AgroSpectrum ASIA
Envisaging Future | Updating Present

IFAD and Grow Asia to modernize agriculture in Southeast Asia through digital and ICT solutions

25 October 2023 | News

SEEDS aims to accelerate and scale-up social and economic development for small-scale farming families in Cambodia, the Philippines and Viet Nam

SEEDS aims to accelerate and scale-up social and economic development for small-scale farming families in Cambodia, the Philippines and Viet Nam

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Grow Asia launched the **Smallholder Economic Empowerment through Digital Solutions (SEEDS) project** with financial support from the Republic of Koreaâ??s Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA). SEEDS aims to accelerate and scale-up social and economic development for small-scale farming families and poor rural people in Cambodia, the Philippines and Viet Nam through digital and ICT solutions.

Southeast Asia is home to 660 million people across 10 countries, and has seen incredible change in recent decades, driven by the rapidly increasing availability and adoption of technology. But while digital technology has brought unprecedented opportunities and sources of income, a persistent digital gap means that small-scale farmers and rural people have been unable to tap into these new opportunities. SEEDS aims to leverage strong partnerships to bring localized solutions that bridge this gap, and ensure truly inclusive growth in the region by helping them to access services to modernize their farms and agri-enterprises. It will directly benefit 48,000 people, as well as 30 start-ups and 150 government officials across the three countries at the national or subnational level.

â??Around 150 million adults in Southeast Asia still lack access to digital technologies, and rural people are especially left behind. Collaboration is essential to ensure that everyone has access to, and can benefit from, the wide opportunities the new digital economy opens up,â?• said Reehana Raza, Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific, IFAD. â??SEEDS is an initiative that attempts to bring all partners together to enhance digital inclusion, so that technology can be a real force for good.â?

While the interest in leveraging digital technologies to improve service delivery for small-scale farmers is growing rapidly among the governments of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and response from the private sector is picking up, there are policy and regulatory barriers that limit the uptake of innovations in service provision. Some of these barriers are low digital literacy; a gap in coverage because of poor or limited mobile internet connectivity; and inadequate data privacy policies and regulations.

SEEDS will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the policy and regulatory landscape influencing the uptake of digital innovations in smallholder agriculture, with a focus on policies that promote connectivity in rural and remote regions. The goal is to collaborate with government and private sector partners to enhance the supportive policy and regulatory framework for smallholder digital technologies.

In addition, SEEDS will engage governments, agribusinesses, technology, and support organizations in Cambodia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam to identify specific digital initiatives that can be supported. It will also link to existing IFAD country programmes and interventions, aligning with already existing digital components and initiatives. It will identify promising digital solutions that have already been developed and piloted through IFAD-funded projects in the three countries to be strengthened and scaled up.

Importantly, the grassroots farmer organizations that work with IFAD-funded projects can allay concerns of small-scale farmers, especially those related to data privacy, and act as the last mile provider of services and training to members. To that end, SEEDS will assist these organizations in acquiring digital literacy and mastering the use of relevant digital technologies. This will allow small-scale farmers to be integrated into the evolving digital technology landscape, and to achieve higher farm productivity and incomes.