



# WE4F Asia EDGE Ag-Energy Prize

## Executive Summary

The Water and Energy for Food (WE4F) Grand Challenge Asia Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (EDGE) Agriculture-Energy Prize assisted mid-stage enterprises and five youth-owned companies with game changing innovations at the nexus of renewable energy and agriculture. The prize provided 15 enterprises capacity building support to overcome business growth challenges in a post-COVID-19 context. Of these 15 prize finalists, five organizations were awarded cash prizes to further help these enterprises to grow and scale their innovations over the coming years.

The winners will also receive technical assistance from the new WE4F South and Southeast Asia Regional Innovation Hub (RIH) based in Bangkok, Thailand. The purpose of this executive summary report is to share and document lessons learned to help development practitioners with future open innovation programming in the WE4F nexus, especially in the post-COVID-19 context.



## Phase One: Launching the Prize to Selecting the Finalists

From November-December 2019, the Catalyst team collaborated with the USAID Global Development Lab and Regional Development Mission to Asia (RDMA) to design and launch the prize. This included a [fact sheet](#), a FAQ featuring questions from the contestants, a [website page](#), and a [prize rules document](#). Catalyst coordinated with USAID/RDMA to promote the prize through social media channels and interlocutors in the region. Analytics found that the combination of Facebook ads along with direct individual email outreach to over 300 contacts in Southeast Asia was most effective in generating applications than mass email and social media campaigns via USAID/RDMA and bi-lateral mission communication channels.

Altogether, 79 contestants from 22 countries applied to the WE4F Asia EDGE Ag-Energy Prize, surpassing the target of 60 applications.

In January 2020, Catalyst assembled a diverse group of seven highly-qualified judges from public and private sector organizations to select the 15 finalists based on problem-market-fit criterion. Catalyst developed [guidelines](#) and conducted group orientation calls to prepare the judges. The judges independently scored each application in a google form. Afterwards, Catalyst facilitated a conference call with the judges to select the top 15 finalists that scored the highest on an aggregated list.



## COVID-19 Pivot: Preparing for the WE4F Co-Creation Workshop

Originally, the WE4F Co-Creation Workshop was intended to be an in-person event held in Bangkok, Thailand over the course of five days. The team shifted to hosting a virtual event due to COVID-19. As a first step to explore the design of this first-of-a-kind co-creation workshop for WE4F, the USAID Catalyst team sent short surveys and conducted interviews with each of enterprises to customize the workshop's content and determine the best format to promote innovator-to-innovator exchange.

Based on these surveys, USAID Catalyst and USAID determined a new format for the virtual co-creation workshop. This included adjusting the content to a post-COVID 19 context and changing





the timing to 90- minute sessions for five consecutive days from May 17- 21. To prepare for the virtual co-creation workshop, the USAID Catalyst team conducted the following:

- **Selected facilitators** deeply familiar with business model innovations in the WE4F nexus in South and Southeast Asia;
- **Developed Digital Booklets** to prepare and engage participants in the workshop. This included Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) information such as required links, apps, troubleshooting advice, participant bios, and a detailed agenda;
- **Designed Participant-Led Sessions** that prioritized innovator-to-innovator exchanges to promote learning and strengthen the community of WE4F innovators in South and Southeast Asia;
- **Created Detailed Facilitator Guides** to help organizers manage logistics of the event;
- **Designed Daily Feedback Surveys** to foster adaptive management that rapidly identified what was working and what was not to adjust in real time;
- **Prepared a Virtual Whiteboard** that provided a space to document breakout group inputs, highlights from experts, and view resources; and
- **Selected Blue Jeans Video Conference Platform** to allow seamless virtual breakout groups and screen sharing.



## Final Round of Judging

The team conducted the final round of judging the week after the virtual co-creation workshop instead of concurrently. This was done to be conscientious of the judges' time, who were each consumed with navigating their respective organizations through the new post-COVID-19 landscape. Each finalist had 20 minutes to make their case and answer questions.

To prepare, Catalyst updated the judging guidelines and held orientation meetings to provide step-by-step instructions on how to virtually evaluate the participants. Catalyst included facilitators to manage the schedule for each pitch. Astonishingly, 100 percent of the judges agreed that the expectations and guidance for judging was clear, making it an overall positive experience.



## Award Ceremony

In June 2020, the winners were announced at the virtual Asia Clean Energy Forum through [this produced video](#). The final prize winners include:

- **ATEC Biodigesters International (Cambodia), Grand Prize, Mid-Stage Category, \$100,000** - Provides rural farming families across Cambodia tools to turn organic material into energy through a pay-as-you go financing method.
- **RecyGlo (Myanmar), Grand Prize, Youth Category \$75,000** - Turns organic waste into biogas and nutrient-rich soil in Myanmar. The company also sells, franchises, and co-develops waste-to-energy and natural fertilizer solutions in other Asian countries.
- **Gham Power (Myanmar), 1st Runner-Up, Mid- Stage Category, \$65,000** - Helps farmers to improve their agricultural yield and with its integrated 'Off Grid Bazar' solution that combines reliable irrigation, affordable and easy financing, and personalized agri-advisory service.
- **Claro Energy (Myanmar), 2nd Runner-Up, Mid-Stage Category, \$50,000** - Provides off-grid solar microgrids for irrigation to power-deficient regions with broad applications across irrigation, agriculture, drinking water, and urban settings.
- **Agrosolar, Runner-up, Youth Category, Myanmar, \$55,000** - Uses an entirely solar-powered drip irrigation system that makes it easier and cheaper for farmers to grow a wide variety of crops in a sustainable and energy-efficient way.





## Lessons Learned from Executing the Virtual WE4F Co-Creation Workshop

Based off the experience implementing the co-creation workshop, we learned the following:

- **Test, Measure, and Adapt** – We were fortunate to have a room of entrepreneurs who deeply believed in continuous iteration and experimentation to improve service delivery. Surveying them daily was critical for making changes and developing a well-reviewed co-creation workshop. Catalyst also surveyed the participants a week after the co-creation workshop and 80 percent scored it as an above average or excellent opportunity.
- **Bring the Energy** – Compared to an in-person workshop, it's more difficult for facilitators to feed off the energy in a virtual setting. Facilitators need to come prepared with activities and approaches to increase and maintain participants' energy levels throughout a 90-minute session. For example, one facilitator played his favorite music 5-7 minutes before each session and welcomed people via the chat room as we waited for everyone to join the call.
- **Promote Exchange Above All Else** – The facilitator should place the focus on promoting an exchange among peers rather than targeting a particular learning outcome during a virtual co-creation workshop. For example, ask a series of open-ended questions, such as "Why or why isn't ESG important for your business?" or rephrase to something provocative like "Is addressing ESG too costly for a small?"
- **Mitigate the Participant Use of Technology** – There are many useful tools to mimic brainstorming and whiteboarding in a virtual setting, such as Miro. Catalyst used notetakers to capture and organize virtual sticky notes in breakout groups with Miro. While it may be normal to ask a participant to fill out a sticky note in an in-person event, we learned this distracts participants and wastes time.
- **All Hands-on Deck** – A benefit to being virtual is that more support staff can be present at the workshop than if it were in-person. Catalyst learned that having many organizers on hand with defined roles is vital. This

included lead and supporting facilitators, a logistics coordinator, an ICT Help Desk person, a social media and communications specialist, and breakout group notetakers.

- **Give Participants What They Want** – Catalyst recommends prioritizing time on the modules that are of most interest to the participants, based on survey results. For example, on day four, the team devoted the majority of the time to breakout groups, content delivery from experts, and the virtual tea break.
- **Embrace Awkward Pauses and Encourage Engagement** – It takes time to unclick the mute button and speaking up in a virtual conference room can be intimidating, especially if English is not your native language. Catalyst learned to wait patiently for a response and call on participants to share an experience. After participants became more comfortable, the discussions were lively and more reminiscent of in-person engagements.



## Looking Ahead

Catalyst learned that virtual co-creation workshops are effective and should be considered to complement future in-person programming. These engagements:

- **Save Funding** – Even with the additional preparation time, virtual engagements are significantly more cost effective since large percentages of budgets are often dedicated to cover travel and venue costs. In fact, WE4F was able to leverage the leftover funds to provide follow-on marketing technical assistance to two non-winning, prize finalists.
- **Encourage Participation** – Virtual workshops are especially useful for business owners as it accommodates their busy schedules and helps them to stay on top of their day-to-day business operations.
- **Build Innovator Networks** – While face-to-face interactions are invaluable for forming relationships, Catalyst's co-creation workshop demonstrated that professional relationships can also be formed in a virtual setting. For instance, two of the prize winners indicated to USAID Catalyst that they are exploring a joint venture opportunity together in Myanmar.