

# **Raising the Ambition on Sustainable Palm Oil in the Indian market post COVID19**

## **Activity Report 2022-23**

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## 1. Introduction

Since 2018, [Centre for Responsible Business](#) (CRB) has been working in partnership with the [Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#) (RSPO) to promote awareness and build capacity of various relevant stakeholders about the need for and opportunities from transition towards certified sustainable palm oil in India. Since the beginning of this partnership, CRB and RSPO have not only been engaging with FMCGs businesses, processors and traders but also other stakeholders such as international organisations, government, policy players, youth, media, retailers, industry associations, financial institution and millennial consumers. This is a brief report of CRB-RSPO partnership of 2022-23.

In this partnership period CRB engaged some new actors, in addition to further strengthening the engagement with the 'initiated'. Some of these entities included the Indian Vegetable Oil Producers Association (IVPA) and Plant Based Foods Industry Association (PBFIA); and ministries of the Government of India including Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Ministry of Finance; and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. This has expanded the scope of stakeholder engagement on sustainable palm oil in India.

Easing of travel restrictions post COVID-19 pandemic helped CRB in planning and undertaking most of the activities in person including field interactions and events.

## 2. Activity Update

In this section a brief update of the activities has been provided highlighting the achievements and challenges.

### a) Engagement with IVPA (IVPA-CRB-RSPO Partnership)

CRB was a knowledge partner for IVPA's Sustainable Palm Oil International Conference (SPINS) 2022, the first ever industry led conference held on 18-19 November 2022 in Hyderabad. Rijit Sengupta and Bhavya Sharma from CRB attended the event. The event which was organized in association with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) aimed to bring together edible oil experts, researchers, technologists and industry players having major stake in Vegetable Oils and Oilseeds. The program included specific lectures, a roundtable and panel discussions related to Market dynamics, Supply & Demand, Self Sufficiency in Vegetable Oil, Oil Palm and Sustainability issues, among others.

RSPO, one of the partners of the event organized a session- the Sustainable Palm Oil Dialogue at the event on 18 November 2022. CRB supported RSPO in conceptualizing and curating the session, identifying potential speakers for the event, finalizing the background note and the discussion pointers.



In order to create awareness about this event, CRB also designed social media collaterals which were then posted on CRB's social media handles. Information about the event and the RSPo session along with the collaterals were also shared with relevant stakeholders (I-SPOC members, observers, people with whom CRB has initiated engagement with amongst others) through emails before the event.



## b) Strengthening I-SPOC

CRB acts as the Secretariat for I-SPOC and continues to strengthen it by organizing meetings, onboarding potential members, enhancing visibility, producing and relaying reading materials, supporting the members and observers along with

managing the website and representing I-SPOC through hosting and participating in events.

- Coordination, Institutional and Governance systems and Strategic Outreach to Industry Actors

- i) **Monthly Founders Meetings:** The four Founders (CRB, RSPO, WWF - India and Rainforest Alliance) have been meeting every month to review progress of the coalition, activities undertaken by the Founders, identify areas for promoting strategic partnerships/dialogues, deliberate on key issues and action points (including member mobilisation, member engagement, capacity building, onboarding important members, member meetings, external events, etc.) identifying and working together for funding possibilities.

A meeting to review activities of I-SPOC since inception and to deliberate on way forward was held in December 2022 (followed by a meeting in January 2023). Based on the discussion, CRB developed a draft action plan and a work plan for the coalition that was then finalized and shared among the founders for finalization.

- ii) **Steering Committee Meetings:** In the year 2022-23, the Steering Committee met twice (in August 2022 and April 2023). The aim of these meetings was to share and communicate the strategic and operational plan of the coalition along with seeking inputs from members. Some of the other issues pertaining to the coalition, namely increased membership and observer engagement and mobilization, capacity building through increased engagement, strategy for I-SPOC based on the discussions within the Founders, annual workplan and implementation, keeping or disbarment of the Working Groups and building together a network of Action or Activity Groups based on the needs of the members. CRB draft minutes of these meetings and also prepare and share quarterly Action Taken Report (ATR) based on the suggestions made by the Steering Committee.

- iii) **Members Meeting:** Currently there are 36 members in the coalition (4 new members IVPA, PBFIA, MTR and VVF Pvt Ltd joined the coalition in 2022-23). In the partnership year 2022-23, I-SPOC had two members meeting (August 2022 and April 2023 respectively). Member organizations (25+) and observers (approximately 20+) attended the sessions across the two meetings. The summary report for each of the meeting was developed and shared by CRB with all participants.

Link to the summary report (August 2022)- <https://indiaspoc.org/I-SPOC%208th%20Members%20Meeting%20proceedings.pdf>

Link to the summary report (April 2023) - <https://indiaspoc.org/I-SPOC%209th%20Members%20Meeting%20Summary%20April%202023.pdf>





August, 2022



April, 2023

- iv) **Capacity Building Workshops:** Each of the members meeting was followed by a capacity building workshop. In August 2022, RSPO and WWF came together to conduct a capacity building workshop on Sustainability Frameworks, sustainable sourcing policies and the need for traceability in the palm oil supply chain.

The second capacity building workshop was held in April 2023. At the This workshop Zoological Society of London (ZSL), a member of I-SPOC spoke about [SPOTT](#) (online platform assessing commodity producers, processors and traders on their public disclosure regarding their organisation, policies, and practices related to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues). The second half of the workshop had the Asia Regional Director – Landscapes from IDH, Ms. Tran Quynh Chi sharing her views on the progress by the by the regional markets.

- v) **Open Day:** I-SPOC held its first open day of 2023 on May, 5th 2023 in Mumbai. The speakers included sustainability champions like **Dheeraj Talreja**, President-India, South Asia & Sub-Saharan Africa – AAK, **Bhavna Shah**, Regional Head - MPOC India, Bangladesh, Nepal & Sri Lanka President Maharashtra Chapter, MSME & Startups Forum- Bharat President, India Malaysia Business Council WICCI, **Amit Chhabra**, Head of Institutional Sales, Patanjali Foods Limited and **Harshal Thakare**, Manager-Business Processes and Sustainability, Galaxy Surfactants) talk about their journey - achievements, good practices and challenges on the uptake of sustainable palm oil in India with the participants.



- vi) **Action Group on Traceability:** Based on the discussions with the Steering Committee Members and the participants at the Members Meeting in August 2022, it was decided that based on the needs as expressed by the members and observers, I-SPOC would be creating Action Groups on relevant topics. Each of the formed Action Group will be functional for a span of 6-12 months and each group will provide members/participants methods and recommendations to address relevant topics. Knowledge products might also be produced.

The first action group that was formed was the one on Traceability. Five experts Bhawna Yadav, Reckitt; Ram Vaidyanathan, Godrej; Harshal Thakare, Galaxy Surfactants; Anubhav Srivastava, AAK and Aswathaman Vijayan (in personal capacity) came together to be part of this group. It was decided that the experts will work together with the Secretariat and provide inputs on the topic of traceability – what is it, why it is needed and how it can be achieved. The Secretariat had an initial group call followed by one-on-one calls with each of the experts to gather their inputs on the subject.

Based on the inputs from the ‘action group’ members, CRB is developing a briefing paper whose purpose would be to contribute towards wider capacity building of the industry stakeholders on traceability. This paper will also be shared with a group of external experts for inputs/comments. Once finalized, the paper will be disseminated widely nationally and internationally.

- vii) **Social Media Visibility:** CRB has been using its website/twitter/FB/LinkedIn/Instagram handles effectively to disseminate content related to activities of I-SPOC on a regular basis. It has published articles/press releases by partner organisations, including Rspo. Along with that the Resource Page on the website is updated monthly. Articles on [I-SPOC LinkedIn](#) Page are posted every Monday/Wednesday and Friday. The total number of followers on the LinkedIn page (as of July 11, 2023) are 822.



## The Sustainable Palm Oil Coalition for India (I-SPOC)

Promoting sustainable palm oil production and consumption through collective action.  
Environmental Services · New Delhi · 822 followers · 2 employees



I-SPOC LinkedIn  
page



Picture collage of I-SPOC events from 2022-23 that were covered on I-SPOC LinkedIn page

### viii) Representation of I-SPOC

- RSPO organized its annual members meeting at the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of GlobOil in Agra on September 21, 2022. Representatives from IVPA, AAK, IDH, WWF participated in the meeting. IDH through a presentation highlighted the activities undertaken by them in the edible oil sector in India. CRB represented I-SPOC and delivered a presentation at the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) annual members' meeting. The presentation highlighted the developments towards the path of Sustainable Palm oil in context of the Indian market.
- RSPO conducted an in-person consultation workshop on 23 December 2022 in Vijayawada, India to collect comments, feedback, and input of key stakeholders including farmers, members, NGOs and others, in shaping the context of how Indian smallholders can cultivate oil palm sustainably through RSPO standards. This is in line with ISEAL's requirements that existing standards need to be revised at least every five years for continued relevance and for effectiveness in





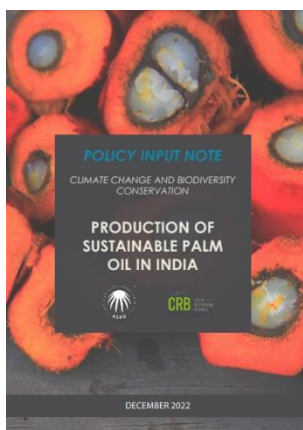
meeting its stated objectives. Bhavya Sharma and Nidhi Choudhary from CRB attended the public consultation.

- ix) **Global Sustainable Palm Oil Network Initiative:** Sustainable Palm Oil Coalition for India (I-SPOC) as represented by CRB and RSPO is now part of a Global Sustainable Palm Oil Network Initiative along with other coalitions such as the China Sustainable Palm Oil Alliance (CSPOA), UK Sustainable Palm Oil Initiative-UKSPOI (EFECA) and Singapore Alliance for Sustainable Palm Oil (SASPO). Other than engaging with other national alliances to share information/lessons, CRB has also tried to highlight the uniqueness of the palm oil value chain in India, and the need for collaboration and shared responsibility across value chain actors for impactful actions.
- x) **Documentation:** The secretariat has been developing the agenda, summary reports of all the meetings and events under I-SPOC and sharing it with the participants. CRB has also initiated a 'Blog Series' where guest authors share their views on topics related to sustainable palm oil and the supply chain. The topic of the blogs and the respective writers are listed below:
  - a) Voluntary standards and addressing deforestation risk – Neha Simlai, Head of Market Development (Asia-Pacific) at the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®).
  - b) Production of sustainable palm oil in India: a reality - Dr. Kalidas Poteneni, Ex-Scientist, IOPR

- **Engagement with Ecosystems Actors**

- i) **Policy Engagement:**

A Policy Input Note ([PIN](#)) on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation – Production of Sustainable Palm Oil in India was finalized and designed. It was launched at Members Meeting in April 2023. After the launch, the PIN was disseminated to all I-SPOC members and observers through emails. It was also uploaded on the I-SPOC website and LinkedIn page.



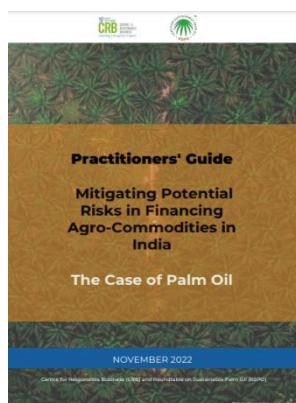
The second PIN entitled, Towards a Policy Framework for Financing Sustainable Palm Oil in India has been finalized and is being readied for



dissemination. The third PIN focusing on 'Employment and Decent Work in Palm Production in India' is being finalized. Draft of the two other PINS (on Trade of Sustainable Palm Oil in India and Sustainable Procurement of Palm Oil in India) have been developed and will be finalized over the next couple of months.

CRB has also established contact with a number of State Governments including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, Assam amongst others that are engaged with the implementation of the National Mission of Edible Oil – Oil Palm scheme of the Government of India. The purpose is to engage with willing and interested State Governments and build their capacity on sustainable production of palm oil in India.

- ii) **Engagement with Financial Institutions:** In 2022-23, the [Practitioners' Guide on Mitigating Potential Risks in Financing Agro-Commodities in India – The Case of Palm Oil](#) was launched at the I-SPOC Members Meeting in April 2023.



### c) ISS 2022

The ninth edition of CRB's sustainable business Conference (India and Sustainability Standards 2022 or ISS2022) was held in a Hybrid format from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2022 in Delhi. The objective of this flagship event, with the theme, 'Prioritising Nature and People in Business to Create Measurable Impacts', was to bring together multiple stakeholders in the sustainability ecosystem to help further the opportunities and overcome the challenges of promoting sustainable business through dialogue and consensus-building.

RSPO who was a lead partner at ISS 2022 organized a session on Sustainable Palm Oil Dialogue (SPOD-India). The session aimed to highlight the leadership role that the Indian Industry can play in mainstreaming the trade of sustainable palm oil along with identifying pathways for integration of sustainability principles in the cultivation of oil palm in India. The session also looked at the role that ecosystem actors (such as financial institutions) play in supporting the transition toward uptake of sustainable palm oil.



### 3. Next Steps

CRB and RSPO are exploring following activities under the partnership for the period 2023-24:

- Strengthening I-SPOC
  - Organize and Facilitate Meetings, Managing Working Groups/Action Groups, Documentation, Social Media Visibility.
  - Awareness Generation and Capacity Building: Organize Open Days and Capacity Building Workshops along with producing 3 knowledge products.
- Engagement with Policy Makers: engage relevant government agencies at the national and state levels based on the policy input notes developed through the ongoing partnership between CRB-RSPO. Also engage with state level policy makers in all the 14 states engaged on domestic production.
- Engagement with Financial Sector: organize 2 events with the relevant actors in order to increase awareness on the subject.
- ISS 2023: RSPO will Co-host a Session at the CRB 2023 10<sup>th</sup> annual sustainability conference (India and Sustainability Standards 2023, ISS 2023) to be held in New Delhi, India, 6-8 November, 2023.