

Sustainable Palm Oil Coalition for India (I-SPOC) 12th Members Meeting April 23, 2025

I. Objectives

- Updates from the Secretariat
 - Advancements in the Domestic Palm Oil Production Landscape
 - Efforts to Advance Palm Oil Traceability
 - I-SPOC's Initiatives at the Policy Level
 - Engagement with Financial Institutions
- Members' Insights: Opportunities and Challenges in the Transition to a Sustainable Palm Oil Value Chain
- Capacity Building on RSPO Certification Systems
 - By Shivnayan Aggarwal, Manager, Market Transformation- India, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)
- Policy Perspectives on Sustainable Palm Oil Production
 - Presentation by Nidhi Choudhary, CRB
 - Expert Views: Vishal Dev, Director, Sustainable Business, WWF India

II. Summary of the Proceedings

a. Updates from the Secretariat

Rijit Sengupta from CRB started the meeting by setting the context and initiating a round of introductions for all the participants. This was followed by a brief update on the activities undertaken by the coalition with various stakeholders since the last Members Meeting in July 2024 by Praseetha P Kumar (CRB).

Advancements in the Domestic Palm Oil Production Landscape

- Sustainability in domestic palm oil production has been central to I-SPOC's mission since its inception. In continuation of its efforts, I-SPOC developed a Policy Brief titled 'Aligning Sustainability Principles into the Palm Oil Production Policy in India' to support the integration of sustainability within the National Mission on Edible Oils – Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) framework.
- Building on this, I-SPOC initiated outreach to all 14 NMEO-OP states and held initial conversations with Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Nagaland, among others.
- These interactions led to the Capacity Building Workshops on Sustainable Palm Oil Production in Arunachal Pradesh, organized in collaboration with the

Department of Agriculture, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The workshops took place in Roing on 30th August and Itanagar on 3rd September.

- These workshops aimed to build awareness among stakeholders, including farmers, FPOs, industry representatives, and government officials on good agricultural practices, environmental and social safeguards, and human-wildlife conflict management.
- The sessions were attended by key dignitaries including Shri Gabriel Denwang Wangsu, Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and Allied Sectors, and senior government officials, including Shri Dani Yubbe (Director, Agriculture) and Shri T D Neckhom (Director Marketing cum State Nodal Officer on Palm Oil), Shri Bidol Tayeng, Commissioner and Secretary, State Agriculture Department, and Idar Noyar, Assistant Nodal Officer, Palm Oil. I-SPOC was represented by WWF-India, RSPO, and CRB. A total of 221 stakeholders participated, and the initiative received extensive media coverage across regional outlets.
- Following the workshops, the State Agriculture Department requested I-SPOC to develop a concept note for sustainable palm oil production. In response, a Roadmap for Policy on Sustainable Palm Oil Production in Arunachal Pradesh has been submitted to the State, and feedback is awaited.

Efforts to Advance Palm Oil Traceability

- The need to strengthen understanding of traceability was first highlighted during I-SPOC's 8th Members Meeting in August 2022 in Mumbai. Following this, a Traceability Action Group was formed in August 2022, comprising various experts from across the value chain.
- Multiple expert consultations were held through 2022 and 2023 to explore challenges and opportunities in achieving traceability in the Indian palm oil value chain. Insights from these consultations, along with secondary research, were compiled into a briefing paper titled 'Understanding and Applying Traceability in the Indian Palm Oil Value Chain'.
- The paper was officially launched on November 15, 2024, at India and Sustainability Standards (ISS) 2024, during a session titled 'Importance of Traceability in Driving Trade in Palm Oil Supply Chain'.
- Building on this momentum, I-SPOC is launching a three-part Masterclass Series on palm oil traceability tools with an objective to raise awareness on palm oil traceability among key stakeholders and to demonstrate how existing tools can be used to achieve traceability in the Indian context.
- The first session of this masterclass will focus on PRISMA (RSPO) and is scheduled for 6th May 2025 from 3:00 to 4:30 PM.

I-SPOC's Initiatives at the Policy Level

- The Policy Engagement Working Group was formed in 2024 to deepen policy discussions on sustainable palm oil across production, trade, and consumption.
- The group comprises over 16 experts from diverse sectors, including

ex-government officials, industry leaders, research bodies, and NGOs.

- The main objective of the group is to develop actionable policy recommendations and identify elements for a robust policy framework.
- The first meeting of the group was held on May 20, 2024 and the subsequent meetings were held on 15 October and 11 December 2024.
- These meetings have led to the development of a framework highlighting recommendations at policy and operational level for producing sustainable palm oil. The framework looks at recommendations from two aspects:
 - Policy level recommendations developed for the Central Government to guide State Governments for developing state specific policy on Sustainable Palm Oil Production
 - Operational level recommendations developed to provide guidance by the Central Government to the State Government for developing guidelines on Sustainable Palm Oil production targeting agronomic aspects, land use and workers health and safety
- Framework is to be finalized and submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare for further action. The Policy Level Recommendations are to be implemented through central and state governments and the Operation Level Recommendations to be implemented through technical institutes like Indian Institute of Oil Palm Research (IOPR), National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), Indian Institute of Farming System Research (IIFSR) etc.
- Meetings of the group will continue to discuss the policy aspects in the trade and consumption sector.

Engagement with Financial Institutions

- Recognizing the importance of Financial Institutions in Incorporating Sustainability in the palm oil value chain in India, I-SPOC and RSPO have together developed a Practitioners' Guide titled Mitigating Potential Risks in Financing Agro-Commodities in India. targeted at the risk management, finance, credit and investment officers, at mid- and senior levels in Indian financial institutions to enable them to take better credit and risk decisions. It is also targeted at financial sector regulators, training institutes, and industry associations, as it would help create knowledge and awareness of these risks.
- I-SPOC is collaborating with financial institutions by raising awareness and support in building capacity to address and mitigate the risks associated with financing agro-commodities in India. Leveraging the growing interest among financial institutions, this initiative seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the critical risks posed by climate change, as well as the opportunities it presents, while advancing sustainable finance practices.
- The goal is to equip financial institutions with the knowledge and capacity to navigate the complexities of agro-commodity financing responsibly, ensuring both financial stability and long-term sustainability.

b. Members' Insights: Opportunities and Challenges in the Transition to a Sustainable Palm Oil Value Chain

A roundtable session was organized to hear directly from coalition members and observers. The discussion focused on gathering insights about the current experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by organizations to transition to a sustainable palm oil value chain. Participants shared insights from their respective sectors, highlighting operational hurdles, sector-specific capacity-building needs, and the kind of targeted support expected from I-SPOC to accelerate the shift toward sustainability. The session aimed to capture multi-stakeholder perspectives to inform the coalition's future strategies and interventions. Key points that emerged during the discussion are summarized below:

Importance of Traceability and Certification Standards Suited for India:

Several participants stressed that traceability is foundational for sustainability in the palm oil supply chain. Lack of transparent systems limits monitoring and makes certification difficult. There was a call for improving traceability mechanisms and promoting credible sustainability standards suited for India.

Market Demand from HoReCa and QSR: Participants highlighted the potential of the HoReCa and QSR sectors in driving demand for SPO. While many global QSR brands have made sustainability commitments, local operations and supply chains often fall short. Members underscored the need to raise awareness and engage procurement managers and supply chain actors. There was also collective agreement on organizing closed-door dialogues with these MNCs to align strategies and advance sustainable sourcing.

Consumer Awareness and Role of Regulatory Bodies (FSSAI): There was unanimous agreement on the critical need to build consumer awareness around sustainable palm oil. Members emphasized the importance of engaging government regulatory bodies such as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), given its mandate to regulate the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and import of food products, as well as set food safety standards. The evident lack of awareness at the ground level makes it even more essential to involve FSSAI in sustainability dialogues, ensuring broader outreach and ultimately fostering greater consumer awareness.

Need for Engagement with SMEs and Non-food Sectors: It was observed that SMEs, especially in the non-food sectors like oleochemicals, personal care, and cosmetics, have very limited awareness of SPO. A focused approach involving targeted outreach and incentives for these industries was recommended.

Role of Retail and Consumer-Facing Brands: Retailers and large consumer brands can influence upstream suppliers and shape consumer choices. Members

discussed involving them in awareness campaigns and voluntary commitments to help mainstream SPO across product categories.

Perceived Cost and Availability of SPO: Some industry players perceive SPO as expensive or not readily available. This perception was seen as a major barrier. Members discussed the need to communicate long-term value and provide clarity on SPO pricing and sourcing options within India.

Need for India-Specific Standards or Frameworks: There was considerable discussion about adapting global standards or developing India-specific guidelines for SPO. Members pointed out that current standards may not always reflect local realities, and a contextual approach might help increase adoption.

Capacity Building and Technical Support for Industry: Several members underlined the need for capacity building—especially for MSMEs and processors—on the benefits, processes, and sourcing of SPO. Suggestions included workshops, toolkits, and technical support platforms.

Involvement of Palm Oil Importers and Refiners: Participants emphasized the role of refiners and importers, who serve as crucial intermediaries in the supply chain. Encouraging them to demand sustainable sourcing from origin countries could influence upstream practices.

Smallholder Inclusion and Structural Gaps: Concerns were raised about the limited integration of smallholders into sustainable palm oil supply chains. Challenges such as land ownership, access to finance, and weak extension services hinder their participation. Members emphasized the need to support smallholders through capacity-building, access to inputs, aggregation models, and sustainability-linked market access.

c. **Capacity Building on RSPO Certification Systems**

In December 2024, I-SPOC conducted a needs assessment survey among its members and observers to identify capacity building requirements and priority areas for support. The analysis of the survey results revealed that certification systems were a prominent area where members and observers felt the need for enhanced understanding. In response, I-SPOC organized a dedicated capacity building session on the RSPO certification system during its Members Meeting.

Expert-led Capacity Building Session: The session was led by Shivanay Aggarwal, Manager - Market Transformation (India), RSPO, , who provided a detailed overview of the RSPO certification framework, membership models, and implementation pathways.

Some of the key points highlighted during the capacity-building session and the subsequent Q&A are outlined below:

- **Flexible Certification Models for Smaller Players:** RSPO offers two membership tiers—ordinary and associate—with the latter available at a low annual fee for micro users sourcing under 500 MT/year. Group certification and remote audits make the system more accessible and cost-effective for startups and small businesses.
- **Support Needed for SMEs and Micro Users:** The session emphasized the lack of awareness and technical capacity among SMEs and micro users thus underscoring the need for tailored outreach and support.
- **Proposed Visual Guide for SMEs:** Participants suggested developing a simple **fact** sheet or visual explainer to demystify RSPO certification for SMEs, supporting broader uptake and aligning with I-SPOC’s communication efforts.
- **Showcasing Business Value through Success Stories:** A former micro user, now an ordinary member with five certified sites, was cited as proof of the business case for certification, highlighting scalability and long-term value.
- **Labeling and Consumer Awareness Gaps:** The discussion highlighted challenges around palm oil labeling and low consumer awareness. While FMCGs often avoid palm oil disclosure, the oleochemical sector (with better margins) has greater room to lead on sustainability communication.

The session underscored the importance of simplified certification pathways, success-driven messaging, and targeted outreach to enable greater participation in India’s sustainable palm oil transition.

d. Policy Perspectives on Sustainable Palm Oil Production

Nidhi Choudhary, Senior Programme Officer, CRB, introduced the Policy Engagement Working Group (PEG), formed in 2024. This 16+ member group includes experts from government, civil society, FMCGs, research institutions, and producer associations. The group aims to develop policy recommendations and a robust framework to advance sustainable palm oil (SPO) production in India.

This was followed by valuable insights from expert Vishal Dev, Director, Sustainable Business, WWF India. Some the key insights from him are listed below:

- **Central Government’s Role in Production Policy:** The group agreed that production policy changes must be driven by the central government, as it provides the majority of funding. States play an implementation role but lack the authority to initiate policy reforms independently.
- **Production Framework & Benchmarking:** A production framework has

been developed covering key areas such as water, soil, chemical use, and labor standards. The PEG through the central government will try to encourage States to work with institutions like IOPR and ICR to establish region-specific benchmarks. The central policy should mandate adherence to these benchmarks as a condition for funding.

- **Trade Policy Discussions Ongoing:** Initial discussions on sustainable palm oil trade have begun. A more detailed position is being developed for further deliberation.
- **Upcoming Actions:** A joint meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture is being planned to present the group's policy recommendations, following internal discussions and finalization.

Annex 1: List of Attendees

S.No.	Name	Company/ Organization	Mode (In person/ virtually)
1	Prashant Deo	IHPCIA	In person
2	Eleanor Spencer	ZSL	Virtually
3	Jenisha Luhar	PeAura	In person
4	Adarsh Mohandas	Preffered by Nature	Virtually
5	Amit Chowdhary	IOM	Virtually
6	Smita Gaikwad	Ferrero	Virtually
7	Shweta Basu	CDP	Virtually
8	Rimika Kapoor	Greenloop CleanTech	Virtually
9	Swapnil Patil	IFFCO Allana	In person
10	Cristina Larrea	IISD	Virtually
11	Nimish Shah	HUL	Virtually
12	Vidit Ajmera	IDH	In person

13	Kamal Seth	WWF-Singapore	Virtually
14	Bhavit Pant	Rainforest Alliance	Virtually
15	Aakash Arora	RSPO	In person
16	Shivnayan Aggarwal	RSPO	Virtually
17	Vishal Dev	WWF-India	In person
18	Pratibha Baveja	WWF-India	Virtually
19	Kalyan Verma	WWF-India	In person
20	Rijit Sengupta	CRB	In person
21	NidhiChoudhary	CRB	In person
22	PraseethaPKumar	CRB	In person