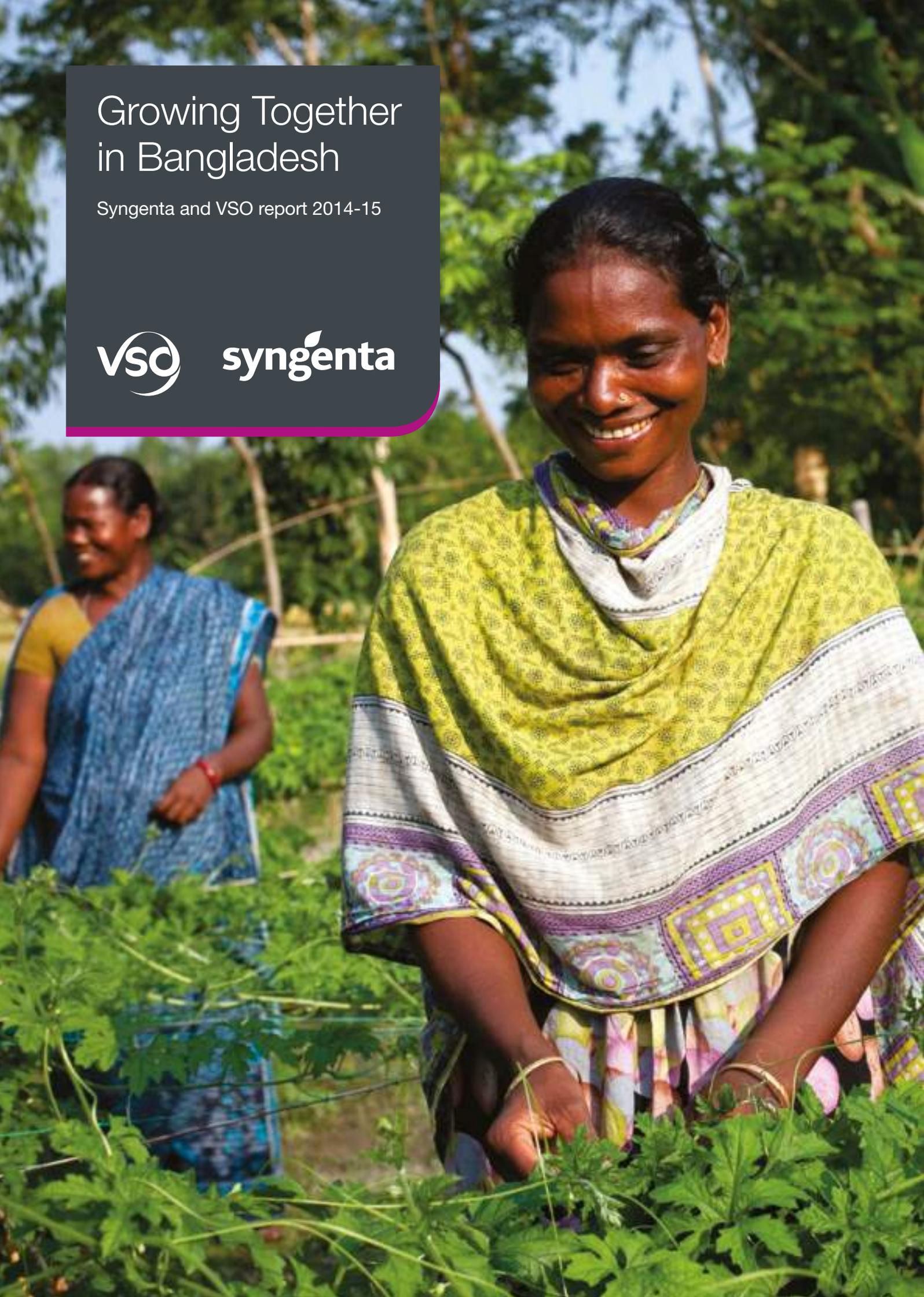


Growing Together in Bangladesh

Syngenta and VSO report 2014-15



syngenta





Farmer groups attend a Farmer Field Day in Birmapur.





Rezaul Islam, from Alipur Borobhita Farmer Association in Mithapukur, harvesting broccoli for the first time.



Contents

1	Glossary	6
2	Executive summary	9
3	Introduction	13
4	Methodology: Measuring impact	19
5	Progress and impact	23
5.1	Pillar one: Community development	24
5.2	Pillar two: Farmer training on good agricultural practice	32
5.3	Pillar three: Value chain development	40
6	Impact on employees	49
7	Leveraging insights for a new kind of business	55
8	Looking ahead	59

1 Glossary

Agro-inputs	Agricultural products and techniques applied to the land for specific farming benefits.
BADC	Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation. The BADC works on the development of agriculture through supply of agricultural inputs and dissemination of technologies among farmers to ensure national food security.
Bangladeshi Taka (BDT)	The official currency of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (e.g. exchange rate: USD 1 = 78.2 BDT at the time of writing).
Birampur	A sub-district in the Dinajpur district, a division of Rangpur, Bangladesh.
BRAC	BRAC Bank Limited is one of the leading private banks in Bangladesh.
Cohort	Applies to groups of fifteen senior employees from Syngenta who share their expertise to deliver the project.
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 project interventions. The control group farmers are selected from nearby villages where the Growing Together project is not being implemented.
Data triangulation	A effective technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources and particularly refers to a system of combining several different research methods to study a single subject.
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).
Districts	Bangladesh is divided into 64 districts, or zila, which are further subdivided into 493 upazila.
Farmer Center	Buildings that have been built for farmer groups by the Growing Together project. These serve as a central storage and buying station, enabling groups to store their produce and deliver it efficiently to a contracted market. At the time of this report, two Farmer Centers have been built and four more are being developed.
Field facilitators	Qualified and experienced agronomists who are hired by the Growing Together project to support farmers in the field.
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice.
GBK	Golden Barn Kingdom Pvt. Ltd is a company working mainly on world food projects and has been a partner in the Growing Together project.

Growing Together Ambassador	A farmer group member who is responsible for setting up and supporting new farmers' groups in neighboring communities.
GTP	Growing Together project.
Imitator farmers	Individuals who are not included in the project interventions, but attend farmer field days and adopt new best practices from their Growing Together neighbors and other farmers in their community. A total of 264 imitator farmers were identified, of which 25% have been surveyed.
ICV	International Corporate Volunteering.
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 project 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 Market Systems Development (PMSD)	A practice in which the perspectives of different participants in a market process are acknowledged, or any obstacles identified and overcome, so that their collective vision is aligned to achieve the best outcome.
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.
Rangpur	A division in northwest Bangladesh in which the two target communities are located.
RDRS Bangladesh The Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service in Bangladesh (RDRS) is Growing Together project implementation partner.	The Growing Together project implementing partner.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	The seventeen goals set by the United Nations to end poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change by 2030.
Upazila	Town or subdivision of a district in Bangladesh.
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 project but is used for future activities.



Jonathan Richards, a Supply Chain Manager at Syngenta speaks with farmers about their crops.



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 September 2015 world leaders announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will steer international development over the next 15 years. In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals, this new set of goals recognizes a need to address the drivers of change such as economic growth, job creation, reduced inequality and innovation. The private sector is seen as a key player in terms of utilizing its technical competencies and resources to strengthen international development efforts, and by re-engineering its business practices, to become more sustainable and inclusive.

The Good Growth Plan (GGP) is Syngenta’s commitment to help farmers meet the challenge of feeding a fast-growing world population sustainably. It also underscores the company’s contribution to society within the wider context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Supporting these aims, Syngenta partnered with VSO to develop the Growing Together project, designed to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in rural communities and provide senior leaders from within the company with first-hand experience of the challenges they face.

The program is based on regular interventions by cohorts of fifteen Syngenta employees who spend one month in Bangladesh working and living with local farmers. By combining these short interventions with long-term continuous support from VSO and local partner organizations, the Growing Together project (GTP) has been able to develop quickly by steadily bringing together cutting-edge global technical expertise with local know-how.

1. thegoodgrowthplan.com

During 2014 and 2015, three groups of employees visited Bangladesh, first working with 1,800 and later 7,000 smallholder farmers, with four more groups planned between 2016-2018. The result of these placements has been the development of a holistic community framework that aims to sustainably increase smallholder farmers' disposable 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 so far. The following section highlights key achievement in three areas.

Impact in the communities

Pillar one: Community development

The formation of community groups plays an important role in terms of building knowledge and capabilities of smallholders. So far, the program has established 60 farmer and 13 youth groups. They share a common vision, meet regularly, own a group savings account and members have defined roles and responsibilities.

The most marginalized people in the group are 359 farmers defined as ultra-poor; many of whom are women and do not own land. Specific initiatives such as a grant for the ultra-poor has been designed to support and include them, alongside ongoing group activities. Each farmer group has at least 30% female membership and in this context, female empowerment can be seen to have tangible benefits.

Since the groups were formed in March 2015 the following has been achieved:

- 480 meetings have taken place with discussions evolving beyond agronomic issues to include topics such as sanitation, child marriage and education.
- \$18,395 has been collectively saved by the groups leading to improved resiliency to shocks such as crop failures.
- Sixty ambassadors were selected, trained and are currently forming new groups in neighboring communities to facilitate the cycle of replication upon which the project's ultimate success depends.

Pillar two: Farmer training on good agricultural practice

Although agricultural advice is available in Bangladesh, a baseline survey conducted at the beginning of the project showed that only 7% of targeted farmers had accessed these 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 by doing.' This requires each farmer group to establish a demonstration plot in which nominated lead farmers share new agronomic techniques taught to them by 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:

- Rice farmers in Birampur and Mithapukur spent 11% and 5% less on fertilizers per acre respectively.
- Rice farmers in Mithapukur and Birampur spent 23% and 17% less on pesticides respectively.
- Rice farmers in Mithapukur are recognizing the benefits of using quality inputs and are now investing 20% more in quality seeds, resulting in a higher profit.
- 100% of farmers have adopted some or all of the techniques learned through the agronomy training.

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. Two pilot Farmer Centers opened in January 2016. These provide a physical space for farmer groups to conduct business as well as organize effective storage so that they can sell their vegetables when the price is best. Farmers were given support and training in how to engage with agricultural supply chains and negotiate mutually favorable terms. The following outcomes were found:

- Rice farmers increased their yields per acre by up to 22%.
- Farmers reported a rise in gross incomes by 46% on average.
- 97% of the farmers have increased their net incomes; 90% by at least 50%, 70% have more than doubled it.
- Farmer Centers have enabled 70% of farmers in Birampur to secure contracts with private sector companies that guarantee purchase at an agreed price.

Impact on the employee

By working in unfamiliar and resource-constrained surroundings, Growing Together project participants found themselves in challenging environments, navigating territories outside their comfort zone and dealing with real world issues that forced them to think and act differently. The following findings were discovered through surveys conducted with participants and their line managers (of group 2 and 3) at the end of their placements:

- 90% of participants thought the project improved their leadership skills, especially in the areas of managing complexity, dealing with ambiguity, and engaging or inspiring others.
- 95% of participants gained a better understanding of Syngenta's business and pressing global food challenges.
- 100% of participants feel proud of Syngenta and its purpose.
- 100% of participants' line managers would recommend participation in this program to other employees.

Impact on the Syngenta business

Thirty-seven Syngenta leaders participated in the Growing Together project in the pilot phase. By working with Syngenta Bangladesh, the participants were able to provide new insights and recommendations for making business with the group of marginal smallholders, which are now being implemented. Furthermore, on return from placement, they have cumulatively presented their experience to 2,878 Syngenta colleagues face-to-face and their blogs on the company intranet have received 17,000 page views. This is an important first step in embedding elements of The Good Growth Plan into daily working practices, however, more remains to be done to ensure that a coherent focus on the needs of smallholder farmers becomes a standard practice.

Looking ahead

The work of future cohorts needs to be truly transformational in terms of scale and outlook in order to support the ambitious smallholder commitments of The Good Growth Plan. To achieve this, future Syngenta groups and the VSO team on the ground will focus on taking Farmer Centers beyond the operational level and scale up to make a genuine difference in the context of wider socio-economic factors. This includes identifying appropriate mechanisms that encourage further collaboration with supply chain partners, government organizations, the Syngenta business in Bangladesh as well as the Syngenta Foundation. Another key objective of the program is to fully embed gender equality into the program, with women farmers specially supported and empowered to play an equal part in the local village communities.

The Growing Together project can only have a limited impact on achieving the ambitious targets of The Good Growth Plan to reach 20m smallholders and enable them to increase productivity by 50%. However, it is imperative that the learnings from the project, reinforced by the experience of its alumni, is used to sharpen the company's focus on smallholder farmers and the role that Syngenta can play in improving their lives.

By mid-2018 the Growing Together alumni will have approximately 100 sustainability ambassadors and, with support from an engaged workforce and senior leadership, can disseminate and apply their learning into business ideas and products that support smallholder communities.



Cohort one speak with farmers as part of the livelihoods review.



Suchanda Ekka, the Treasurer of Durgapur female farmer group.

3

Introduction

The Growing Together program is a unique collaboration between VSO, a prominent international development organisation, and Syngenta, a leading global agriculture company, with the aim to sustainably improve the economic and food security for smallholder farmers in Bangladesh through agricultural and commercial expertise.

The program strives to achieve the following vision:

The Growing Together project vision

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 and grow their crops sustainably. We will nurture a culture where no one is excluded, where the needs of the poorest come first, and women and men are valued equally. We will achieve this by empowering farmers with the tools and knowledge to change the status quo by increasing their influence in the value chain, producing higher yielding crops that secure livelihoods and generate the income for themselves, and their families, to thrive.

Our vision for participating employees

We want to foster a community of participants and alumni that is actively engaged in the Growing Together project; 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 project 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, research and development efforts to achieve a step change in farm productivity worldwide in the spirit of The Good Growth Plan.



Syngenta's Good Growth Plan

In 2013 Syngenta launched The Good Growth Plan to address critical agricultural challenges posed by a rising global population. By 2020, Syngenta aims to increase agricultural sustainability with six commitments:



Empower smallholders

Reach 20m smallholders and enable them to increase productivity by 50%



Make crops more efficient

Increase the average productivity of the world's major crops by 20% without using more land, water or inputs



Rescue more farmland

Improve the fertility of 10m hectares of farmland on the brink of degradation



Help biodiversity flourish

Enhance biodiversity on 5m hectares of farmland



Help people stay safe

Train 20 million farm workers on safety, especially in developing countries



Look after every worker

Strive for fair labor conditions throughout our entire supply chain network



Supporting smallholder farmers

Smallholder farmers face many difficult challenges in Bangladesh. These include the dramatically adverse effects of climate change, limited land availability and poor access to markets. In a population of nearly 160 million, more than 40% live on less than \$1.25 per day². Nearly half of the population work in agriculture but of these, 60% are landless or marginally landless³ which means that they are disadvantaged from developing their enterprises successfully.

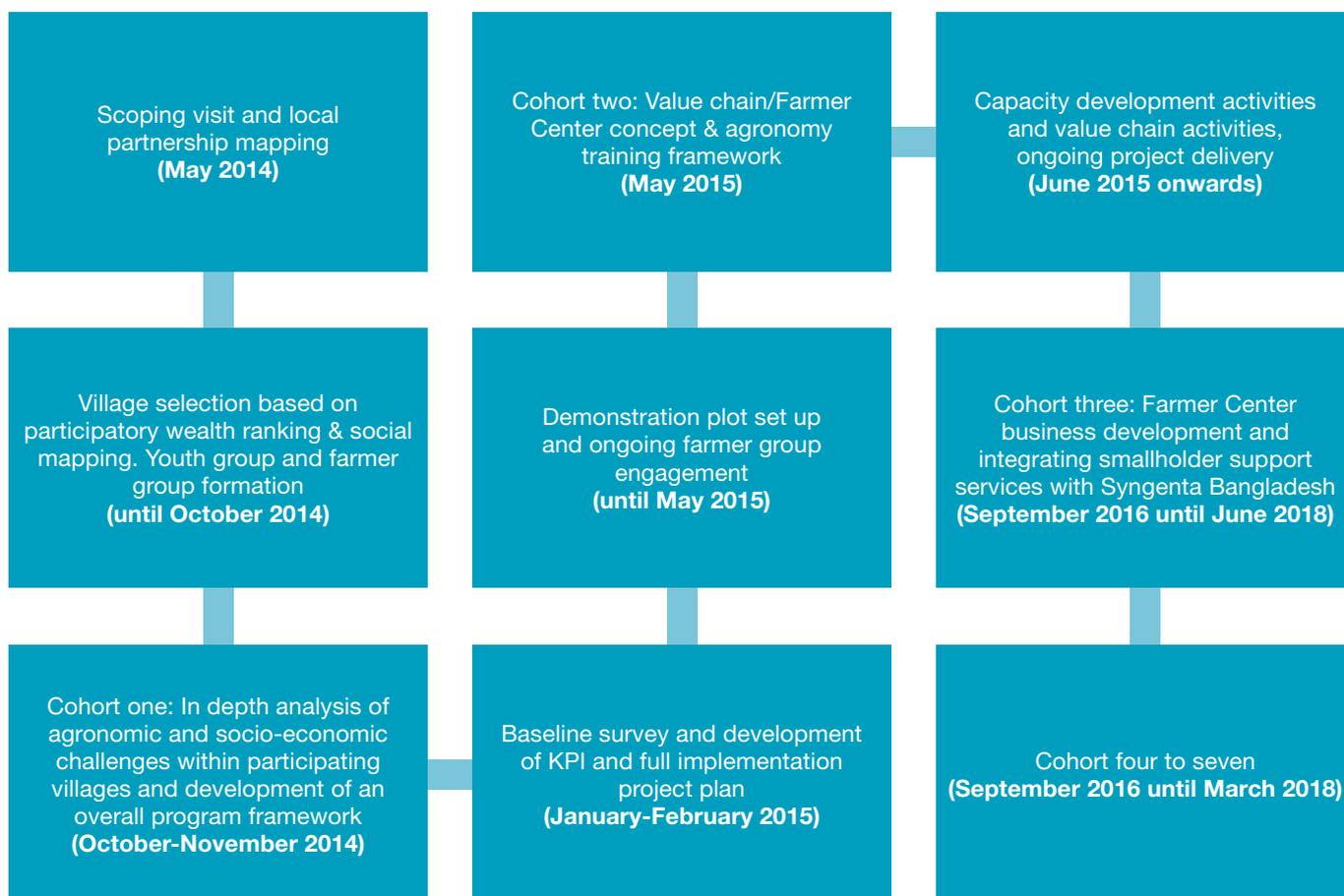
The country's agricultural sector is struggling to keep up with the demands of the growing population and smallholder farmers often find it difficult to grow enough food to feed their families, let alone make a profit. However, with the right urgent and targeted support, this situation can be resolved. As part of the The Good Growth Plan, VSO and Syngenta have co-created the Growing Together project which operates in the northwest upazilas of Mithapukur and Birampur in Bangladesh. Over a period of three-and-a-half years, seven cohorts of up to 16 senior Syngenta leaders each will visit Bangladesh on four-week placements to work alongside with VSO Bangladesh and other partners on projects that will make a lasting impact in the communities.

This report describes the Growing Together project pilot and its impact on smallholder farmers. It explains the evolution of the program over the first 15 months including the tasks assigned to the first three cohorts. It describes the methodology used to establish a baseline and monitor the progress of the farmers. Within the context of the three pillars of development identified for the project, an evaluation of its impact on individual participants and the Syngenta business is outlined. The final section explains how the next stage of the Growing Together project could make far-reaching and sustainable improvements to the lives of poor and marginalized farmers across Bangladesh.

Preparatory work

Discussions about how a VSO-Syngenta partnership would look like began with a scoping visit to Bangladesh to conduct a needs analysis in May 2014. Representatives from Global Syngenta and VSO met with large groups of smallholder farmers, who gathered for the first time to talk about the challenges they face in making a sustainable living. The farmers were open to discussions indicating that there was a clear role for an industry leader such as Syngenta to play. Together, partners began to map out what could be done to address the challenges and to explore the kinds of solutions a global agribusiness might provide.

Program road map



2. DFID, 2013

3. Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014

Selecting communities and farmers

Based on the preliminary analysis, VSO and Syngenta began to map out what could be achieved. The selection of the geographical project area was based on the following factors:

- Where there was greatest need and highest number of marginalized farmers.
- Areas which suffered from a lack of access to agricultural services or information.
- Existing VSO footprint and local networks.

A total of 60 communities were selected and farmers were identified through Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA).

VSO's People First approach

VSO believes that by working through local partners it is possible to build their own capacity to deliver sustainable impact. VSO Bangladesh conducted a detailed partner mapping exercise to determine the most relevant local NGO partners. Eleven local partners were assessed based on VSO's rigorous global partnership criteria. RDRS Bangladesh was selected to provide on the ground assistance to implement the project.

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) Bangladesh

RDRS is an NGO development agency that works to empower the rural poor in Bangladesh. It provides development opportunities and services to landless and marginal families in 18 districts, and works with 375 community-based organizations to empower their members. They aim to achieve meaningful political, social and economic empowerment, quality of life, justice, resilience and a sustainable environment for rural poor and marginalized people. RDRS has over 3,000 employees, 90% of whom are field-based. They have won numerous awards for their programs including their work with microfinance, girls' education and climate change.

For more information: www.rdrsbangla.net



Syngenta groups

Each Syngenta team (up to 16 Syngenta participants) was split into two task groups and given two assignments. At the end of each placement, the teams presented their analysis and recommendations to representatives of the Syngenta Bangladesh leadership team, further senior leaders, VSO and RDRS who collectively agreed how best to move the project forward.

Cohort one assignment

The first cohort of Syngenta participants were tasked with researching challenges in rice and potato value chains while analyzing the socio-economic and agronomic issues facing smallholders in the selected project communities.

Task one: Rice

Task two: Potatoes

Both groups conducted action research into the following areas around rice and potatoes:

- **Vulnerability assessment** (e.g. social status, access to services and technology, access to decision making processes and climate challenges)
- **Value chain assessment** (e.g. links to market and value chain actors, farming practices, mapping market actors and key relationships, determining reasons for low quality production, assessing market needs and gaps)
- **Training needs assessment** (e.g. skills, capacities and training gaps around production, knowledge, business, micro-finance, literacy, negotiation and networking skills).

They developed a collaborative program framework that could begin to address these challenges, supported by a full implementation plan developed by VSO. The overarching program framework contains three interlinking pillars essential to achieving sustainable development outcomes for the project beneficiaries:

Growing Together project pillars

1. **Community development:** Build the assets and capabilities of smallholders and their communities to ensure the long-term sustainability of program interventions.
2. **Agronomic training:** Through ongoing support and on-the-ground demonstration, impart new technologies and good agricultural practice (GAP) training to increase yields, productivity and to ensure correct and safe use of inputs.
3. **Market and value chain development through Farmer Centers:** Provide smallholders with better links and access to markets.

Cohort two assignments

Cohort two's assignment was to provide the project team with further analyses and recommendations to inform the agronomic and value chain program pillars by carrying out the following tasks:

Task one: Agronomic support and development	Task two: Value chain development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and develop a comprehensive agronomy training framework that include different modules (e.g. modules on soil fertility, seeds and crop protection of rice, crop diversification, storage, safe use of PPE, etc.) • Work closely with the value chain group to understand what agronomy/farmer training will be required to support farmers to access local markets • Leverage the newly set up demonstration plots as the basis of the training program and plan scalable delivery mechanism • Test outputs and training content with local stakeholders and a sample group of targeted farmers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with project staff and partners to understand and further develop a comprehensive Farmer Center concept for the program, leaving in place a model which addresses the specific challenges facing smallholder farmers that is scalable and sustainable • Develop an appropriate and realistic list of hub services and activities that will support farmers in accessing markets and add value to their products • Research and analyze different governance models • Ensure the hub concept is clear, well documented and ready for rollout by project staff.

Cohort three assignments

Cohort three's assignment was to develop a Farmer Center approach with the goal of taking this model to scale through Syngenta Bangladesh. They were tasked to:

Task one: Farmer Center business development	Task two: Integrated smallholder support services for Syngenta Bangladesh
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Farmer Center business model to ensure it is sustainable and scalable • Review operating models such as franchising, taking into account local context, requirements of the farmers groups, and recommendations of the Farmer Center Committees • Alongside relevant stakeholders, develop guidelines and protocols required to ensure the ongoing success of the Farmer Centers • Further develop and refine the Farmer Center 'service catalogue' • Review different organizations and service providers and make recommendations as to how Farmer Centers can use their services • Make initial recommendations about how to better engage women and youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the synergies between Syngenta Bangladesh and the Growing Together project objectives, utilizing existing Syngenta knowledge and expertise • Provide concrete recommendations and guidelines for how Syngenta Bangladesh can accelerate the delivery and scale of key Growing Together activities through Farmer Centers • Work with the Farmer Center team to ensure that strategies and recommendations are integrated and aligned • Develop a rationale and tangible recommendations showing how and why Syngenta Bangladesh can grow with and contribute towards the success of the Growing Together project.

Additionally to the Syngenta participants, the Growing Together project benefits from a range of different resources and expertise. This includes two long-term VSO volunteer roles who advised the local team on improving market linkages and further building the capacities of the farmer groups.



Greg Gungoll, Marie-Odile Zink and Antonia Doebelin from Syngenta examine rice in Birampur.



4 Methodology: Measuring impact

The Growing Together project aims to go beyond the standard monitoring and evaluation criteria of development projects. In addition to identifying and measuring outputs such as the number of trainings organised and number of people trained, the adoption of new agronomic practices and the impacts of changes in yields and income are also measured.

Establishing a baseline

Following a competitive tender process in January 2015, the local research company Matrix completed a baseline survey of the socio-economic and agronomic conditions of the target population. Four hundred farmers were interviewed in total, alongside a control group of 100 farmers. This enabled a direct comparison of the project's impact on targeted communities with communities living nearby where there were no project interventions.

Following the recommendations made by cohort one and the results of the baseline survey, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were agreed and finalized.

KPI Key Performance Indicators

Community

Year One Milestones (2014-15)

Activities with 1,800 smallholder farmers and their communities include:

- Correct and safe use of agro-inputs by 70% of targeted farmers^A
- Practicing of new agronomic techniques reported by 80% of farmers
- 60% of farmers, women and community members engaged and participating in Farmer Center activities^B
- 70% of community groups are active and functioning effectively^C

Year Two Milestones (2015-16)^E

Activities with 10,000 smallholder farmers and their communities:

- Correct and safe use of agro-inputs by 70% of targeted farmers^A
- Practicing of new agronomic techniques reported by 80% of farmers
- 60% of targeted farmers, women and community members engaged and participating in Farmer Center activities^B
- 70% of community groups are active and functioning effectively^C

Year Three Impact (2016-18)^E

Impact on 10,000 smallholder farmers and their communities will be:

- 40% of targeted farmers report an increase in average household disposable income
- 30% of targeted households report an increase in food security status
- 50% increase in farmer productivity
- 60% of targeted farmers participating in new value chain activity
- 30% of women report an increase in their economic empowerment^D

Learning & Development

- 70% of Syngenta participants report that they have achieved their learning objectives for the assignment
- 70% of Syngenta participants feel more engaged with the company and its purpose
- 70% of Syngenta participants report improvement in leadership skills
- 80% of Syngenta participants report an improved understanding of the needs of smallholders and Syngenta's business
- 80% of Syngenta colleagues report that the placement has significantly helped them to connect to The Good Growth Plan

Year One Milestones (2014-15)

- 80% of participating Syngenta participants engaged in internal or external knowledge sharing events and internal media
- More than 10,000 page views on mySyngenta intranet

Year Two and Three Milestones (2015-2018)

- 80% of participating Syngenta colleagues engaged in internal or external knowledge sharing events and internal media
- More than 10,000 page views on mySyngenta intranet
- Increased media coverage (to be specified)
- Number of new initiatives, products or services developed by Syngenta Bangladesh or Syngenta participants (to be specified)

A. Defined by cohort two

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

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

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

E. KPIs currently under revision based on year one results

Outcome and impact monitoring

Between December 2015 and January 2016, seven field evaluators conducted individual interviews with 629 farmers. They also facilitated 20 focus group discussions with farmers' groups and ten key informant interviews with stakeholders. During the interviews, farmers were asked how many acres of rice, potatoes and vegetables they cultivated in 2014 and 2015, how much they harvested on average per acre and the average price they secured in those years. Primary data was also collected from imitator farmers and control group farmers⁴.

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

- Externally conducted baseline survey
- Numbers reported in focus group discussions
- Numbers reported in key informant interviews.

In January 2016, the data was discussed and reviewed in a data validation workshop and an independent monitoring and evaluation expert cross-checked a sample of the data.

Limitations to the methodology

Whilst the project data triangulation is rigorous, there are still accuracy limitations; for example, the farmer survey data is based on farmers' memory of their harvests and income in the previous year. As such, putting in place monitoring tools for farmers to register their yields will be vital to ensure more robust data collection that relies less on memory. It is also crucial that the locations of control groups are carefully chosen to facilitate more distinct comparisons between project and control farmers. Data analysis suggests that the Mithapukur control group may have been too close to the project farmers. This meant that some control group farmers may have become imitator farmers by virtue of their proximity to the project.

Additionally, production cost data was collected separately from the main interviews using a sample of farmers and an average assumed for project and imitator farmers by virtue of their proximity to each other, as well as one for control groups, in Birampur. The control group sample from Mithapukur could not be collected so the project farmer sample average has been used to calculate net income in this case. This assumption of comparable production costs, though not unreasonable, should be tested with more comprehensive data in future if possible.



Liz Hunt, Syngenta's Sustainable Sourcing Lead, with rice farmers in Rangpur.

4. Imitator farmers are not included in the project interventions, but copied good agronomic practices from project farmers in their community. A total of 264 imitator farmers were identified, of which 25% were surveyed. Control group farmers have similar characteristics to the target farmers, but are not included in the project interventions and used as comparators. The control group farmers were selected from nearby villages where the Growing Together project was not being implemented.



Members of Uttor Gopinathpur Farmer Group draw a map of their land and and list their group resources.



5 Progress and impact

VSO and Syngenta believes that the assets and capabilities of communities need to be developed in order to support sustainable change in poor and marginalized communities. Forming village structures, developing agronomic skills and knowledge and building farmers' collective capacity to access value chains is fundamental to smallholders achieving a secure livelihood.

5.1 Pillar One: Community development

KPI

At the end of pilot year one, at least 70% of community groups formed should be active and functioning effectively.

Active and effectively functioning farmer groups must have a shared vision and agreed objectives amongst all of the members. They must meet regularly and have consistent attendance. It is important that group members have clear roles and responsibilities, keep records of their meetings, decisions and accounts, and have a group bank account.

Sixty farmer groups (four all-male, one all-female and 55 mixed gender groups) and 13 youth groups were formed using the Participatory Rural Appraisal outlined below:



Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

'PRA is a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans'.

World Bank, 2015

Integral to the Growing Together Project, PRA techniques are used as an analytical and community group formation tool. To form each group, community members gather for a facilitator-led discussion. The community is asked to map individual and community-owned assets.

This information is used as the basis of a discussion where community members agree the priority objectives and membership of the Farmers' Groups. Farmers who self-identify as 'ultra-poor', 'poor' or of 'middle income' and 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.

Farmer group discussions

At regular meetings, each group member has the opportunity to share social and agronomic issues. These include discussions around good agronomic practices such as rice seedling production and management, insect management and early and late blight management for potatoes. They also discuss social topics such as water and sanitation challenges, early marriage and the negative pressures of dowries, school dropouts and the importance of girls' education. In total, 480 farmer group meetings have so far taken place involving 1,800 farmers.

480

farmer group meetings have taken place

Encouraging group savings

A group savings account encourages a collective mind-set and gives clear, tangible goals around financial management. Evidence shows that the group sees the value of investing and working together so that their joint savings can grow. Moreover, this is an important foundation to support financial literacy in the community and a stepping stone from which groups can go on to access other, more secure forms of micro-finance and credit in the future. Each group decides where to invest their savings and is given support and guidance from field facilitators. So far, a majority have used their savings to lease additional land as a group, to invest in inputs and to provide credit for group members who may be suffering a particular financial crisis.

Group savings generated so far

Community	Cumulative total savings	Current total balance	Total invested so far from savings and crop sales	Currency
Birampur	725,367	324,867	400,500	BDT
	9,208.08	4,143.71	5,108.42	USD
Mithapukur	716,405	326,232	390,173	BDT
	9,137.82	4,161.12	4,976.70	USD
Total amount	1,441,772	651,099	790,673	BDT
	18,389.95	8,304.83	10,085.11	USD

60 Farmers' Groups have saved
USD **18,390** since March 2015



“If we invest as a group, if each farmer contributes something, then all of the farmers will experience the benefits. If there’s a loss it won’t be so costly for each farmer. This is a major strength of the group.”

Abdul Latif, member of the Bugra Para Farmer Group

A grant for the ultra-poor

The ultra-poor grant is a specific intervention designed to target, support and include ultra-poor people in farmer group activities. So far, 359 ultra-poor farmers have accessed a \$31 grant and spent the money on agro-inputs, leasing land and other agricultural-related investments.

Inclusion of women

Farmer groups should represent all community households, and ideally have an equal gender mix. However, as the farmers selected the groups themselves, this process did not produce a gender balance. As such, a minimum 30% quota was introduced which resulted in a gradual increase of female participation. Despite this, women are still often regarded as a statistic and project staff have identified a need to better integrate gender awareness into activities. This means designing interventions, which will actively empower women and their involvement.

Growing the project from within

Ambassador farmers have so far set up 85 new farmer groups. However, project staff identified that more support is needed to train them, as they have faced challenges facilitating the PRA analysis and maintaining target farmer criteria. Ambassadors report that they are proud of their role but care needs to be taken to ensure that they are recognized and valued as volunteers, and not treated as project staff.

KPI

Results against KPI

100% of farmer and youth groups are active and meet regularly. They have a shared vision, clear roles and responsibilities for what they want to achieve.

60 ambassadors
have set up
85
new farmer groups



Farmers gather for a group meeting.

Case study: Empowering young people

A surge in anti-social activities by young people in their community inspired 30 young people in Mithapukur to form the Kafrikal Youth Group. Their objective was to proactively counteract their peers' disruptive behavior. When the Growing Together project conducted their first training, the group realized that the anti-social behavior represented deeper social problems. Assisted by project staff, the group held discussions around the inter-related issues of early marriage, education, and poverty. These discussions have helped the members to realize that staying in education and out of marriage for longer will benefit them and their families in the long term. This is an area that the group and project staff aim to explore further as the project progresses.

The Growing Together project also helped young people to cultivate half-an-acre of land with potatoes. They first raised 7,000 Taka from members' savings, enabling them to lease some land and buy farming materials. They also assisted illiterate members to read the written instructions on labels of agricultural products and negotiate the lease of farmland between farmer groups and landowners. Two youth group members were chosen as Growing Together project ambassadors and trained in community organization before forming new farmers groups in selected villages. There is now strong evidence that the active involvement of youth in constructively resolving community issues and improving farming practices is guiding them in a positive direction to become the next generation of farmers and leaders. A youth group member describes the impact this has made: "Previously, I was shy and would not be able to stand before the crowd, much less to speak. When I joined the youth group and participated in the Growing Together project activities such as trainings and meetings, I gained confidence and was able to make speeches. Recently, I won an oratorical competition in our school. I was very proud of my accomplishment and realized that positive changes happened when you get involved in community activities".





Case study: Unlocking the potential of ultra-poor women

In Durgapur village of Mithapukur, more than third of a farmer group's 30 members are defined as ultra-poor. These individuals represent an ethnic minority group of indigenous female unskilled agricultural laborers who do not own land. Their husbands' income cannot support their families of 5-6 people and the women's wages provide only the bare necessities with no surplus for clothing, education or health. As a result, child mortality is disproportionately high.

Using a \$31 grant received by all ultra-poor group members, these women collectively leased half-acre of land. Cohort three supported the women to negotiate and buy best quality potato seeds from the private sector vegetable export company, Agriconcern Ltd. The project staff provided technical cultivation advice and an Agriconcern expert also gave support for managing disease, insects, fertilizers and irrigation. Agriconcern have now agreed to purchase this potato crop for export to Russia or Singapore. The women have reinvested their profit, leasing a larger plot of land and have used the remaining money to buy Boro, a seasonal irrigated rice. One member commented, "we did not have the ability to cultivate crops as we had no land but now we are cultivating potato and rice. We hope our income will increase and we will be able to meet our family needs - so we are happy." Another member's husband stated: "Thanks to our wives' involvement in the project our income is increasing, meaning we are able to meet the cost of our children's education. We are feeling very proud."

The cultivation of this new crop started in February 2016 and, importantly, the material and cultural benefits derived from the financial and practical help will be reinvested multiple times over. One neighbor stated that, "previously there was no organization supporting us. Now ultra-poor people are progressing thanks to crop cultivation and operation of the saving schemes. Seeing these initiatives gives us encouragement." In this way the project's positive results stand to gain momentum year-on-year, thereby causing a ripple effect over time.





5.2 Pillar two: Farmer training on good agricultural practice

KPI

At the end of pilot year one, 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.

Although the Bangladesh Department of Agriculture is mandated to provide advice to all farmers through its Agricultural Extension Advice, the reality is that very few farmers are able to access these services with approximately only one extension officer available to every 3,500 farming households⁵. The baseline survey also confirmed this, showing that only 7% of project farmers reported ever having accessed extension services.

Challenges reported by farmers before the Growing Together project:

- Lack of knowledge about pests, disease and control measures
- Lack of pesticide knowledge, and in many cases using the wrong doses (i.e. overuse being very common)
- Counterfeit and low quality products
- Ad-hoc planting practices
- Poor land preparation and incorrect use of fertilizer
- Poor access to quality seed
- Lack of access to modern equipment or machinery
- High post-harvest losses.



A demonstration plot in Mithapukur.

Agronomic framework development

Once the farmer groups were established, the second cohort began developing the agronomic framework for the program. This involved an analysis of the training content that should be delivered while developing a sustainable model for disseminating this knowledge. It was recognized that a lot of material and expertise already existed between stakeholders such as Syngenta Bangladesh, RDRS and the Bangladesh Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), who were engaged to co-develop the technical agronomic training modules.

Demonstration plots

A key focus of the agronomy training is 'learning by doing' so that every farmer group is supported to set up a demonstration plot for each season or crop (e.g. rice, potato and vegetables). Demonstration plots enable farmer groups to test and practice the new techniques they have learnt in a risk free environment. It also enables group members and other farmers in the community, such as imitators, the opportunity to directly compare the progress of the demonstration plots against other nearby fields and crops. To achieve this aim, the project ensured that high quality seed could be accessed through agro-businesses such as BADC, Syngenta Bangladesh and ACI Ltd. Each farmer group practicing on its own demonstration plot comprises of both men and women, encouraging the notion that traditional gender roles in this context need not apply. By April 2015, sixty demonstration plots had been set up, with each farmer group taking responsibility for the ongoing management, supported by regular visits from field facilitators.

Formalized training

Each farmer group keeps their own training materials so they are able to refer back to them when they need to. Engagement in the training has been aided by formalizing the sessions so that all farmers are tested on their learning and receive an official certificate on completion of the project. Farmers report that they are proud to be part of their group and to be formally trained for the first time in their lives.

5. Katalyst, 2014



“Together we are learning in the field and I can apply these lessons to my own field. Previously I used fertilizer but I didn’t measure it and some of my plants died. I’ve learnt how to properly plant vegetables and measure and apply fertilizer. This was all new to me. It is too early to know for sure, but in our joint field we can see that there will be a good harvest.”

Selina Kerketa, Durgapur farmer group secretary

Farmer field days: Spreading the word

Farmer field days are held at demonstration plots and are advertised to the wider community in an effort to engage new farmers who would like to learn from the project activities. Farmers are also invited to speak and share their learning and female farmers are especially encouraged to speak out. During the day, a small area of the demonstration crop is harvested so that all farmers can understand the progress that has been made.

Thirteen farmer field days have taken place so far, with up to 560 community members attending each day. These wider community members, as well as others who are not directly participating in project activities but who have learnt from observing and by word-of-mouth, make up the imitator farmer groups.



Lead farmer, Md Rezaul conducts a training with the Alipur Boro Vita Farmers Group.

Changes in farming practices

The results of the 450 in-depth interviews and observations that were conducted with farmers on a one-to-one basis reveal a substantial increase in yield and productivity compared with the control groups. One challenge often faced in similar programs is adoption rates by farmers, and turning the knowledge that farmers receive during training into tangible improvements in farming practices. Following their training, farmers reported the specific changes highlighted in the table below:

KPI

KPI results:

100% of project farmers reported that they were proactively practicing the new farming techniques, including how to apply pesticides and other agro-inputs more efficiently.

As highlighted in the methodology, it is clear now that the Mithapukur control group is too close to the treatment group. This is something for project staff to explore further in the coming year.

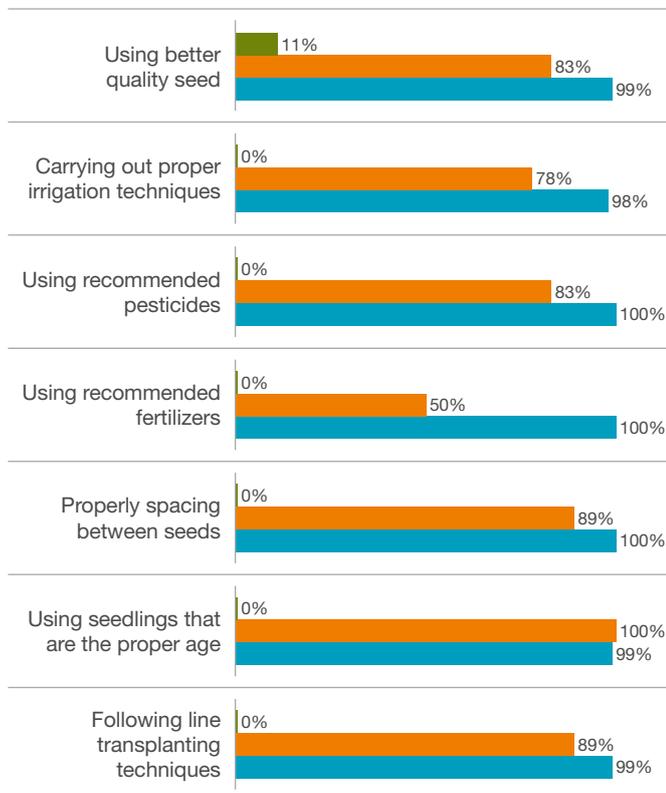


Faruki Islam, Growing Together Project Manager speaks with farmers at a Farmer Field Day.

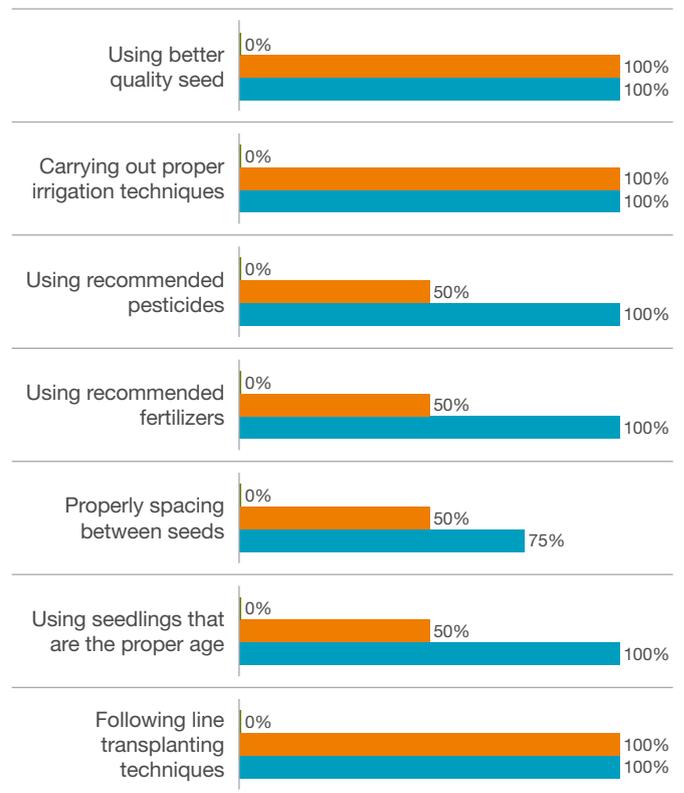
Mithakpur and Birampur changes made by rice farmers as a result of training

- Control group farmers
- Imitator farmers
- Growing Together project farmers

Mithakpur



Birampur



Safe use of agronomic inputs

The analysis from cohort one demonstrates that prior to the project, farmers had a limited understanding of agronomic safety practices. Given the potential dangers that this presents, including the adverse effects that poor agro-input usage such as pesticide overdoses could have on crops, clear guidelines on safe and efficient use of inputs were built into the agronomic training. Based on their highly successful five golden rules approach, Syngenta Bangladesh helped to develop the training content and shared best practice on how to deliver it.

For example, a random 25% sample of project farmers were observed to check that they were putting the five golden rules into practice. The results of these observations are shown below, which highlights that not only were project farmers putting PPE rules into practice, but in many cases, imitator farmers nearby were also using the same cautionary measures. In both cases, this is in comparison to farmers in control groups, who did not significantly increase or decrease their safe use practices.

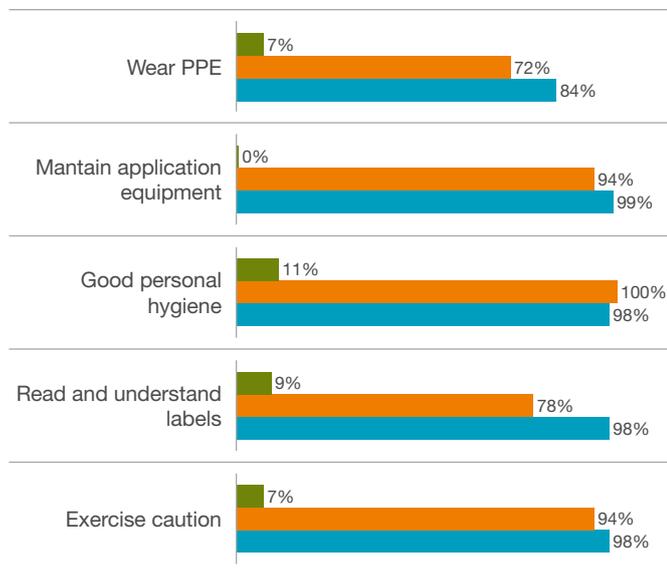
Syngenta five golden rules



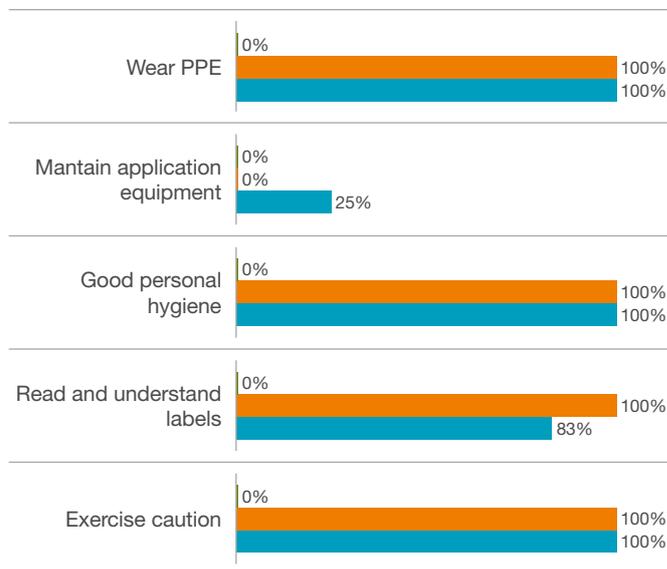
Mithapukur and Birampur farmers observed using the five golden rules of safe use of crop protection

- Control group farmers
- Imitator farmers
- Growing Together project farmers

Mithapukur



Birampur



KPI

KPI results:

100% of the beneficiary farmers were found to use quality seeds and pesticides. In Mithapukur, 99% of the farmers applied their inputs efficiently, however, in Birampur this was only 39%.

Although farmers reported using PPE, they were observed in the field and it was clear that in the majority of cases officially recognized PPE practices were not adhered to. For example, farmers wrapped scarves around their mouths and noses in place of masks. They protected their hands, but not necessarily with the good quality gloves that are recommended. As PPE is not available to buy locally, this is a challenge for farmers. However, since advice and training has now been disseminated, they are aware of the risks and are attempting to protect themselves. This observation offers scope for the project brief to ensure that PPE is accessible locally and at an affordable price before farmers are able to use it properly.

Cost of production

To substantiate what each individual farmer reported with further data, farmers were asked a number of questions to determine if they had changed the amount of money they invested in agro-inputs, and how much they were spending on each stage of the process. Across all farmer groups, respondents invested approximately the same amount of money in their crops compared to the baseline (+/- 1%). However, when farmers were asked to further breakdown exactly what they had spent their money on, the findings confirmed what the farmers were practicing new techniques that they had learnt.

Costs of production in Mithapukur and Birampur compared to the same season in 2014

	Production cost (%) per acre 2014 - 2015							
	Seed cost	Land preparation	Fertilizer	Cow dung	Trans-planting	Pesticide	Harvesting	Total Cost
Rice (Birampur)	-23%	+5%	-11%	NA	+42%	-17%	-1%	-1%
Rice (Mithapukur)	+21%	The same	-5%	+6%	+14%	-23%	The same	-1%
Potato (Mithapukur)	The same	The same	The same	-24%	-1%	+3%	+85%	+4%
Vegetable (Mithapukur)	-1%	The same	+1%	-11%	The same	-22%	-3%	-5%

The results show that farmers increased their investment in quality seeds by 20% in Mithapukur. This increased awareness and understanding of seed quality has enabled farmers to avoid counterfeit seeds – helping them to reduce spend on fertilizers and pesticides.

Costs of production in Birampur compared to control group farmers and the same season in 2014

	Production cost (%) per acre						
	Seed cost	Land preparation	Fertilizer	Trans-planting	Pesticide	Harvesting	Total Cost
Rice (Birampur) 2014	-23%	+5%	-11%	+42%	-17%	-1%	-1%
Control group	-5%	+2%	+1%	-5%	-1%	+7%	+1%

In the comparison with control group farmers in Birampur project farmers are spending significantly more on transplanting and land preparation and less on fertilizers and pesticides, leading to an overall reduction of the cost of production.



Case study: Shared success through collective agronomic training

Since Ipil Baha Farmer Group was formed in October 2014, they have held 15 monthly meetings, acquired group savings of 38,565 Taka and received agronomic trainings including the set up of a demonstration plot. Representing the group, President Martin Murmu explains, “we were taught how to use modern technology in cucumber farming. The demonstration plot gave us an opportunity to be practically involved in vegetable production”. Advice was given around how to buy the best quality seeds, erect cucumber trellises, improve irrigation and pest management, implement health and safety regimes and safely administer agrichemicals where needed. Many of these initiatives have also been successfully replicated by the imitator farmers.

Group learning and skills sharing has been facilitated by project staff and lead farmers at demonstration plots. This practical on-the-ground method has proved effective because it acts as a look and learn center for them. The skills and knowledge they acquire can be easily applied to their own individual plots.

Moreover, they now have a well focused group vision and can devise realistic strategies to help themselves - an achievement which they previously reported to be beyond their capabilities.

In May 2015, they harvested 113.59kg of cucumbers and agreed its sale to Birampur Bazaar for 100 Taka per kg which gave them a profit of 4,584 Taka. Some farmers experienced a total income increase of more than 30%. They said that it was the first time they had achieved a higher income from produce sales and they attributed this success to the project. The farmers are now excited about potential partnerships with the private sector through a Farmer Center located three kilometers away. The project has also helped them to see a path to commercial opportunities by developing the scope of their market, creating databases, improving communication systems and acquiring more land. All of these strategies point to a future which they can progressively evolve and which will also develop their communities in multiple, sustainable ways.



5.3 Pillar three: Value chain development

KPI

80% of farmers, women and community members are engaged and participating in value chain activities.

The third pillar of the Growing Together project is to facilitate market and value chain development. This is to ensure that farmers are able to participate and benefit from rice, potato and other vegetable value chains, and that the wider market systems are conducive to smallholders earning a sustainable income from their crops. To create a sustainable impact on smallholders, a number of key challenges within the rice and potato value chains need to be addressed. These are outlined below.

Market system challenges identified by cohort one

- Access to high quality and disease free seeds
- Access to high quality agro-inputs
- Access to credit and good finance
- Getting a fair price for product at sale
- Information from market
- Technical training on how to maximize profitability.

Farmer Center development

To achieve this objective, cohort two developed a Farmer Center concept taking into account existing models such as the Syngenta Foundation Farmer Hubs, the RDRS Federation model, and similar models and services developed by other NGOs and government agencies. In June 2015, work began to set up and establish two pilot Farmer Centers buildings in Mithapukur and Birampur as well as a service catalogue. The Farmer Centers act as an operation center and administration office where they serve as a central storage and buying station, enabling farmer groups to store their produce and deliver it efficiently to a contracted market.

Farmer Center service catalogue

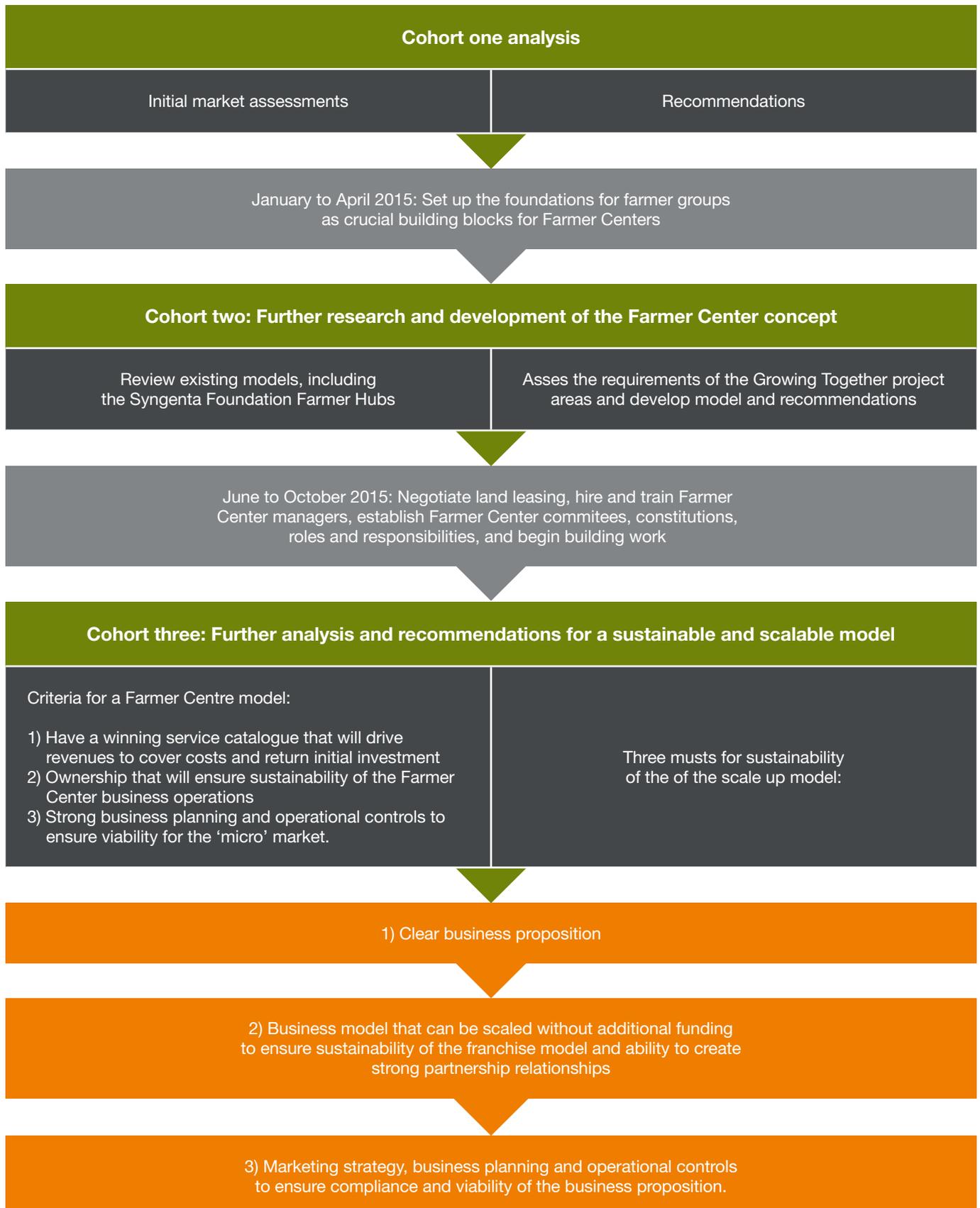
- Agro-inputs
- Financing
- Product aggregation and selling platform
- Rental of machinery
- Agronomic advisory
- Private sector engagement
- Government.

To achieve sustainable impact after three years, an output for year one was to ensure that project beneficiaries should be actively participating in value-chain activities. The design and framework of the program stipulates that these activities would be best delivered through the creation of Farmer Centers.



Patrick Doyle, Head R&D Quality Management, and Francois Burghgraeve, Insecticide Asset Lead interviewing a retailer.

Farmer Center development



Farmer Center: Next steps

- Working more closely with the Syngenta Foundation to develop a joint delivery model.
- Growing the pilot Farmer Centers from two to six within 2016 by involving Syngenta Bangladesh where possible
- Continuing to build links with private sector companies who can provide guaranteed prices and quantities for project farmers.
- Using Participatory Market Systems Development (PMSD) methodologies to facilitate market linkages and understanding between various market actors.



“Farmers lack information regarding selling their crops. The farmers themselves are losing out and it’s the middle man who make money. A middle man may sell the produce for 800 Taka and give the farmers just 400 Taka. I feel it is important to teach farmers about marketing.”

Monjusree Saha, Head of Programmes at RDRS Bangladesh

Linking farmers with value chains

An important achievement for many farmers was the introduction of farmer groups to private sector companies who could provide guaranteed prices for their produce. To facilitate this a number of local private sector companies were reviewed by project staff and the Syngenta Foundation. They sought companies that were looking for contract farmers, offered good contractual conditions and provided hands-on support and advice for farmers. Normally, poor farmers would not be able to access private sector companies due to their low production volumes and lack of market understanding. However, by working collectively and broadening their understanding of their particular value chain they are able to engage with the private sector to their mutual benefit. Initial results from two pilot Farmer Centers are:

- 66% of farmers in Mithapukur and 70% of farmers in Birampur have secured contracts with private sector companies such as ACI, Agriconcern and local millers which guarantee the purchase of their crops at an agreed price.
- 57% of farmers in Mithapukur received a 60% input loan.
- 100% of farmers reported that they received advice from purchasing companies on which high quality seeds to use.

Impressive increases in yield and productivity

Rice farmers reported substantially higher yields per acre (up to 22%), productivity and incomes. However, this should not be seen as hard quantitative data but rather as a trend... Looking forwards, farmers will now be asked to register their yields, price and cost data through the Farmer Centers.

% Change in rice yield 2014-2015 (kg/acre)

- Control group farmers
- Imitator farmers
- Growing Together project farmers



Rice farmers increased their yields per acre by up to **22%**



Amanda Scott, Merger Integration Manager, with rice farmers in Mithapukur.

Not only did productivity increase, the sales prices of rice and potatoes increased too, resulting in a higher farm profitability. For example, rice farmers reported a price increase of between 6-13%, the price of potatoes went up by 24% and vegetables increased by 19%. Farmers also reported that they have been able to increase their acreage of productive land.

Reduced spend

In addition to increases in yield and price, the costs per kilogram reduced significantly, which further increased the profitability of rice, potato and vegetable farming respectively. These cost reductions can be explained by both an increase in productivity as well as by an increase in input efficiency.

% Cost reduction per KG



Due to improved agronomic practices, including use of better quality seeds and increased use of natural fertilizers such as cow dung, Rice farmers in Birampur spent 9% less on chemical fertilizers in 2015 compared to 2014. In Mithapukur, this percentage was 5%.

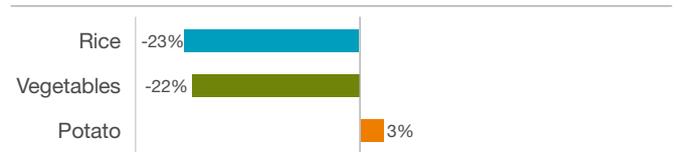
Reduced spend on chemical fertilizer in 2015 compared to previous year (rice)



Rice farmers in Birampur and Mithapukur spent **11% and 5% less** on chemical fertilizers per acre respectively.

Additionally, rice and vegetable farmers spent up to 23% less on pesticides in 2015 compared to 2014. The slight increase on pesticides in potato farming in Mithapukur was due to the increasing cost of potato pesticides.

Reduction expenditures on pesticides (Mithapukur)



Increase in income

Farmers report a significant rise in their gross incomes by up to 46%. This rise in income was due to better understanding around good agronomic practice, an increase in land size and vegetable diversification. Imitator farmers also report higher gross incomes per acre than control group farmers.

Table 4: Overview of the changes in income of beneficiary farmers

	Gross income (2015)	Net income (2015)	Gross increment (compared to 2014)	Net increment (compared to 2014)	Currency
Rice (Mithapukur)	27,413	9,688	8,058	7,515	BDT
	350	124	103	96	USD
Rice (Birampur)	27,179	9,414	6,888	6,081	BDT
	348	120	88	78	USD
Potato	47,301	15,389	15,841	12,234	BDT
	605	197	203	157	USD
Vegetables	32,415	24,903	7,545	7,556	BDT
	415	319	97	97	USD

Costs are subject to price fluctuation per country - figures displayed represent global cross rates. (0,0128)

Farmers reported a **rise in gross incomes** by up to 46% on average

Increase in average net income

The reported benefit of Growing Together project farmers increases even further if production costs are taken into account. 97% of farmers increased net income – 90% by at least 50%, 70% have doubled it. Also imitator farmers report a significantly higher net income per acre.

The results at impact level are very promising. The Growing Together project team aims at continuing impact measurements over time, so that trends can be analyzed and acted upon.

97%

of farmers increased
net income

This evidence of yield increases challenges perceived ceilings in rice production in Bangladesh; a perception that farmers are limited to 4.4 metric tons of rice per hectare. In fact, project farmers have achieved between 5.6 and 5.8 metric tons and imitator farmers are achieving similar numbers. Importantly, the yield per acre gained through good agronomic practice is matched with dramatic change in chemical fertilizer and pesticide use. There is good evidence to suggest that intensification of rice farming leads to diversification of crops. The data suggests that 22% more farmers grew vegetables after more intense yields in rice. This diversification of crops leads to a diversified income and better nutrition which will ultimately help to address wider health issues in Bangladesh such as stunted growth and child mortality.



Antonia Doebelin, Facilities Services & Resource Manager from France, examines a bottleguard crop with farmer Mujibor in Mithapukur.

Case study: Kafrikal Uttorpara Krishok Shomitee Farmer Center

Thanks to the Growing Together project, the Kafrikal Uttorpara Krishok Shomitee Farmer Center is becoming an efficient agricultural community with well focused aims in trainings, farmer field days, participatory research, community dialogue, social issue discussions and meetings with government and private organizations. The group now has a constitution, by-laws funds and, crucially, it has youth and women representatives. Above this group sits the Kafrikal Krishok Kendra Farmer Center Executive Committee representing 12 farmer groups and sub-committees that directly manage the service catalogue.

In January 2016 the construction of the first Farmer Center was completed. This consists of a 180 ft² storage area and a 448 ft² operation center and administration office which also serve as a central storage and buying station.

After seven meetings with Agriconcern, a potato company who export to 11 countries, the Farmer Center committee secured a growing agreement contract. The farmers described the challenges they face accessing quality seeds and exercised their improved skills in marketing. Agriconcern agreed to provide 78 tons of quality seeds to 200 potato farmers and also to buy their harvest at a higher price of 9-10 Taka per kilogram which is three Taka higher than their normal rate. The farmers are now producing three varieties of potato - Granular, Lora and Comerica - in response to demand from foreign markets. Agriconcern offered farmers 60% credit up-front for their crop which provides security and an incentive to receive the remaining payment. The Farmer Center acts as the coordinator between the farmers and Agriconcern, assisted by Growing Together project staff.

The potatoes were harvested, sorted and cleaned in February 2016 and Agriconcern technical experts went to the potato field to provide harvesting advice to the farmers. They were then exported to countries such as Russia, Singapore and Vietnam. Before this process, farmers were unaware that private sector organizations like Agriconcern could help them address their problems. They now start 2016 with a new Farmer Center, a guaranteed market for their potatoes and increased confidence in coordinating and negotiating with private sector organizations who, in turn, reciprocate this confidence.







Emma Ashford, Syngenta's Global Head of Co-Formulants, Packaging, Tolling & Seed Procurement.



6 Impact on employees

The Growing Together project provides a holistic learning platform for participants to engage with Syngenta's Good Growth Plan and therefore enhance their leadership skills. Participants work directly with smallholder farmers in an experiential learning environment, where 'knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' through active involvement and problem solving⁶.

6. Kolb, 1984

Leadership development approach

Syngenta has identified the need for a game-changing approach to the leadership and professional development of its employees which:

- Emphasizes the need for all employees to understand the wider social, political and economic environment so that positive strategic outcomes can be created.
- Promotes empathy of people, their beliefs and emotions in order to build sustainable relationships and have greater positive influence.
- Foster an ambitious and courageous philosophy that stretches employees and makes them accountable for the success of the organization.

Learning and development journey

Pre-placement

Participants are selected at least ten weeks before deployment. Using the leadership framework, they agree with their managers on a set of personal and work-related learning objectives, which explore individual challenges and develop key skills. To begin to develop these competencies and prepare for the realities of the project, the participants attend four program specific webinars, and complete an online training course. They also undertake a situational judgment exercise, which puts the participants into typical scenarios they may encounter while on placement and seeks to challenge their thinking around working in the developing world.

Placement

On arrival in Bangladesh, participants receive a three-day orientation program. As this is the first time the participants come together as a group it is a critical period in the development of a range of soft skills such as collaboration, self-awareness and establishing trust. For this reason, there is a focus on team building activities and also sessions which provide a space for participants to safely explore ideas and practice techniques before travelling to the field. To help encourage reflection and to capture learning, there is a facilitated project review half way through and at the end of the program. Participants are also offered coaching sessions throughout their schedule to review, reflect and capture their development against agreed learning plans.



Syngenta participants and farmers.

Post-placement

On return home, leadership development outcomes are explored through debriefs with VSO and line managers whilst participants are encouraged to engage with the Growing Together Alumni. Ultimately, the project aims to create active citizens who champion and apply this learning from the project to their work and to their broader lives.

Monitoring and evaluation

Any form of experiential learning can be seen to have four main stages of impact:

1. Engagement: Participants have found the content and activities of the placement inspiring and motivating.
2. Learning: Participants have gained useful knowledge.
3. Behavior: This experience has facilitated the participants to work differently and, ideally, more effectively.
4. Results: Changes in behavior lead to positive business results.

Measurement of the first two stages usually takes place shortly after the placement finishes and is conducted by surveying the participants themselves. The third and fourth stages require a more longitudinal study and can incorporate the views of the participants' line managers, human resources and business units, involving qualitative and quantitative measures.

In order to measure the success of the Growing Together project in relation to this leadership development approach, five KPIs were agreed for the pilot year. This framework has informed every aspect of the employee journey through the program from selection, training, program development, in-country support and monitoring and evaluation post-placement.

Key performance indicator results

1. KPI: 80% of Syngenta participants report an improved understanding of the needs of smallholders and Syngenta's business

Building an external perspective by stepping outside one's typical environment allows participants to see things differently and help in their own way. 95% of participants said the program helped them understand Syngenta's business and today's pressing food challenges.

"The programme has expanded my thoughts around The Good Growth Plan and sustainability. It has changed my perspective on food security and helped me connect with growers. I now ask myself the question; is this the best, most sustainable way for growth?"

Francois Burghgraeve (cohort 1)

2. KPI: 70% of Syngenta participants feel more engaged with the company and its purpose

100% of participants feel proud of Syngenta's work in Bangladesh, its commitment to smallholders, and in particular, their contribution to this work through participating in the Growing Together project.

100%
of participants feel proud
of Syngenta's work
in Bangladesh

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

100% of line managers and 90% of participants felt that the project had successfully helped them to achieve their learning objectives. Meanwhile, 80% of participants found it helpful or extremely helpful in developing new skills, particularly around cross-cultural competence, flexibility and working in difficult environments.

4. KPI: 70% of Syngenta participants report improvement in leadership skills

90% of participants thought the program had improved their leadership skills to a great extent. Through working in a new and resource-constrained environment, participants find themselves navigating territories outside their comfort zone. One participant said that, “working under pressure and seeing my reactions has helped me understand my leadership style and possibilities for improvement”. Line managers also saw a dramatic difference in their team members. One manager said that their colleague had “become more self-aware and decisive in day-to-day activities”. Overall, participants and line managers felt that the leadership qualities that were best improved by the program were collaboration skills and the ability to engage and inspire others.

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

90% of participants said the project helped them to connect with The Good Growth Plan. One participant commented that it has allowed her to “have a personal connection to The Good Growth Plan and share those experiences with my customers and colleagues”. All line managers responded that they would recommend the project and thought the experience had given their colleagues a better understanding of The Good Growth Plan in action.



Nathan Klages, Fiona McKerrow, Angela Arnold and Ioana Tudor working on their final report.



Amanda Scott's story: Partnering differently makes good business sense

As a senior Syngenta manager, British participant Amanda Scott is used to being in the lead during merger integrations. When she got an opportunity to take part in the Growing Together Program as a team leader, she found herself using a completely new set of skills to align the goals of Syngenta with the social needs of communities Bangladesh. Here she talks about why the VSO partnership with Syngenta makes good business sense.

"It's quite different from my day-to-day job in that it's not really about managing the way I would lead a divestment or integration. It's about bringing the group together and using their capabilities and strengths. It's leading leaders.

If you don't help farmers change their practices and have access to new techniques and technologies, then we might not be able to supply food for an increasing population. Syngenta knows that we must make partnerships with NGO's and governments to make this happen. Our challenge centers around recognizing how we are all coming from a different perspective and how to make it all work together. Our focus was to link the program with the Syngenta business in Bangladesh, which wasn't easy. Essentially, it's about making the work we do with smallholders become an instrumental and fundamental piece of our organization rather than an add-on. The experience was phenomenal".



Farmers and members of the community attend a Farmer Field Day in Muradpur.



7 **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. 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. 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 growth⁷.

7. Creating Shared Value, Harvard Business Review, 2011

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 food⁸. The Good Growth Plan clearly outlines this relationship and specifies the company’s commitments to help feed a growing global population by 2020. The Growing Together project 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.

The Growing Together project targets poor and marginalized farmers, a group with whom Syngenta Bangladesh Business would not normally work with directly. It helps to provide a vital insight into how Syngenta can engage with the five million marginal and smallholder farmers living in rural communities in Bangladesh.

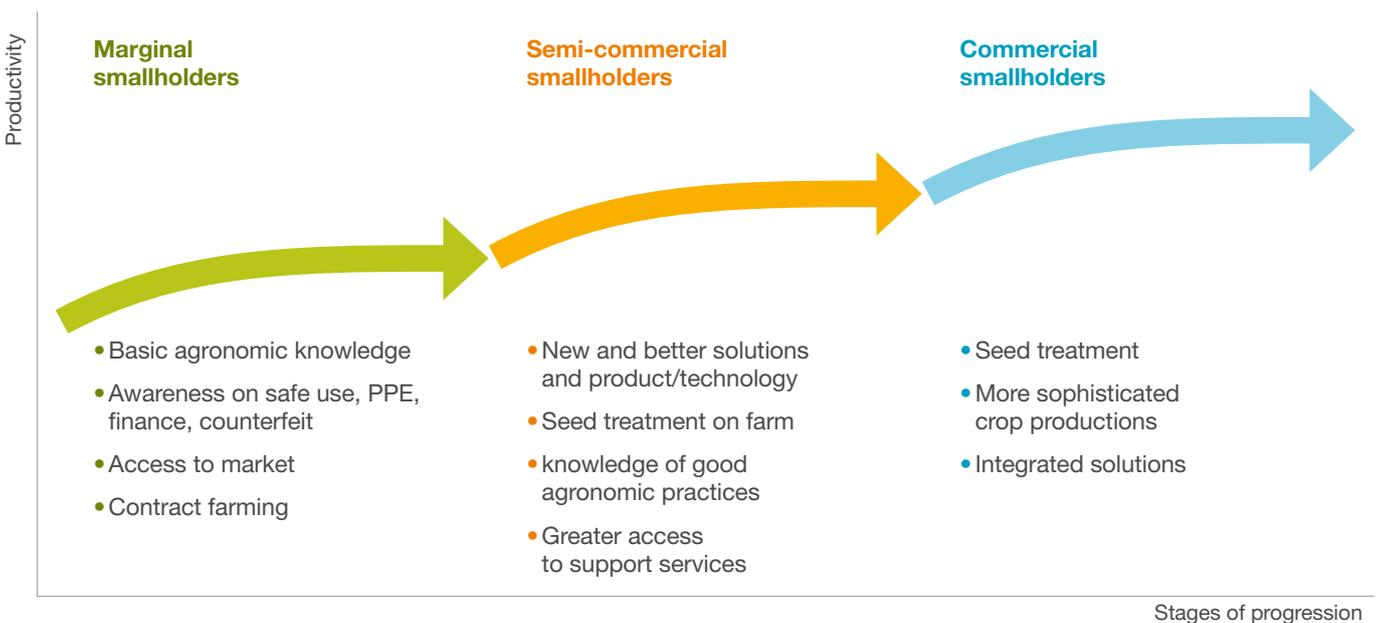
Meeting the needs of smallholder farmers

The Growing Together project brings Syngenta’s global operation and Bangladesh business into direct contact with marginal farmers. For many participants this is the first time they have worked directly with smallholders. The learning and feedback loop that takes place between the project, the participants and Syngenta Bangladesh is embedded through regular presentations and feedback sessions when the cohorts who are either in-country or when they return. For the first time, cohort three formalized this through a more structured assignment to identify synergies and potential links between the project and the business. They provided practical recommendations for improving how the business can better meet the needs of smallholder farmers in Bangladesh. The rationale for doing this was around long-term sustainability; if the local business could find commercially viable ways of supporting marginal farmers, then these services would continue far beyond the life of the Growing Together project.

Cohort three provided tangible outcomes as well as longer-term recommendations to leverage business channels and touch-points to raise farmer productivity and achieve The Good Growth Plan and Growing Together project goals. The participants also placed emphasis on driving profitable business growth coupled with social mindedness.

Other recommendations from the cohort were around the business portfolio and services, go-to-market opportunities, linkages stakeholders, and financing. These recommendations are currently being reviewed and followed up with Syngenta Bangladesh. The diagram below shows how through targeted support, marginal farmers can become more profitable.

Farmer Progression



8. FAO, 2015

“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.”

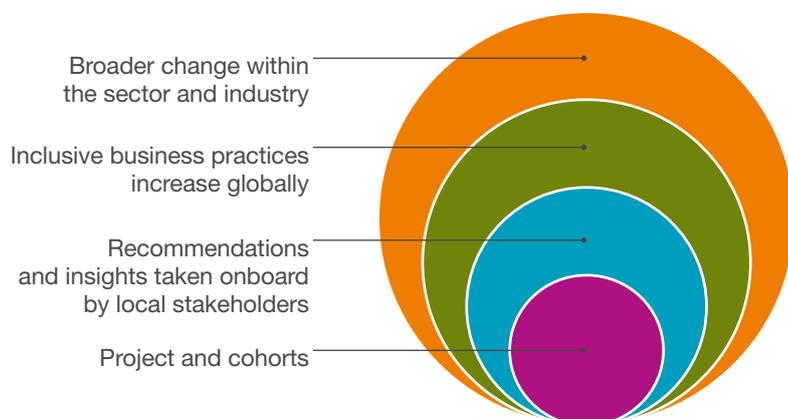
Hassan Sazzadul, Syngenta Bangladesh Director

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

The Growing Together project 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

80% of the Growing Together alumni engaged in internal or external knowledge sharing events and internal media and more than 10,000 page views on the mySyngenta intranet.



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. The purpose of the blog is to share informal stories about Bangladesh, the challenges facing smallholders and personal or emotional journeys. This aligns with levels of engagement with The Good Growth Plan, highlighting the level of interest from Syngenta employees.

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 insights, analysis and recommendations.

KPI

Results against the KPIs

- 2,878 Syngenta employees and leaders joined face-to-face, online information sharing sessions or meetings held by Growing Together alumni.
- The Growing Together page on My Syngenta had 17,242 page views.



1. Selected cohorts of Syngenta employees travel to Bangladesh to work on structured, skills based assignments working with smallholders and local partners.
2. Cohorts share insights and recommendations with Growing Together Project team, Syngenta and local stakeholders.
3. On return, insights are shared further across the global business. Ways of working develop and adapt with smallholders in mind.
4. Best practice is shared. Others in the sector learn about the program. Syngenta known as a values-based company with embedded sustainability practices.



Members of a women's farmer group tend to their communal crops in Durgapur Village.



8

Looking ahead

The key priority for the next two years is to take the successful Farmer Center model and find ways of bringing it to scale without diminishing its positive impact on the poorest and most marginalized farmers and communities. The first two Farmer Centers were officially opened in January 2016 servicing 1,800 farmers and the aim is to open an additional four Centers in 2016 to extend the reach to 10,000 farmers. This will be an impressive expansion of the program but it is recognized that it won't be enough to have a considerable impact on the millions of farmers across Bangladesh. Other scaling options will be investigated as part of the project.

Franchising

Cohort three made clear recommendations on the requisites for taking the Farmer Centers to scale:

- Have a winning **service catalogue** that will drive revenues to cover costs and return initial investment.
- Business model **ownership** that will ensure sustainability of the business operations.
- Strong **business planning** and **operational controls** to ensure viability for the ‘micro’ market.

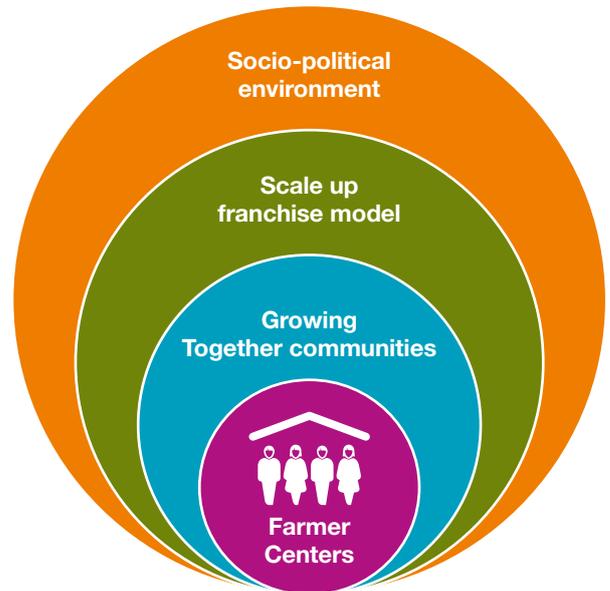
These three vital elements led to the conclusion that the best way forward would be to develop a franchising model so that Farmer Centers could be fully owned by entrepreneurs, yet have a standard business plan, operational controls and service catalogue that ensures viability while positively meeting the needs of all farmers. The next cohorts will develop a business plan to effectively integrate the Farmer Centers into the wider socio-political environment at scale through the franchise model. To make this model scalable, specific mechanisms and approaches will be needed to encourage collaboration at this level of the value chain.

Community development will also remain a central focus of the project. Another task of the next cohort is to boost women’s membership amongst farmer groups and empower their active involvement. This cohort will develop recommendations and guidance to ensure the Growing Together project is inclusive of women in all activities. By leveraging Syngenta’s best practice on gender and diversity, the group will seek to ensure that effective policies and mechanisms are embedded in every aspect of the project so that there is a positive impact on all forms of women’s empowerment as the model is scaled up.

Moving towards a nested view of value chains

As the partnership matures and the focus moves towards value chain governance, the Growing Together project aims to look at these value chains as ‘nested’ rather than ‘linear’. A traditional linear approach is useful to understand how value increases progressively towards retailers but it also tends to limit equity and reinforces power dynamics, which govern the chains. This report provides strong evidence that good agronomic practice can help farmers increase their yields and the initiatives within the Farmer Centers can help them achieve a better income. However, until value chains are looked at as dependency networks, the project will not fully address efficiency and governance. The linear view is transactional. This means that farmers receive help to get the best price from the aggregator or miller, and the miller looks to get the best price from the wholesalers and so on. None of the actors are necessarily concerned about the process as a whole, rather, they optimize their closest circle of influence.

To view value chains as nested that prioritize interaction over transaction creates spaces where different actors talk about system constraints or opportunities. The project aims to transform the way these actors interact. In the most part, farmers and actors along the value chain adopt a ‘what’s in this for me?’ mindset. The next stage of this project aims to transform this into a collaborative way of thinking by asking the question ‘what is in this for us if we work together?’



Technology

To scale from 10,000 to a million farmers is not feasible without either a boost in funding or finding a way to create efficiencies. For this reason, it is well known that no project can realistically scale without technology. For example, the idea of introducing a Digital Green's farmer-to-farmer video, resulting in a multiplier effect of four to 96,000 farmers and a reduction of costs to approximately GBP 50 per adopting farmer.

Tangible impact on Syngenta

For a project like Growing Together, year one is too early to measure tangible impact on the business. The first impact however is to achieve a critical mass of engaged employees who are interested to hear more about the project. The next challenge will be to channel this engagement and awareness into structured activities. This will need to be supported by a business environment that rewards new ideas and innovations that are focused on supporting smallholders. Widespread engagement from the global Syngenta workforce alongside an alumni network of senior leaders who will have reached more than 100 people by 2017, delivering some tangible innovation focused on smallholder communities. These can be products, solutions and business models providing shared value to all involved stakeholders. This requires that learning and insight from the program are disseminated into the wider business in Bangladesh and beyond to improve smallholder inclusiveness.

21st century leaders

By participating on the Growing Together project, Syngenta employees are developing the skills, experience and attitudes needed to become the next generation of sustainable business leaders capable of fulfilling Syngenta's ambitious targets. By working directly with smallholder farmers and their communities, program participants gain invaluable insights into their potential customer base, evolving their business style to be more empathic through convening and consensus-based consulting. More importantly, the Growing Together project fosters transformative rather than transactional relationships where stakeholders collaborate rather than contract in order to get the best outcome in the long term rather than simply the best price. This paradigm is a prerequisite in developing sustainable business practices.

Grass roots activists

A clear limitation of the project is the number of employees that can participate. So far, just 37 of the 28,000 Syngenta employees have been directly involved. Although, the success of the project has been communicated more widely, it is important to recognize that the tangible outcomes of ownership and interaction will ultimately help to realize The Good Growth Plan commitments towards smallholders. Therefore, ways of increasing employee interaction will need to be developed. This could be done through crowdsourcing technology that allows a much bigger group of Syngenta employees to contribute to the program delivery by providing virtual advice and recommendations to either Syngenta or local VSO teams.

The Good Growth Plan sets out ambitious targets which means that the Growing Together project will have to be similarly bold and ambitious. To do this, the program will not only have to take its successful pilot to scale through innovative franchising but also leverage the experiences and learning back into the business to ensure Syngenta remains a sustainability leader into the future.



Syngenta participants and community members.





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

vsointernational.org

+44(0)208 789 7500

corporate.volunteering@vsoint.org

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).