e.g. exchange rate: USD 1 = 80.88 BDT at the time of writing).
Birampur	A sub-district in the Dinajpur district, a division of Rangpur, Bangladesh.
Cohort	Applies to groups of senior employees from Syngenta who share their expertise to deliver the program.
Contract farming	An agreement between two or more parties relating to the provision of agricultural services and crop production. It frequently involves collectives and provides an assured market.
Control group farmers	Smallholder farmers who have similar characteristics as the target group of farmers, but are excluded from program interventions. The control group farmers are selected from nearby villages where the Growing Together program is not being implemented.
Decimal	A measure of land used in Bangladesh and India equivalent to one hundredth of an acre (e.g. 100 decimals = 1 acre / 100 decimals = 0.4046 hectares).
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is an agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.
Farmer Center	Buildings that have been built for farmer groups by the Growing Together program. These serve as a central storage and buying station, enabling groups to store their product and deliver it efficiently to a contracted market. At the time of this report, six Farmer Centers have been built.
Field facilitators	Qualified and experienced agronomists who are hired by the Growing Together program to support farmers in the field.
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice.
GTP	Growing Together program.
Imitator farmers	Individuals who are not included in the program interventions, but attend farmer field days and adopt new best practices from their Growing Together neighbours and other farmers in their community. A total of 264 imitator farmers were identified, of which 25% have been surveyed.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Measurable and qualitative targets by which success of an action can be evaluated.
Lead farmer	A farmer group member who is trained by program staff in good agronomic practices and is responsible for disseminating this knowledge back to their group.
Mithapukur	An upazila of Rangpur District in the division of Rangpur, Bangladesh.
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)	An analysis and community group formation tool that uses local knowledge and enables communities to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans.
Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)	Protective clothing and equipment designed to protect the wearer's body from injury.
PRAN	One Bangladesh's biggest food & beverages companies exporting to over 134 countries worldwide. PRAN is currently producing more than 400 food products under 10 different categories i.e. Juices, Drinks, Mineral Water, Bakery, Carbonated beverages, Snacks, Culinary, Confectionery, Biscuits & Dairy.
Rangpur	A division in northwest Bangladesh in which the two target communities are located.
RDRS Bangladesh (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service Bangladesh)	The Growing Together program implementing partner.
Social franchise	Social franchising is the application of commercial franchising concepts to achieve socially beneficial ends.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	The seventeen goals set by the United Nations to end poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change by 2030.
Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture	A not-for-profit organization that focuses on supporting the productivity of small-scale farmers in developing countries around the world.
The Good Growth Plan	Syngenta's six commitments to help farmers meet the challenge of feeding a fast-growing world population sustainably.
Ultra-poor	Farmers who identify themselves as poor and are either landless or have less than 50 decimals of land.
Ultra-poor grant	A grant available to farmers who are identified as ultra-poor in order to buy agronomic inputs and lease land. This grant is not repaid to the program but is used for future activities.



Men travelling on a train roof in Dhaka.
Photo: Thomas Jung.



2 Executive summary

“Over 2.5 billion people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Smallholder farmers are critical to the world’s food security, yet they often face high financial risks and low returns. Every day, 180,000 people leave rural communities to live in cities. Ensuring that farming is a viable and attractive occupation will help to create vibrant, productive rural communities”¹.

A global partnership for sustainable development

In 2015, 193 world leaders adopted 17 goals to set the sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years. If these goals are achieved, it would mean an end to extreme poverty, inequality and climate change by 2030. The private sector is a key player in helping achieve these goals.

The Good Growth Plan is Syngenta’s commitment to help farmers meet the challenge of feeding a fast-growing world population sustainably by providing tools and training that make agriculture more productive, efficient and profitable. The Good Growth Plan underscores Syngenta’s contribution to society within the wider context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. thegoodgrowthplan.com

Growing Together

Growing Together is a program co-created by VSO and Syngenta. Together both organizations are working to improve the livelihoods of 10,000 smallholder farmers in Bangladesh. As part of the Growing Together program, senior Syngenta employees work alongside farmers in rural Bangladesh, bringing together cutting edge global expertise with local know-how to ensure local agriculture remains a commercially viable and attractive industry to work in.

By combining employee volunteering placements of one month in Bangladesh with long-term continuous support from VSO and local partner organizations, the Growing Together program has already delivered impressive results.

Until end of 2016 four teams of Syngenta employees visited Bangladesh, living and working with the local communities. The result of these placements has been the development of a holistic community framework that aims to sustainably increase smallholder farmers' income and foster vibrant, resilient and inclusive communities. The project framework is based on the following three pillars:



A comprehensive evaluation was carried out to measure the impact achieved until end of 2016. The following section highlights key achievements in three areas.



Adelfa Hill and Swati Chawla from Syngenta in interaction with a women's group. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Impact in the communities

Pillar one: Community development

The formation of community groups plays an important role for developing capabilities and improving business relationships with others in the market. To date, the program has established 230 farmer groups and 45 youth groups. Members share a common vision, meet regularly, own a group savings account for collective investments and resilience and have defined roles and responsibilities.

The most marginalized people in the groups are ultra-poor farmers, many of whom are women and do not own land. Specific grants for the ultra-poor are provided to support and include them alongside ongoing group activities. Each group has at least 30% female membership.

Community groups meet monthly to discuss the social and agronomic issues that are affecting them. This year groups have shared social issues in areas such as child marriage, water and sanitation and access to education. The groups discuss these challenges and work together to find solutions.

Achievements to date:

- 230 farmer groups have been formed
- Combined, the savings of all groups within the program now totals \$181,250 USD
- 91% meeting attendance rate throughout the year
- 91% of participating women have higher confidence in modern farming practices
- 32% of participating women say they have increased decision making power and influence within their families.



Growing Together participants in conversation with a farmer group.
Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Pillar two: Farmer training on good agriculture practice

A baseline survey conducted at the beginning of the program showed that only 7% of farmers in the target communities had access to available agricultural advice services. In response to this, an agronomic framework was developed which includes training content and a sustainable model for disseminating this knowledge. A key approach of the agronomy training has been 'learning from peers'. This requires each farmer group to establish a demonstration plot in which nominated lead farmers share new agronomic techniques learned from qualified field facilitator agronomists. These plots enable farmers to test new techniques in a risk free environment and to directly compare progress with their own fields. The following outcomes were measured by VSO field evaluators and then verified by an independent evaluator.

Achievements to date:

- 230 demonstration plots had been set up by January 2017
- 570 training events have been conducted
- 7,000 farmers (2,240 female) have received agronomy training in rice, vegetable and potato cultivation since the start of the project
- 21 farmer field days have taken place, with about 6,000 community members attending
- 96% of farmers report that they are now proactively practicing the new farming techniques, including correct and safe use of agro-inputs and this is reflected in yield and returns on investment.

Pillar three: Value chain development and Farmer Centers

The third pillar of the project is to ensure that market systems are conducive to smallholders earning a sustainable income from their crops. Six Farmer Centers have now been established providing a physical space for farmer groups to aggregate their crops. The centers provide access to a broad range of services identified by Syngenta teams to add value to the local communities. Services include rental of machinery, access to inputs (such as seeds) and finance, trading support and access to affordable storage so that farmers can sell their crops when the price is best.

The Farmer Centers also offer support and training on how best to engage with agricultural supply chains and negotiate mutually favorable terms. The following outcomes were found:

- 100% of participating farmers are now using services provided by the Farmer Centers
- 65% of project farmers are engaged in national and international contract farming through the Farmer Centre aggregation service
- In 2016 Growing Together rice farmers in Birampur district increased net incomes by an average close to 20%, while potato farmers in Mithapukur more than doubled their average net incomes.



Growing Together group four during their placement. Photo: Zoe Ives.

Impact on employees

The learning experience for Growing Together participants comes from working in a challenging, unfamiliar and resource-constrained environment. The Syngenta employees have to apply their know-how in places outside their comfort zone, deal with issues that force them to think and act differently and consult with the multi-stakeholder teams responsible for implementing the program on the ground.

Surveys conducted with participants and their line managers after their placements found the following:

- 97% of participants feel that the program has improved their global perspective and similarly that they have an enhanced ability to focus on customers
- 80% of Syngenta participants report an improved understanding of the needs of smallholders in relation to Syngenta's business
- 100% of participants feel that their ability to collaborate with other stakeholders has improved
- 80% of Syngenta colleagues report that the placement has significantly helped them to connect with Syngenta's plan for sustainable agriculture, The Good Growth Plan
- 70% of Syngenta participants feel more engaged with the company and its purpose
- 89% of line managers who responded to the survey feel that participation in the Growing Together program helped their team member improve key leadership skills.

Impact on the Syngenta business

Over 60 Syngenta leaders have participated in the Growing Together program since its inception in 2014. By working closely with Syngenta Bangladesh the participants were able to provide new insights and recommendations for business opportunities with marginal smallholders, some of which have been implemented. Furthermore, on return from placement, participants have cumulatively presented their experience to approximately 3,500 colleagues face-to-face and their blogs on the company intranet have received 22,000 page views.

By sharing their experiences participants have helped to increase the internal awareness about smallholder challenges and by displaying Syngenta's contribution to mitigate these they also raised people's pride in the company. The insights from the field help all colleagues to connect back with customers, putting them at the center of the Syngenta operation. It also highlights the importance of working in partnerships to achieve the company's Good Growth Plan targets.



Hossain Sarwardi, in front of a new Bank Asia branch at a Farmer Center. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Looking ahead

Syngenta's investment in the Growing Together project is intentionally time-bound and will complete in June 2018, driving VSO and the development sector to think differently about sustainability and scale. It requires developing additional investment relationships with institutional and markets system actor, particularly those with value chain interests through contract farming, input distribution channels, financial and insurance services.

In early 2017, the program opened the first of an initial six retail banking facilities in all Farmer Centers with the help of a strategic partnership with Bank Asia, a leading Bangladeshi bank. Their offer reduces the cost of borrowing for farmers considerably and facilitates more entrepreneurial investments within the broader communities. It is planned that future Farmer Centers will also include this retail banking offer. Additionally, the program is scoping a partnership with the UN financed Bluenumber Foundation that will contribute to the tracing of crops throughout the entire value chain.

Estimates suggest that opportunities through market systems investments will enable the program to reach 100,000 farming households, improving the livelihoods of more than 2 million people in thriving communities and generating opportunities for other initiatives in health, nutrition, education and economic development. Scaling of the program will be facilitated by a social franchise of up to 100 Farmer Centers.



Photo: Allison Joyce.



3 Introduction

The Growing Together program is a unique collaboration between VSO, a leading international development organization, and Syngenta, a leading global agriculture company, with the aim to sustainably improve the economic and food security of smallholder farmers in Bangladesh.

“Developing rural communities sustainably means bringing them closer to markets, sharing knowledge and giving access to better farming practice. Our partnership with VSO is proving to be very successful with measurable benefits for rural communities and our volunteering employees.”

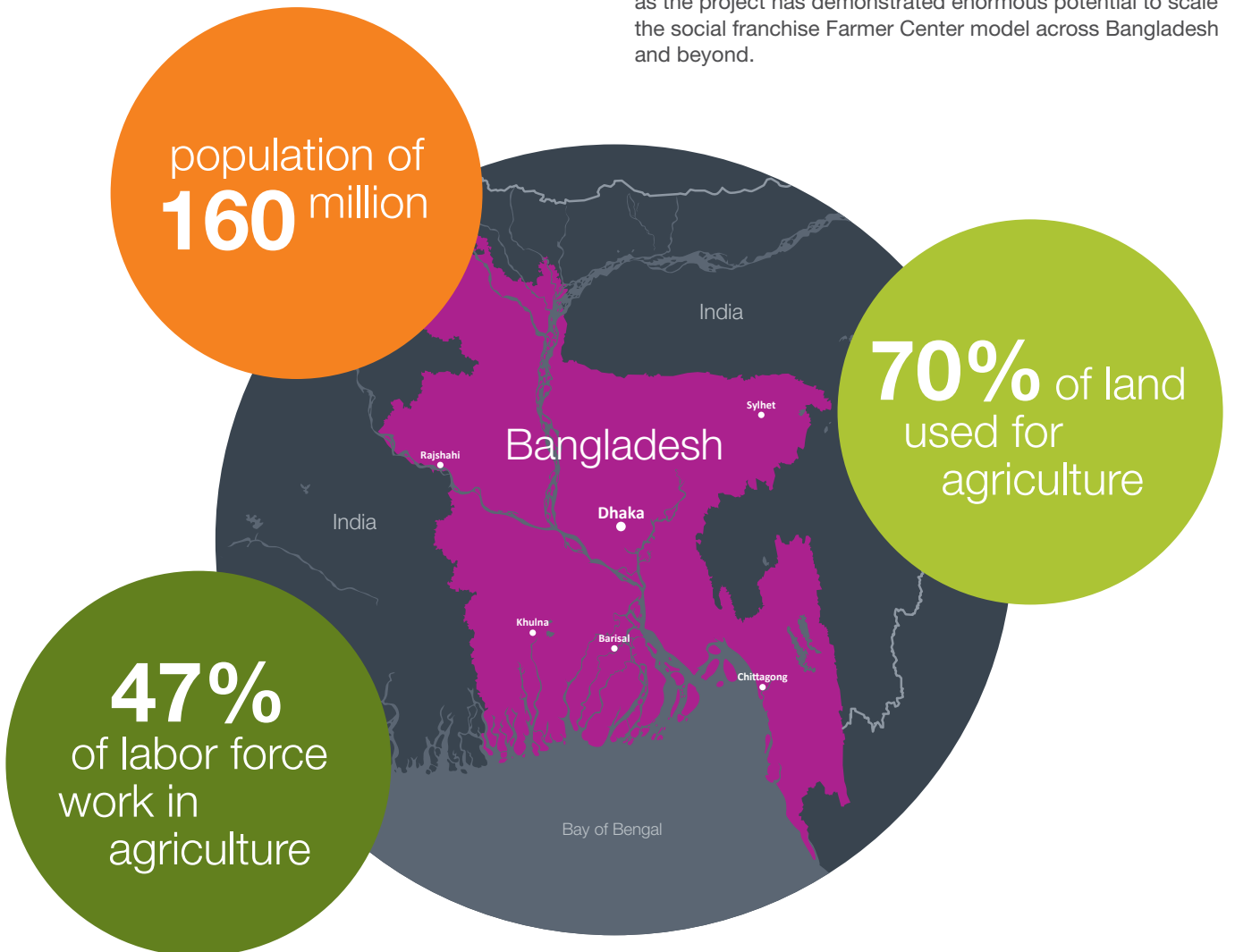
Juan Gonzalez Valero,
Head of Public Policy and Sustainability at Syngenta

With a population now exceeding 160 million and a projected increase of a further 17 million until 2025 (World Bank, 2016), Bangladesh faces an increasing challenge to feed a growing population. Despite growing into a lower middle income country, a staggering 40% of Bangladesh's population live on less than \$1.25 per day. Of this, 75% live in areas where agriculture is the predominant source of income. Yet farming is increasingly failing to meet the demand of a fast-growing rural population and food security is far from guaranteed.

Small plots of land, dated techniques and limited access to markets make it difficult for Bangladesh's smallholder farming communities to produce enough to feed themselves and their families, let alone make a profit. These factors are compounded by the effects of climate change which can make growing crops in traditional ways more difficult.

It is in this context that VSO and Syngenta in 2014 spent time with smallholder farmers in town-hall meetings in Bangladesh to understand their frustrations on market prices, debt-driven cycles of high-interest crop financing and crop protection products and applications that simply did not meet their needs or expectations. The Growing Together program, born out of these discussions, has been working with these same farming communities ever since.

Agriculture in Bangladesh



The program harnesses the expertise of senior-level Syngenta employees who volunteer on assignments in Bangladesh together with VSO and local implementation partner Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS).

Each year, two cohorts of up to fifteen Syngenta employees travel to Bangladesh for one month to share their expertise and further embed a deeper understanding of best agricultural practices business acumen within the communities to ensure fair and equal access to markets.

By the end of 2016 the Growing Together program reached 10,000 farming households in the north-western districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur and has the ambitious goal to reach over 100,000 smallholder farmers by mid-2018.

The Growing Together program is at an exciting stage of development: A social franchise Farmer Center model has been developed and is being continuously refined. Embedded in this model is a focus on building the assets and capabilities of smallholder communities, providing bespoke agronomic training and facilitating market systems collaboration to bring benefits to the entire value chain and in particular, to smallholder farmers.

This report explores the impact that this collaborative initiative has had within the communities in which it works, on the employees who have taken part as well as on the wider Syngenta business. The report also looks to the future as the project has demonstrated enormous potential to scale the social franchise Farmer Center model across Bangladesh and beyond.



Members of a farmer group tend to their communal crops in Durgapur. Photo: Allison Joyce.

The vision of Growing Together

Our vision for the communities

Our goal is for smallholder farming communities in Bangladesh to grow together, support each other and learn in an environment where farmers can work safely, grow their crops sustainably and generate more income for their communities to thrive. We nurture a culture where no one is excluded, where the needs of the poorest come first and women and men are valued equally. We aim to achieve this by empowering farmers with the tools and knowledge to change the status quo by increasing their influence in the value chain and encouraging inward investment into farming communities for the longer term benefit of the whole market system.

Our vision for participating employees

We want to foster a community of participants and alumni that is actively engaged in the Growing Together program; where participants take collective ownership in the development of leadership skills, innovation and the improvement of business practices that help to create a more sustainable world. Our goal is to see participants reach beyond their technical skills and collaborate across diverse teams and multiple stakeholders to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. We aim to see participants proactively become ambassadors for smallholder farmers by advocating for food security in a local and global context.

Our vision for Syngenta

The insights and learnings generated by the Growing Together program will have an impact far beyond changes at the grassroots level. Our focus on smallholder farmers will not only help to develop sustainable practices in the field but will serve to enrich Syngenta's ongoing sustainability and research and development efforts to achieve a step-change in farm productivity worldwide in the spirit of The Good Growth Plan.

The Syngenta volunteer program 2014 - 2016

Cohort one, October 2014

The first cohort conducted a needs assessment to understand the challenges in rice and potato grower communities and value chains. From this they developed a framework that would work with communities to empower

them to address these issues. This framework comprises three areas; community development, agronomic training and market systems facilitation. More information can be found in the community impact section of this report.



Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Cohort two, May 2015

The second cohort designed a comprehensive agronomic training framework to support farmers to grow and learn together to sustainably increase yields. They also introduced the Farmer Center concept as a means to

enable market systems facilitation; exploring what services would be most beneficial to farmers and developing a model that was piloted with Farmer Centers in Mithapukur and Birampur.



Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Cohort three, November 2015

The third cohort explored the opportunities between Syngenta Bangladesh business and the Farmer Center model. They also spent time reviewing and refining the Farmer Center model, mapping various operating

models that took into account the local context and the requirements and opinions of farmers. Cohort three's work led to the decision for the Farmer Centers to become a social franchise.



Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Cohort four, October 2016

In 2016 Bangladesh faced some security challenges with several attacks on individuals and groups. Following rigorous monitoring of the situation the fourth cohort worked remotely from an agricultural project in Jharkhand, East India. From here the group analyzed the sales data from the

Farmer Centers to refine the service catalogue and business model ready for the next four Farmer Centers. Furthermore, the group produced a set of recommendations to introduce more profitable business opportunities for women in the Growing Together communities in Bangladesh.



Photo: Abir Abdullah.



Growing Together group two members in conversations with a farmer group.
Photo: Allison Joyce.



4 Progress and impact

VSO and Syngenta believe that the assets and capabilities of communities need to be developed in order to support sustainable positive change in poor and marginalized communities. Forming village structures and empowering groups to be agents of their own change results in sustainable outcomes and impact.

Impact measurement methodology

The annual data collection enables VSO and Syngenta to monitor the program's progress via a set of key performance indicators (KPIs). Data used in this report was collected January – February 2017 and followed a random cluster sampling technique. 448 farmers, split equally across 10 clusters were sampled. A further 146 imitator farmer clusters were sampled to compare the indirect reach of the project. Imitator farmers are those who are not included in the project interventions but attend Growing Together community events, such as Farmer Field Days, and adopt good agronomic practices promoted by the project. Alongside this, 112 randomly selected comparator farmers were selected (25% of the cluster sample). This enabled a direct comparison of the program's impact with communities living nearby where there were no project interventions.

The data from the farmer surveys was compared with the following data sources:

- Numbers reported in focus group discussions
- Numbers reported in key informant interviews.

4.1 Pillar one: Community development



Members of Syngenta group five meeting with the ultra-poor farmers group at Durgapur, Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

KPI

Key performance indicators

At least 70% of community groups (farmer groups and youth groups) formed are active and functioning effectively*

60% of targeted farmers, women and community members engaged with and participated in Farmer Center activities**

30% of women report an increase in their economic empowerment***

Farmer groups

The Growing Together program facilitates farming communities to self-select and self-organize the poorest farming households into farmer groups. These groups receive organizational capacity building to enable them to overcome social and agronomic challenges.

Farmer group formation

Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques are used as an analytical and group formation tool. The community is asked to map individual and community-owned assets. This information is used as the basis of a discussion within which community members agree the priority objectives and membership of the farmer groups. Farmers who self-identify as 'ultra-poor', 'poor' or of 'middle income' as well as those who have little or no access to basic services are then selected as group members. Using this methodology ensures full participation and ownership of the project activities. It also creates transparency around how group members are selected and enables the development of a shared project vision between partners, farmers and youth group members.

* Defined as the group meeting regularly, has a constitution and bank account in place and documents meetings

** Access to value-addition training, participate in market actor linking activities, engaged in collective bargaining processes

*** Defined as women having access to their own source of income and making their own financial decisions

Results against Key Performance Indicator:

230 farmer groups have been set up. 100% of farmer groups are active and functioning effectively.

	Total number of farmer groups	Male farmers	Female farmers	Total number of farmers	Male youth groups members	Female youth groups members	Total number of youth group members
Birampur	121	2637	1043	3680	569	125	694
Mithapukur	109	2123	1197	3320	554	118	672
Total	230*	4760	2240	7000	1123	243	1366

*Female group: 03; mixed group: 227.

Farmer group structure, roles and responsibilities

Thirty members: Female representation must make up at least 30% of each group

Two lead farmers: Responsible for disseminating good agronomic practices

President: Responsible for the overall functioning and running of their group

Vice president: Supports the president and looks after the demonstration plots

Secretary: Maintains the group records and ensures attendance is registered

Treasurer: Responsible for financial management

Ambassador: Sets up and supports new farmer groups in neighboring communities



“As the group’s secretary I have some responsibility. I facilitate the meetings and take care of documentation, so being the group Secretary is a big role. I feel proud that everybody took the decision to make me Secretary. My husband is also proud.”

Selina Kerketa,
mother of twins and Durgapur
farmer group secretary.

Photo: Allison Joyce.

Monthly group meetings

Farmer groups meet monthly to discuss the social and agronomic issues that are affecting them. This year groups have shared social issues in areas such as child marriage, water and sanitation and access to education. The groups discuss these challenges and work together to find solutions.



Members of Syngenta group five having a meeting with the farmers group at Pairabati Krishnapur in Mithapukur, Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Group savings and access to finance

Every group has set up a group savings account where each member deposits 60BDT (\$0.75USD) on average per month. Group savings encourage a collective mind-set, create resilience to help cope with shocks and can even be used as collateral to secure micro-finance and credit. So far, the **230 farmer groups have saved \$181,250 USD since the project began.**



Bank Asia branch at a Farmer Center. Photo: Anik Rahman.

Results against Key Performance Indicators:

Attendance at the farmer group meetings is high with an **average of 91% of farmers attending meetings throughout the year.**

In January 2017, the Growing Together program opened the first of six retail finance branches in collaboration with leading Bangladeshi bank, Bank Asia. This initiative reduces the cost of borrowing and also facilitates more strategic investment finances for farmers and entrepreneurs in the broader communities. Managing agents are being recruited from the Growing Together youth clubs; ensuring local ownership and generating youth employment.



VSO CEO, Philip Goodwin; VSO Bangladesh Director, Simon Brown and Deputy General Manager of Bank Asia, Zahrul Alam at the opening ceremony of the Mithapukur Farmer Center Bank Branch. Photo: Anik Rahman.

Gender analysis conducted in 2016

To get a better understanding about how to most effectively support women in agriculture, VSO conducted a comprehensive gender analysis in 2016. The analysis found that women's physical access to markets and the Growing Together Farmer Centers is limited by mobility restrictions and cultural norms. It also identified that women spend an average of 5 hours and 20 minutes per day on agricultural activities. While this is approximately half an hour less than men, it is on top of the 10+ hours per day women spend on child care, household chores and feeding their families.

Traditionally, in the Growing Together communities, perishable vegetables are cultivated by women in their household gardens for family consumption. Through Growing Together, vegetable cultivation is becoming more commercial and moving from gardens to fields; bringing with it a significant opportunity for women in agriculture.

The analysis found that 56% of the women interviewed are now engaged in weeding, sowing, stacking, pruning, harvesting and post-harvesting activities. However, with men handling all of the purchasing, selling and finances, this work is rarely recognized as a contribution to family income by women.



Women farmers/entrepreneurs attend a Women Day at the Boldipukur Farmers Center in Rangpur.
Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Results against Key Performance Indicator:

Since the Growing Together project started, **91% of women report an increase in their confidence to use modern farming practices and 32% say they have increased their decision making power and influence within their families.**

This is thanks to the technical knowledge they have gained during farmer group meetings and training at demonstration plots. However, gender equality is still a long way off. Women report a strong desire to engage in agricultural business activities further and increase their influence within their communities. In 2017, one of the work streams that the fifth cohort will focus on is the development of attractive business opportunities for women. This has the potential to create significant impact on the distribution of family incomes and decision making within communities.



Farmers raise their hand to show their interest in opening an account with Bank Asia. Photo: Anik Rahman.

4.2 Pillar two: Farmer training on good agricultural practice



Farmer Mujibor Rahman examines vegetables at Mithapukur, Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

KPI

Key performance indicator

At least 80% of project farmers report practicing new agronomic techniques and 70% of targeted farmers reporting the correct and safe use of agro-inputs

The Growing Together program provides farmers and youth group members with access to agronomic information and training, new technologies and encourages good agronomic practice.

Challenges reported by farmers before the Growing Together program began

- Low yields and high post-harvest losses
- Lack of access to quality and well-priced inputs
- Lack of understanding of good agronomic practices and limited access to this information
- Lack of access to modern equipment or machinery.

Agronomic training

The second cohort of Syngenta volunteers were instrumental in shaping and designing an agronomic training framework to support farmers. **In total, 7,000 farmers (2,240 female) have received training** from the Growing Together program in rice, vegetable and potato cultivation using new agriculture technologies and techniques.

“I’ve learned about getting the right dose of fertilizer. Sometimes farmers are so focused on making a profit that they use too much fertilizer and pesticides, and in the process they destroy the land. We need to cultivate land in a good way – in a way that doesn’t harm people or the land.”

Abdul Latif,
member of Bugra Para farmer group.



Photo: Allison Joyce.

Lead farmers and demonstration plots

Each farmer group has two lead farmers who receive training from field facilitators and then disseminate their learning through to their groups using collectively leased demonstration plots. These plots enable farmer groups to test and practice the new techniques they have learned in a risk free environment. **By January 2017, 230 demonstration plots had been set up**, with each farmer group taking responsibility for the ongoing management, supported by field facilitators.

Farmer field days

Farmer field days are held at demonstration plots and are advertised to the wider community in an effort to share learning with more farmers. **So far, 20 farmer field days have taken place with up to 6,000 community members attending.**

Changes in farming practices

A challenge often faced in agricultural programs is turning the knowledge that farmers receive during training into tangible improvements for farming practices.



Farmers separate potatoes in a cold storage called Arman Cold Storage at Hazirhat, Rangpur, Bangladesh. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Results against Key Performance Indicator:

96% of farmers surveyed reported that they were proactively practicing the new farming techniques, including correct and safe use of agro-inputs.



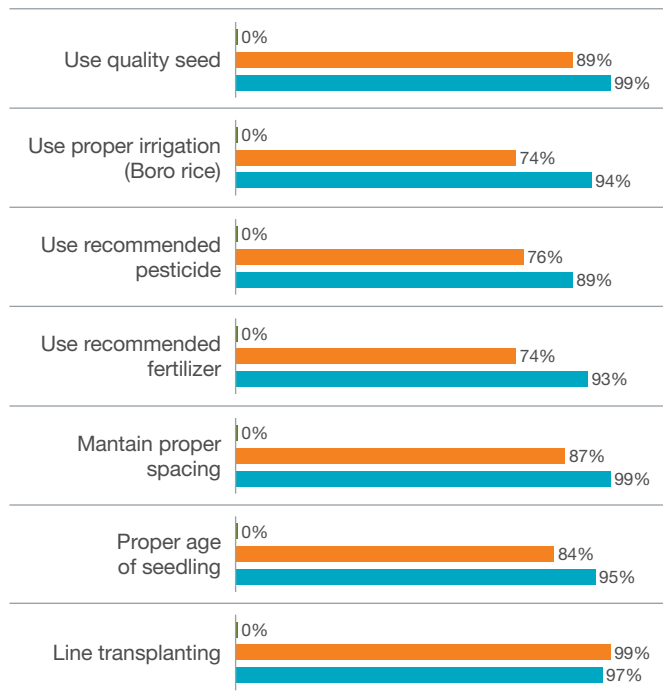
Rice traders wait for customers in the market at Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Application of new farming practices in Growing Together communities

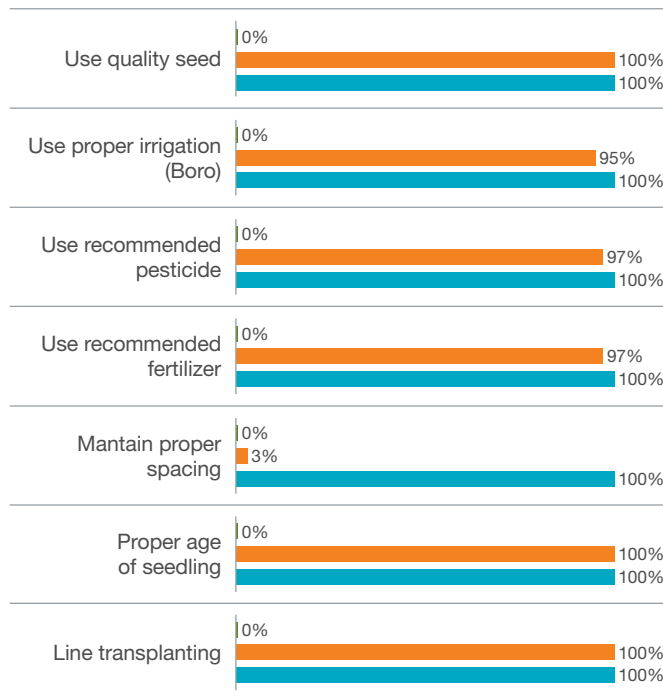
In Mithapukur, farmers grow rice, potatoes and vegetables. However, in Birampur rice is the predominant crop. Potato farming is relatively new in the area and vegetable cultivation is very rare.

- Comparator farmers
- Imitator farmers
- Growing Together farmers

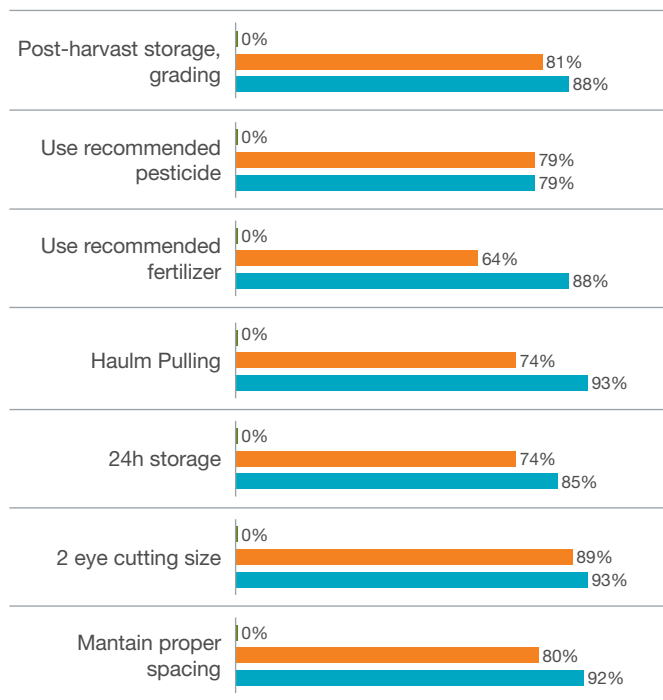
Rice farming in Mithapukur



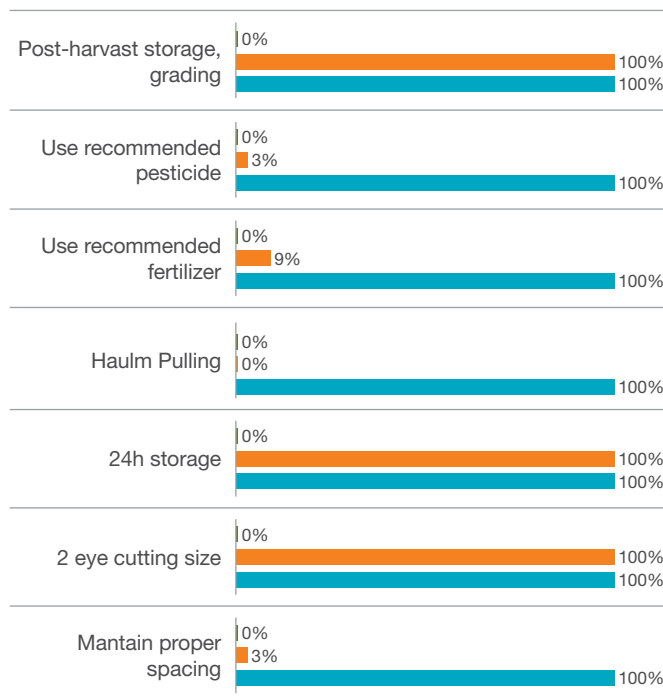
Rice farming in Birampur



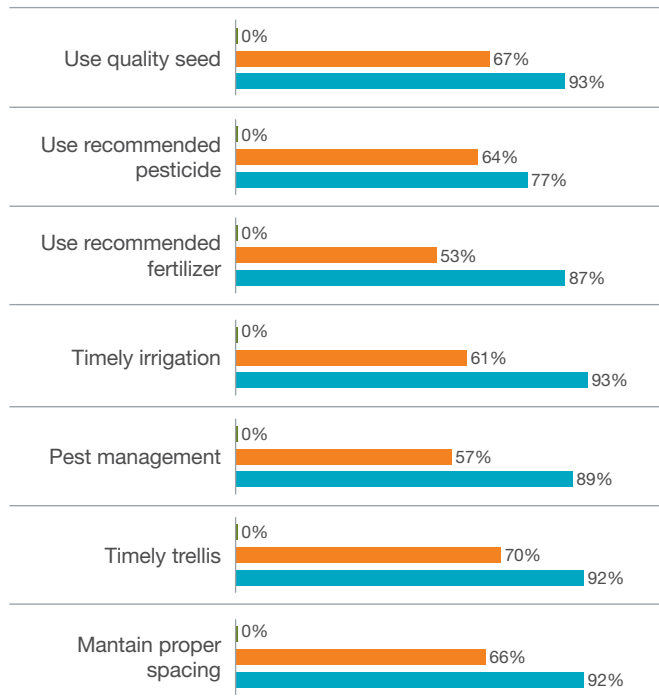
Potato farming in Mithapukur



Potato farming in Birampur



Vegetable farming in Mithapukur



Safe use of inputs

Prior to the Growing Together program, farmers had a limited understanding of agronomic safety practices. Given the potential dangers that this presents, clear guidelines on safe and efficient use of inputs were built into the agronomic training.

Results against Key Performance Indicator:

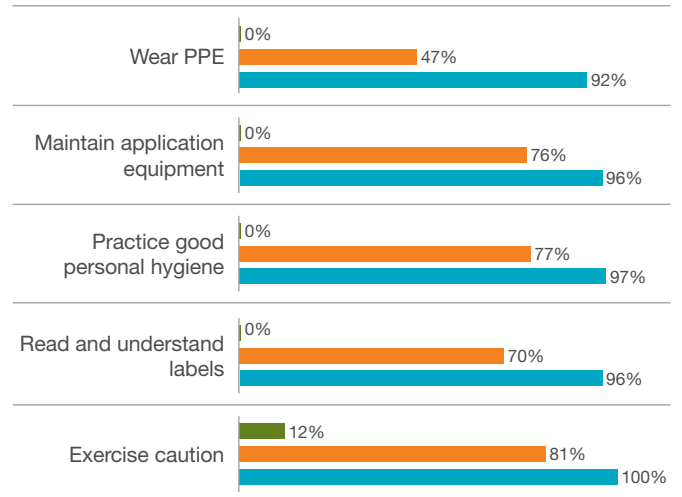
98% of farmers surveyed say that they are now applying inputs more efficiently.

Although farmers reported using personal protective equipment (PPE), when observed in the field farmers were not using recognized equipment but instead wrapping scarves around their mouths, noses and hands. Nearby imitator farmers are also starting to understand the risks involved and applying similar makeshift PPE. It is clear to the program that there is still considerable work to do to make PPE an affordable part of farming. Therefore, a key task of future groups will be to explore avenues to embed this within the Farmer Centre, including the potential of a commercial spraying service.

Save use of inputs in Growing Together communities

■ Comparator farmers
 ■ Imitator farmers
 ■ Growing Together farmers

Mithapukur



Birampur

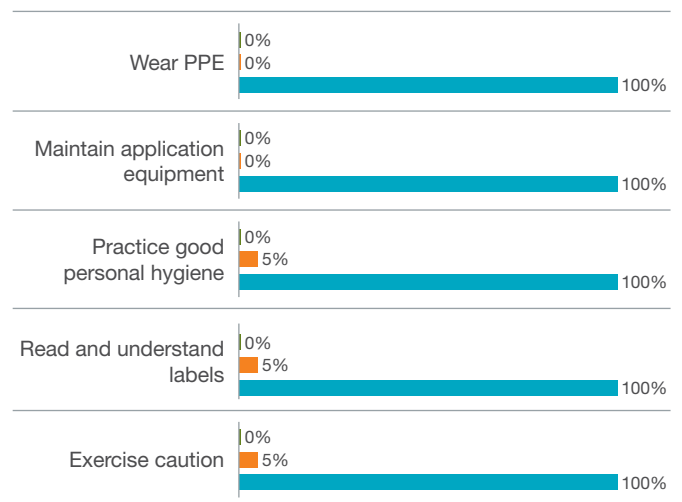
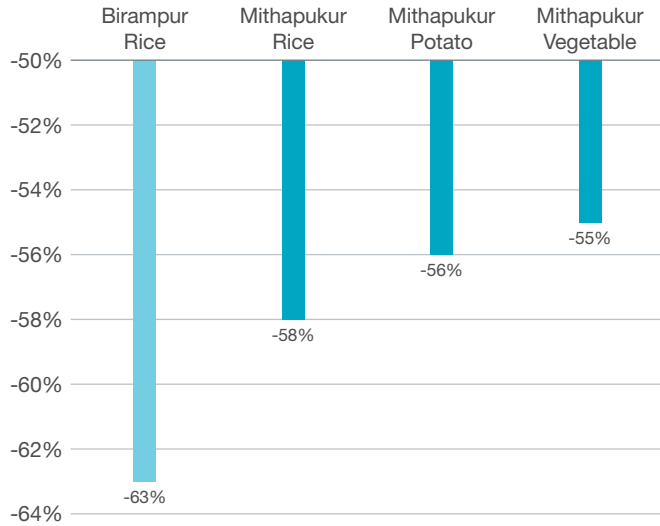


Photo: Thomas Jung.

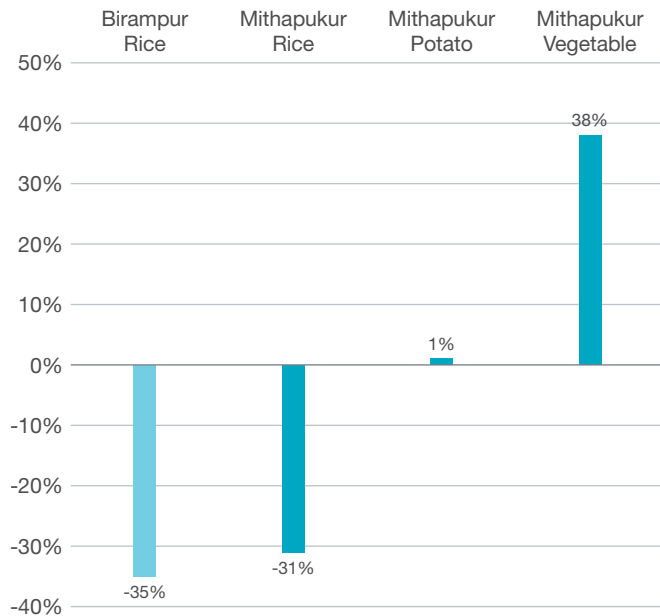
Use of fertilizers and pesticides

The Growing Together program has been instrumental in mobilizing farmers for safe and thoughtful use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. An analysis of the annual data shows that there has been a significant decrease in the use of fertilizers and pesticides per kilogram of crop yield from 2015 to 2016.

Cost of Fertiliser per KG yield (2016v2015)



Cost of Pesticides per KG yield (2016v2015)



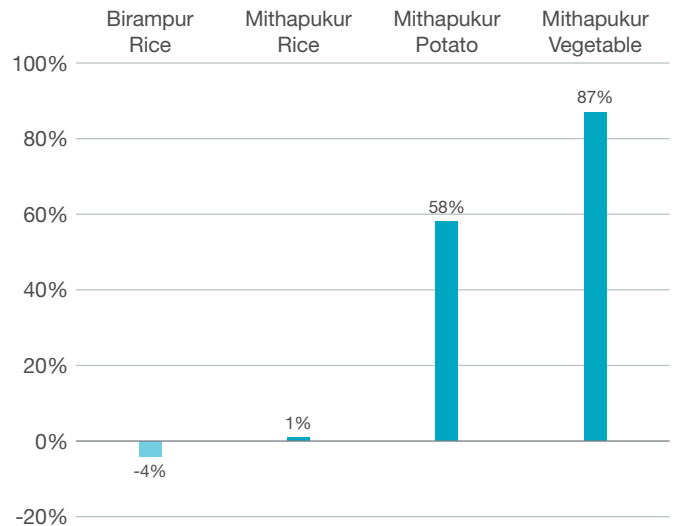
Mithapukur's cost of pesticides needs further analysis of the particular challenges farmers faced in 2016. Overall though these numbers continue a trend from the start of the program; with reductions of 60 to 70% in chemical fertilizer spend across all crops and pesticides reduction of more than 50% in rice and 10% in potato and vegetable.

Yield

Land size remained fairly similar between 2016 and 2015 samples, with average farm size of one acre and a division of land between two seasons of rice, and then mix of potato and vegetable.

Yield per acre significantly increased in both potato and vegetables, but with a concern that Mithapukur farmers grew more lower market value vegetables in 2016 and that this is reflected in income received. While rice yields remain relatively stable in 2016, this masks the shift in yields in 2015 and that Growing Together farmers far exceeded the perceived ceiling of 4.4MT/hectare in Bangladesh. In 2016, Mithapukur rice farmers reported an average 5.9MT/hectare. Birampur farmers reported an average 5.2MT.

Changes in Yield per acre (2016v2015)





Shariful Islam tends to his vegetable crop in Mithapukur. Photo: Anik Rahman.



Farmers transporting paddy from the field at Birampur, Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

4.3 Pillar three: Value chain development

The Growing Together program aims to facilitate further development of market systems in a way that builds trust and creates a joint vision among market actors for successful farming communities and food security.

KPI

Key performance indicator

At least 60% of targeted farmers participating in new value chain activity

40% of targeted farmers report an increase in average household disposable income

30% of targeted households report an increase in food security status



A small trader at his shop in the market at Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Farmer Centers

Central to the success of the program has been the piloting of six for-profit Farmer Centers, learning from an approach introduced to Bangladesh by the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture. Centers provide physical spaces where farmers can access quality inputs such as seeds, crop protection products as well as the rental of simple farming equipment and aggregation of crops. Farmer Center facilitated contracts have led to increased market-driven technical assistance, pre-financed seeds and a significant increase in income through potato export and domestic wholesaler contracts in vegetables.

Results against Key Performance Indicators:

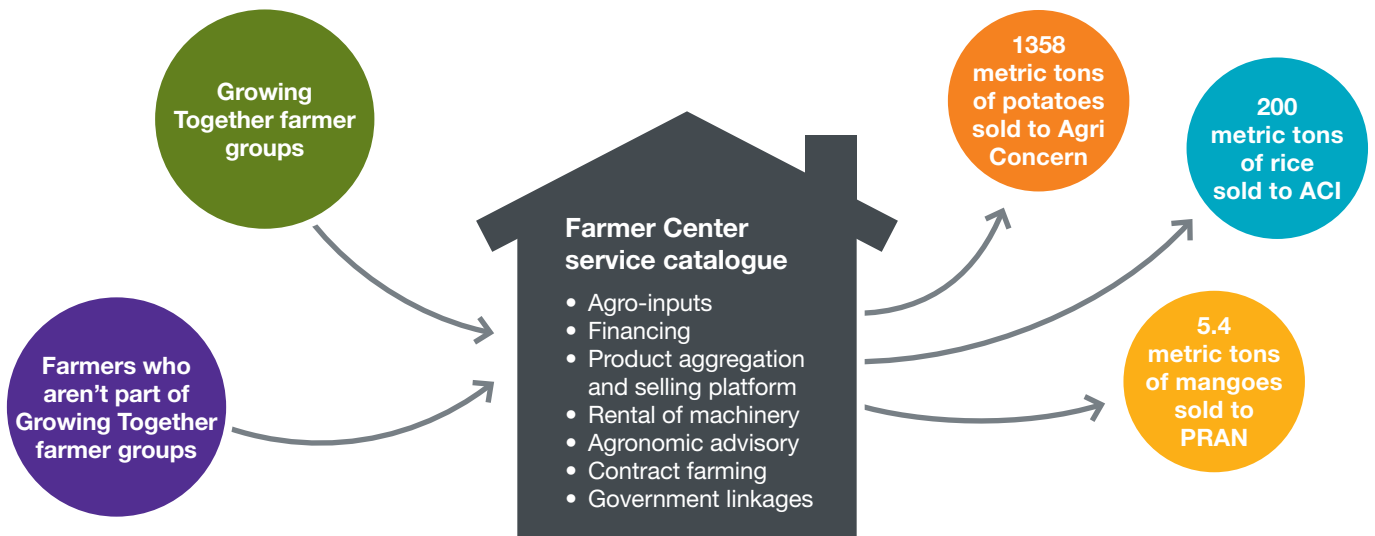
100% of project farmers are now using services provided by the Farmer Centers, such as price information and procuring quality inputs.

65% of project farmers are engaged in national and international contract farming through the Farmer Centre aggregation service. These contracts are also accessed by other members of the community who are not a part of farmer groups.



Mithapukur Farmer Center. Photo: Thomas Jung.

The Farmer Center model in action

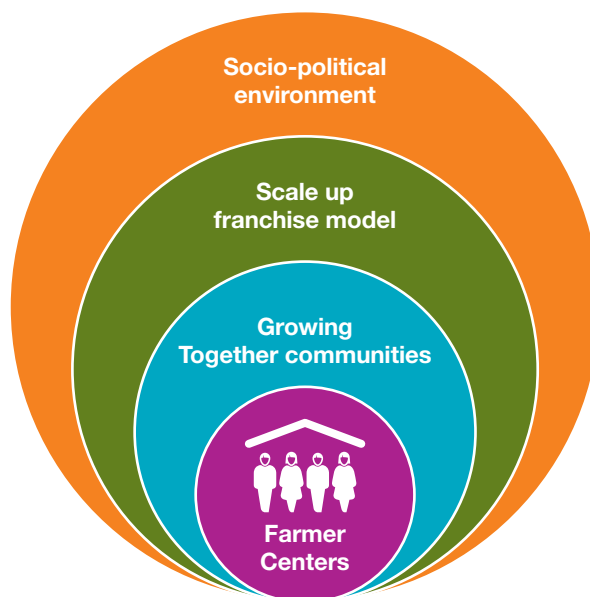


Nested value chain

Traditional linear views of value chains reinforce transactional relationships between one actor and the next. They discourage systems thinking, longer term strategic decisions and interactions between actors at different stages of the value chain, which could include, for example, retailer investments in agribusiness entrepreneurs. A nested view encourages interaction and inward investments into farming communities for the longer term benefiting the whole market system. It is this that then creates a very different perspective where each actor has a vested interest in the success and viability of farming. This year 55% of farmers received input loans as well as support and advice from purchasing companies to help reduce their labor and increase yields. Cohort five will further explore market systems facilitation to embed this nested value chain within the Farmer Center model.

Taking the project to scale through a sustainable, entrepreneurial approach

With the support of Accenture Development Partnerships, the project is advancing its ambition to form a social franchise which not only holds a growing network of Farmer Centers to account (through a standard catalogue of fee and no fee based services) but also further facilitates market systems collaboration.



The nested value chain encouraging inward investment into farming communities.

Farm profitability

Crop diversity remains a critical part of Growing Together's approach, with two thirds of Mithapukur farmers now cropping a mix of rice, potato and vegetable and realizing a 50% increase in net income versus 2015 (average US\$912 versus US\$613) and a tripling of net income versus the 2014 baseline (US\$278). While such multi-cropping is less evident in Birampur, those that do have net incomes similar to Mithapukur farmers.

While rice yield remained fairly static year-on-year, cost of production significantly decreased and market prices significantly increased; the result of course being a much higher net income and return on investment than previous years.

In potatoes, yield significantly increased and price increased marginally. With costs per kilogram of crop harvested decreasing despite price rises in seeds, farmers were able to realize a significant increase in their return on investment compared to 2016.

In vegetables, yield again significantly increased but pricing, particularly in Mithapukur, significantly decreased while overall production costs increased. It needs deeper analysis to understand the specific conditions which caused this.

	Costs of Production per kilogram of crop harvested 2016 v 2015	Growing Together Farmer average ROI 2016*
Birampur Rice	-20%	0.87
Mithapukur Rice	-9%	1.23
Mithapukur Potato	-22%	0.90
Mithapukur Vegetable	-11%	1.77

* Gross income minus costs of production divided by cost of production.

Food security and diversification of diets

58% of families in Mithapukur and 38% of families in Birampur have food security throughout the year.

Households have also significantly diversified their diets due to training received in new vegetable cultivation. In Mithapukur today, 31% of households have meals containing legumes, nuts and seeds at least six times per month and 37% have an equal quantity of fish in their diets.

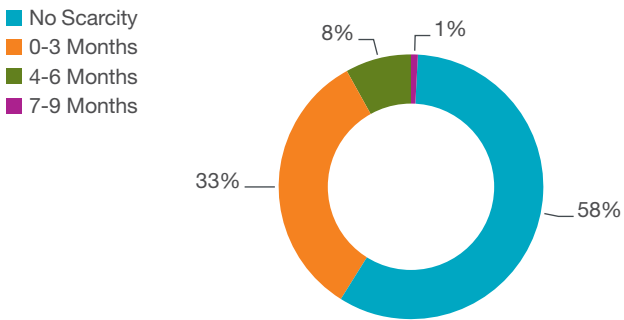


Photo: Nattasuda Anusonadisai.

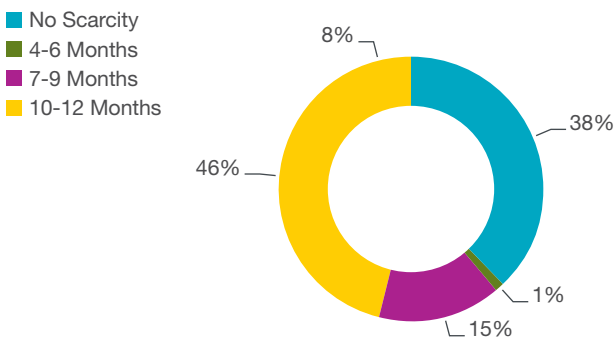


Farmers cut paddy from a demo plot of Bree 52 rice cultivation at Muradpur, Kafrikhal, Mithapukur, Rangpur, Bangladesh. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

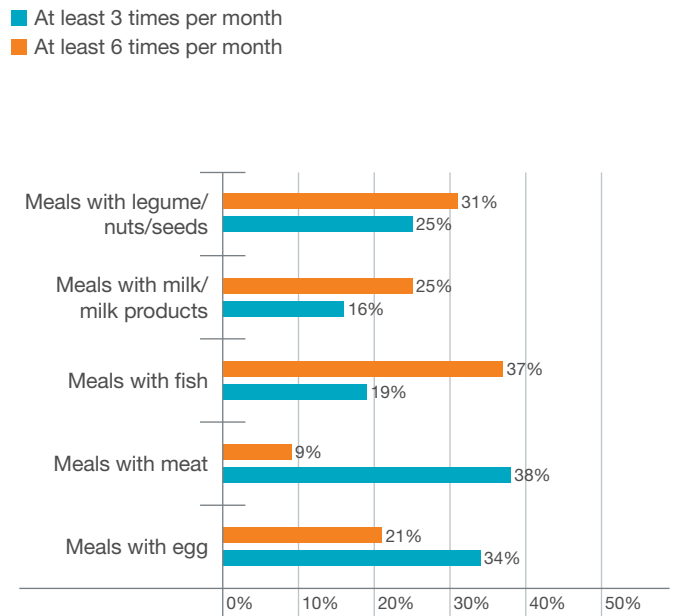
Food security in Mithapukur



Food security in Birampur



Diversification of diets in Mithapukur





Salima Begum with her crop of yard long beans.

Salima's story

Salima joined the Kafrikhal Baluapara farmer group in November 2014. Initially, her husband, Moklaser, was not happy about her participation in the group as he didn't understand its purpose or how his wife's involvement could benefit their family. However, Salima was slowly able to convince him that being part of group agronomic training, having a savings account and regular monthly meetings could bring great benefit to their family.

Before Salima joined the farmer group, Moklaser was growing yard long beans on one fifth of an acre of land. His cost of production was US\$231 and his sale price was US\$274 – giving them an equivalent US\$43 profit for a month of hard work. Some of this profit would also be spent up-front, allocated to transporting the beans to local markets.

Over the past two years, Salima has received regular training from the Growing Together team and group lead farmers via the use of the group demonstration plot allowing her to practice new techniques to enhance her yields in a risk-free environment. In 2015, Salima suggested to Moklaser that she should take on the bean cultivation and apply her new knowledge around planting techniques, pest and disease control. In the same plot of land, Salima grew yard long beans. Her cost of production was reduced by 10% but her yields significantly increased. She sold the beans through the Farmer Center for US\$481 and achieving a \$246 USD profit.

Salima explains, "By selling through the Farmer Center I get a higher profit. Buyers pay 10-20Tk more per 40kg because they can buy in bulk from one place. It is easier for them and better for me. I also save money on transportation as the center is just half a kilometer from my home. This has increased my dignity with my husband and we are making decisions about how to spend the money together."

In 2016, Salima and Moklaser made the joint decision to use their profits to purchase a cow and a goat. They also decided that Moklaser would lease more land and Salima should start homestead gardening. She's now able to contribute to the family income using her new skills while also continuing to raise a family and run a home.

"I sincerely respect Salima's dedication, hard work and willingness to learn. I am really grateful to the Growing Together program for making this happen," says Moklaser.

Salima and Moklaser have now started to use their income to improve their home and family wellbeing. They have started to rebuild some of the bamboo walls of their house using bricks and have invested in some furniture. Her children are happier and attend school every day. Salima says that she feels proud of her achievements and is developing a very positive status within her community.



Syngenta volunteers attend a farmer's group meeting. Photo: Allison Joyce.



5 Impact on employees

The Growing Together program was conceived with a focus on leadership development for senior-level and high-potential employees. This addresses current and future business challenges by supporting staff to work in new, challenging and resource-constrained environments. VSO and Syngenta identified the most common areas where leadership competencies can be improved and used this to develop an approach to achieve this.

Learning and development journey

Pre-placement

Out of a pool of interested employees from all geographies and functions, the program is able to select team members that best matches the required skill sets to successfully work on pre-defined assignments. Following this selection process, participants attend a 2-3 month onboarding curriculum, containing of four webinars, group work and online preparation. They are also “buddied up” with previous Growing Together participants to receive one-on-one support in the lead up to their placement.

Placement

Participants come together as a group in Bangladesh. During their first week they undertake a four-day orientation program with VSO staff before travelling to the field. When in the field, the group normally stays for one week with host families in the villages in which the Growing Together program operates. It is here that they gain unique insights into the needs, challenges and aspirations of smallholder farming communities. To encourage reflection and capture learning, there is a project review half way through and at the end of the placement.



Rachel Postec, Ghita Ouedghiri and Snezana Neff with their host family in India, group four. Photo: Zoe Ives.

Post-placement

Leadership development outcomes are explored with all participants through debriefs and surveys with VSO and line managers. Participants are encouraged to engage with the Growing Together alumni to share their learning and experiences and also to actively contribute to the onboarding of future teams.

Measuring impact

To measure learning and success in relation to this leadership development approach, five key performance indicators (KPIs) were developed. In the first two years, these key performance indicators primarily focused on engagement and learning and since year three they have been expanded to explore behaviour change and business impact.

KPI

Key performance indicator

80% of Syngenta participants report an improved understanding of the needs of smallholders in relation to Syngenta’s business

70% of Syngenta participants feel more engaged with the company and its purpose

70% of Syngenta participants report that they have achieved their learning objectives for the assignment

70% of Syngenta participants report improvement in leadership skills

80% of Syngenta colleagues report that the placement has significantly helped them to connect to The Good Growth Plan

Learning, development and leadership

The Growing Together program continues to deliver an improvement in leadership skills. An encouraging 92% of participants felt that the program has been successful in helping them achieve their learning objectives, and 100% of line managers who responded to the survey were in agreement.

“The Growing Together program is unique as a learning intervention. It’s not only experiential in nature, where you work with team members from different parts of the world and bring the collective expertise to help rural communities. It’s much more than that, it’s immersive, where for a period of time you are actually a part of a community. The learning is lifelong and the experiences often life-changing. Past participants have shown higher levels of engagement and a great sense of gratitude to have been a part of this program.”

Dhanesh Gupte,
Head of People and Organizational Development APAC at Syngenta



Thomas Jung, member of group five, at his host village. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Overall, 97% of participants feel that the program has improved their global perspective, and similarly that they have an enhanced ability to focus on customers. **100% of participants feel that their ability to collaborate has improved.** Furthermore, 89% of line managers who responded to the survey feel that participation in the Growing Together project helped their team member improve key leadership skills.

The Growing Together program brings employees into the homes of farmers and **98% of participants said the project helped them understand the needs of smallholders** and the role that Syngenta's business can play in addressing these needs.

100% of participants feel proud of Syngenta's work in Bangladesh, our commitment to smallholders and the contribution they themselves have made through the Growing Together program.



“The group worked with passion, motivation and energy for the four weeks. Everybody worked towards the same goal and that was fantastic. We will bring our knowledge from this project back into our day-to-day work with Syngenta. I know I will use this experience to motivate colleagues and be a more effective leader.”

Rachel Postec,
Regulatory Manager, Switzerland, group four.

Photo: Zoe Ives.

“You get a real sense of food security challenges here. If a crop fails then millions of people will be affected. Failure is not an option, so it is clear to me that the impact of this project is huge.”

Greg Gungoll,
Key Account Lead, USA, group three.



Photo: Abir Abdullah.



91%

of participants feel that their placement has significantly helped them to connect to The Good Growth Plan as they were able to experience the sustainability initiative in action.



Photo: Allison Joyce.



“It has been an opportunity to connect with Syngenta in Bangladesh. I also understand in much more detail the work that the Syngenta Foundation is doing.”

Emma Ashford,
Global Head of Co-Formulants,
Packaging, Tolling and Seed
Procurement, Switzerland,
group two.

“It has been great to work with growers in Bangladesh and seeing the similarities and differences between growers here and elsewhere. It’s really satisfying to see the farmers’ potential and development. When I go back to my job this will be the story I share when I’m talking with a group of farmers. This is sustainability in practice. When I speak to farmers in the US, or a group of food manufacturers, sustainability isn’t a word that’s widely embraced. This demonstrates that it is about preparing for the future and making sure we can supply enough food for a growing population.”

Liz Hunt,
Sustainable Sourcing Lead, USA, group two.



Photo: Allison Joyce.





“All I know is the longer I’m back, and I reflect back on the experience I had in Bangladesh, the higher value I put on the program. So when I came back initially, it was quite difficult to articulate the experience. You’re exhausted when you come back, you’re emotionally drained. It took a little while to really understand the transformational character of the program and it’s ongoing. It changes you: from the behavior to the attitude. The realization of being able to do and achieve much more with less was truly unleashing for me.”

Amanda Scott,
Integration manager, Switzerland, group three.

Photo: Allison Joyce.





Photo: Allison Joyce.

Jonathan Richards' story

Jonathan works for Syngenta as a Supply Chain Manager, specializing in fungicide products. Jonathan is from the UK and works in Syngenta's Basel office in Switzerland.

"I jumped at the opportunity to join this program as I really want to be part of making a positive difference to peoples' livelihoods. This is at the heart of both VSO's and Syngenta's values, but it is something I haven't previously had the opportunity to be so directly involved in.

I was part of the second group of volunteers tasked with developing a scalable training framework and shaping an initial Farmer Center design. When we are in the villages, we spend most of our time having focus group discussions with farmer groups and youth clubs. Most of those didn't even exist before the last group of volunteers, so that's already a huge difference being made.

I've found it fascinating and intensely motivating to experience firsthand what life is like for a smallholder farmer in Bangladesh. It is so different to just reading about it. We've had some wonderful moments. Despite the challenges of the poverty the farmers live with, we've found a common sense of humanity that is really uplifting. Their smiles will stay with me for a long time.

Working for an international company, I have worked in many multi-cultural teams, but this experience has added a new dimension as we learn to collaborate across business and development sector cultures. It made me realize the power of what can be achieved, through partnerships between private sector, NGOs and governments where you bring different perspectives, knowledge and levels of influence together. Joined up, you can start to make a systematic impact.

Success for me would be to see communities pulling together and self-starting. Real success happens from within the community. When you walk into a meeting and it feels alive and vibrant, men and women equally involved, young and old people listening to each other and the group putting into practice solutions that they didn't even think were possible. Syngenta is deeply invested in this area – The Good Growth Plan is a very public expression of the company's commitment to getting 'stuck in' rather than simply throwing money at problems. Syngenta is putting forward relatively senior people who channel their energy and knowledge into getting this program to work really well.

This experience has really expanded my horizons. Although much shorter than the 3, 6, or 12 month volunteer periods that are more typical for VSO, a month is still a major investment from both the business and the individual. Classic leadership training programs are working on fictitious case studies and it's all about the learning and not about the delivery. In Growing Together you have something to deliver, and you're learning how to work together, and learning about yourselves because you are in such a different context. This experience enriches you as individual and will certainly inform the way we undertake our day jobs



Jonathan talking with farmers from Rangpur district. Photo: Allison Joyce.



Syngenta and VSO members meeting with the women farmers/enterpreneurs during the Women Day at Bodlipukur, Rangpur. Photo: Abir Abdullah.



6 Leveraging insights for a new kind of business

In a rapidly changing world, businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to be responsive to global challenges, especially those within their sector, and find new ways of doing business that can make a positive contribution towards solving these challenges.

This is particularly evident in the areas of poverty eradication, food security, pollution and climate change related topics. Corporate social responsibility has been replaced by the notion that businesses can be commercially successful as well as being more sustainable, responsible and ideally creating shared value across the value chain – in particular, to smallholders in developing countries who have limited access to various opportunities and knowledge that other more developed nations enjoy.

The central premise behind creating shared value is that the competitiveness of a company and the health of the communities around it are mutually dependent. Recognizing and capitalizing on these connections between societal and economic progress has the power to unleash the next wave of global growth².

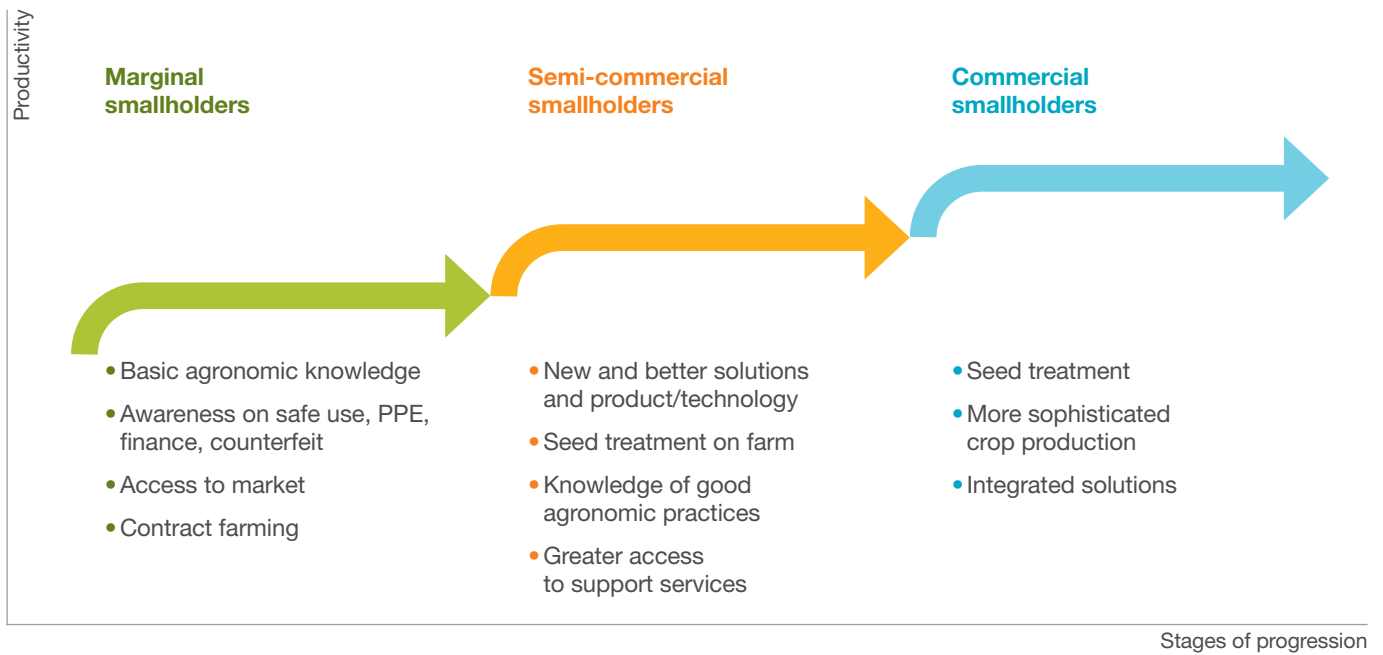
Identifying the needs of smallholder farmers

Syngenta recognizes the intrinsic inter-relationship it has with the 500 millions of smallholders who are estimated to provide 70% of the world's food³. The Growing Together program is creating shared value by encouraging the Syngenta business, at both a local and global level, to work with its smallholder customer base and develop a sustainable business model that can lift smallholder farmers and their rural communities out of poverty.

2. Creating Shared Value, Harvard Business Review, 2011

3. FAO, 2015

Farmer progression



“Syngenta so far as a company has mostly focused on big farmers but I think that smallholders are an area we need to focus on. The people who are designing the strategy for the business might not understand the challenges of smallholders so it is a fantastic learning opportunity for them. I think there is tremendous opportunity from a business perspective. To find effective ways of increasing the productivity of smallholders will get smallholders more involved and efficient. If we don’t do this then The Good Growth Plan - which is the philosophy behind the project – will not be realized. This platform allows everyone to share ideas and can certainly help us come up with innovations”.

Hassan Sazzadul,
Syngenta Bangladesh Head

Theory of change: Driving a sustainability culture within a global business

The Growing Together program seeks to improve capabilities and deliver insight into the needs and challenges faced by smallholder farmers around the entire company. Although awareness raising is not an outcome in itself, it is the first step towards engaging the wider global business with the objectives of the Growing Together project and the insights it has generated.

KPI

Key performance indicator

80% of the Growing Together alumni engaged in internal or external knowledge sharing events and internal media and more than 20,000 page views on the intranet



Members of Uttor Gopinathpur draw map of resources as they form a new group on the basis of lands at Uttor Gopinathpur, Mithapukur, Rangpur, Bangladesh. Photo: Abir Abdullah.

Growing Together alumni are encouraged to share the experiences they have had in Bangladesh and the insights they have learnt. This begins with personal insights shared on the Growing Together blog during placement.

On return, alumni are encouraged to continue with this information sharing and engagement amongst colleagues and are asked to present back to a number of different internal stakeholder groups about their experience as well as their analysis and recommendations.

Result against Key Performance Indicators:

Approximately 3,500 Syngenta employees and leaders joined face-to-face, online information sharing sessions or meetings held by Growing Together alumni.

The Growing Together page on Syngenta's intranet had 22,000 page views during the first four placements.



Daria Malkovets, Quality Manager, Russia, group five.
Photo: Abir Abdullah.



7 Looking ahead

Syngenta's investment in the Growing Together program is intentionally time-bound and will be completed by June 2018, driving VSO and the development sector to think differently about sustainability and scale. Deepening of market system relations have already been realized with the introduction of Bank Asia into the partnership in the past year and, for the first time, making retail banking available to rural farmers in the area. This has provided a real opportunity for farmers to present their business development ambitions to financiers rather than debt financing. This is a wonderful breakthrough for farmers and retail facilities will open in all future Farmer Centers.

In 2017, the Growing Together program also intends to become a pilot partner with Blue Number. This is a United Nations-led data initiative that will support farmers to self-report and own impact data against the UN Sustainable Development Goals and project performance measures. Project youth group members will act as data collectors and the aggregation of this information will provide a platform for young people and farmers to engage with local government around the issues identified. This digital platform will provide farmers with a unique identification number, online presence and traceability along the value chain.

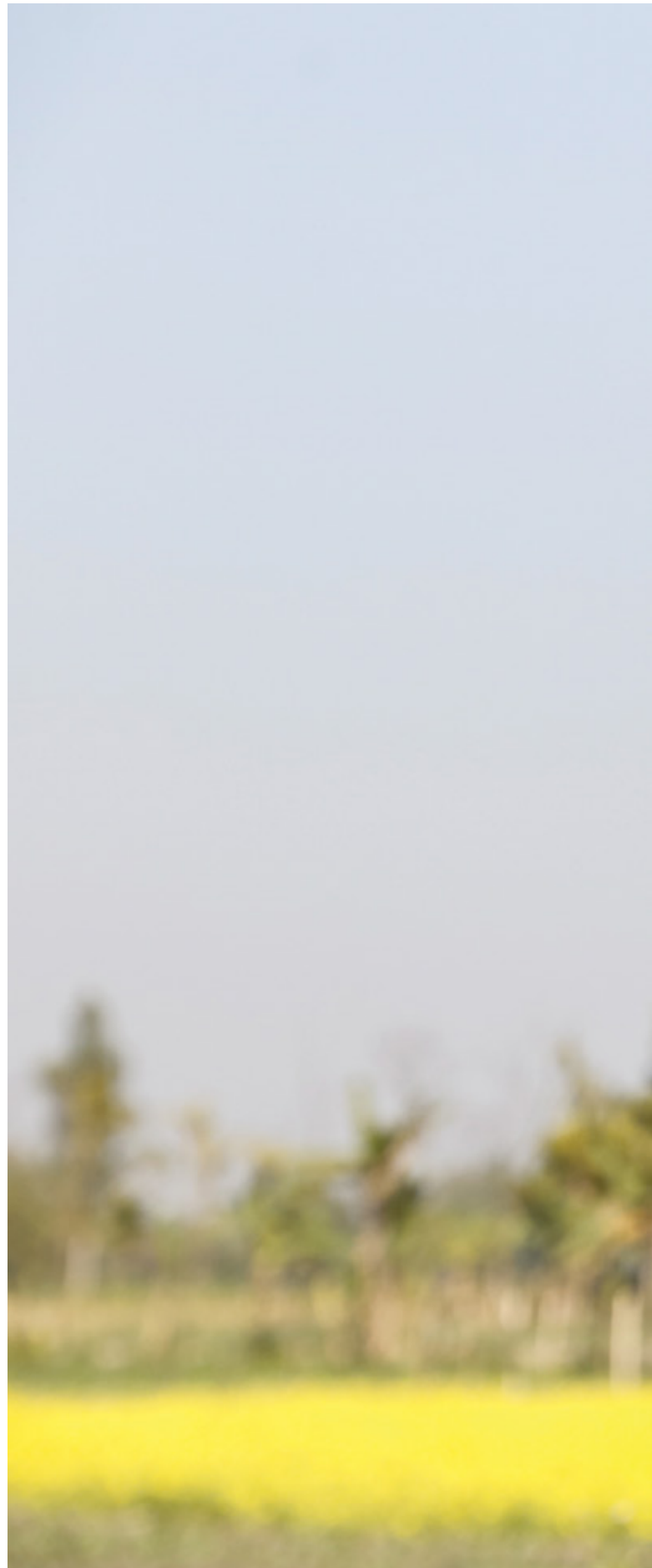
Building on this, the Growing Together program aims to expand contract farming and input distribution contracts within the Farmer Center franchise, further developing the overall business model for farmers and the progression of thriving farming communities.

The key priority until end of 2018 is to bring the successful Farmer Center model to scale by the means of a Social Franchise concept, allowing further institutional and market system actors to engage in the program. By collaborating with partners, the project aims to reach 100,000 farming households in Bangladesh, supported by a social franchise of up to 100 Farmer Centers. Fully owned by entrepreneurs, these centers have a standard business plan, operational controls and service catalogue that ensures viability while positively meeting the needs of all farmers.

In addition to a strong commercial core, community development will also remain a central focus of the project with a priority of continue to increase women's membership amongst farmer groups and empower their active involvement. By leveraging Syngenta's best practice on gender and diversity, the program will seek to ensure that effective policies and mechanisms are embedded into the social franchise framework so that there is a positive impact on all forms of women's empowerment as the model is scaled up.



Tobias Bossert, HR Business Partner, Switzerland, group five.
Photo: Abir Abdullah.



Samiun Nesa with her crop in Mithapukur.
Photo: Anik Rahman.





Photo: Abir Abdullah.





VSO International
100 London Road
Kingston upon Thames
London
KT2 6QJ

vsointernational.org

+44(0)208 780 7500

www.vsointernational.org/ke

Voluntary Service Overseas is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales registered number 703509.
Registered Office 100 London Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 6QJ, England.
Charity Registration 313757 (England and Wales) SCO39117 (Scotland).