



ADVANCING CONFIDENCE IN RSPO CERTIFICATION

Recently, the Integrity Unit took part in the RSPO CB Interpretation Forum in Bogota, Colombia and conducted the 7th RSPO Assurance Forum in conjunction with the prestigious RSPO Inter-American Conference in Miami, USA. With a shared purpose of fostering dialogue and collaboration, these gatherings brought together industry stakeholders from the Americas and across the globe to address challenges and seize opportunities in implementing and upholding global standards for sustainable palm oil.



Amidst the lush landscapes of Bogota and the vibrant energy of Miami, the Integrity Unit facilitated a series of productive sessions, fostering purposeful dialogues on critical issues and promising prospects. This report shares the outcomes of the events, highlighting the concerted efforts aimed at increasing the credibility and trust in RSPO certification.

"We need to understand the dedication of all parties involved in RSPO certification; only then can we empower consumers to make informed, environmentally-friendly choices." - Wan Muqtadir, Head of Integrity

Strengthening Audit on Labour and Wider Social Aspects



Event: RSPo CB Interpretation Forum
Venue: DoubleTree by Hilton, Bogota, Colombia
Date: 23 May 2023
Time: 2:00 to 5:00 PM (GMT-5)
Attendees: 13 auditors and 3 representatives from other stakeholder groups

In this event, the Secretariat conducted a socialisation session for the Labour Auditing Guidance which has been undergoing an 18-month trial period since its announcement in November 2022. Apart from assisting them with the content, participants were also engaged in practical exercises centred around the preparation of certification proposals and audit agendas to enhance their understanding on the application of the guidance in real-audit situations.

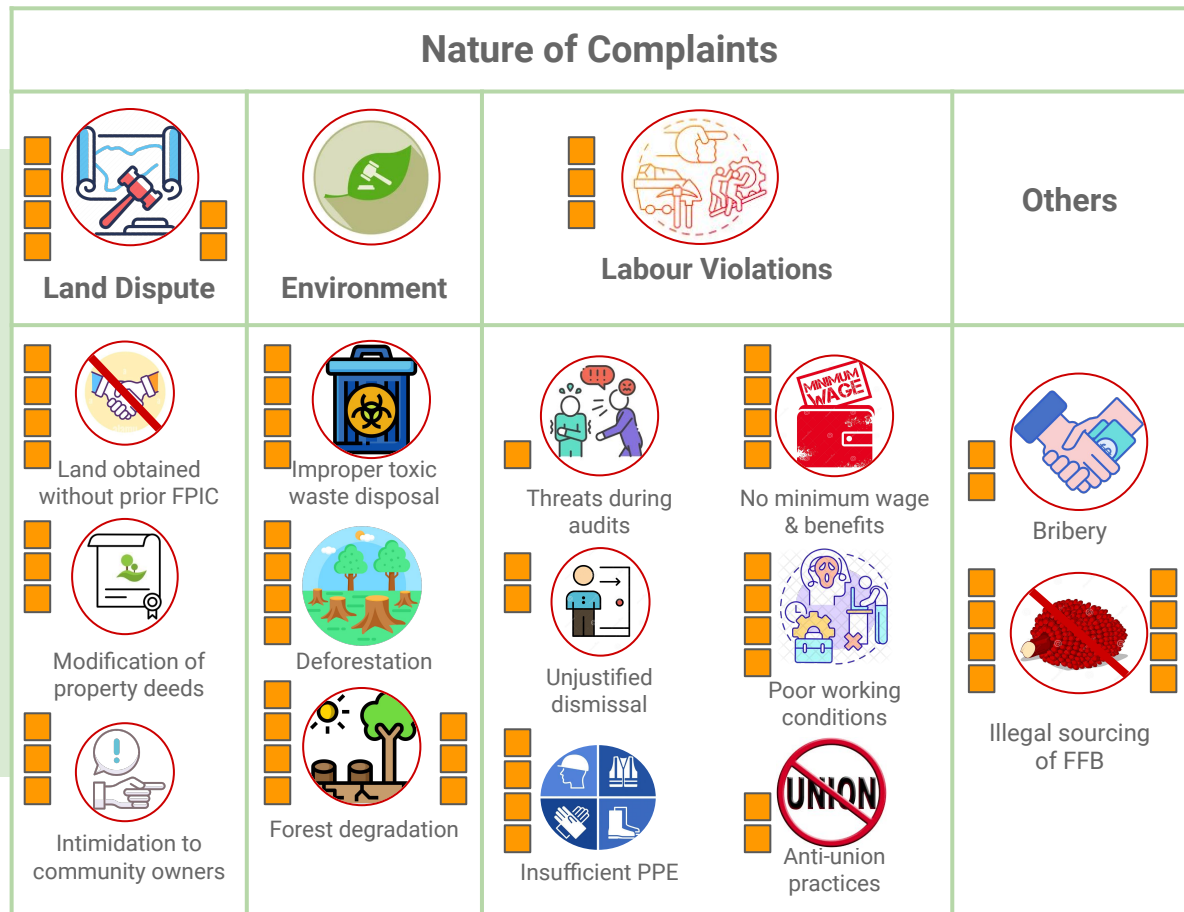


Addressing Gaps and Challenges in Latin America

1 The session continued with a spotlight on complaint cases from Latin America. These cases were drawn from the RSPO Complaint Case Tracker, capturing the recorded complaints up to the present time.



2 Subsequently, participants were asked to select the most pressing issues among the nature of complaints presented. Their choices are indicated by the placement of the orange stickers.



3 Pressing issues and the root causes

To delve deeper into it, participants engaged in a discussion to uncover the underlying root causes behind the highest-voted issues.

Illegal sourcing of FFB

- Complex regulations compromising economic returns and attempts to evade taxes.
- Insufficient control in the purchase of forest products by intermediaries, leading to increased demand for illegal sourcing.
- Lack of specific government programmes addressing poverty, contributing to the incentive for illegal sourcing of FFB.

Forest degradation

- Insufficient universally understandable criteria for identifying forests within management units.
- Weak enforcement of protective regulations and inadequate forest protection measures.
- Expansion of productive projects in vulnerable areas, driven by higher land costs, despite existing laws and regulations aimed at protecting forests.

Land dispute

- Lack of societal focus on collective wellbeing, placing emphasis on personal gains instead.
- Territorial appropriation by political powers.
- Insufficient presence of government offices in rural areas to legalise land titles and a lack of knowledge among farmers regarding the legal processes to secure land rights.

Overcoming Sustainability Challenges in Compliance with RSPO Standards

Event: 7th RSPO Assurance Forum (side event during the RSPO Inter-American Conference)
Venue: Kimpton EPIC, Miami, USA
Date: 31 May 2023
Time: 4:30 to 6:00 PM (GMT-4)
Attendees: 13 representatives from various stakeholder groups

From Bogota, the team traveled to Miami and organised the 7th RSPO Assurance Forum. Supported by the Assurance Standing Committee (ASC), the forum provides a platform for RSPO members and non-members to engage in discussions and offer constructive feedback to enhance the RSPO Assurance Systems. Under the given theme, the forum presented a brief overview of the RSPO's Standards, highlighted the shared responsibility among all actors, and examined the impact of the Principles and Criteria (P&C) implementation on downstream players.

Assurance Services International (ASI) and SCS Global Services contributed valuable insights as panelists during the forum. Here are some key highlights from their informative sessions:



“The RSPO Assurance Systems encompass various critical aspects to ensure credible and impactful certification assessments. Assurance expertise lies at the core, guaranteeing rigorous evaluations that uphold high standards. Oversight and consistency ensure uniform assessments across regions, promoting transparency and fairness. Integrity and risk management protect the RSPO's brand from fraud and enhance certification reliability.

Specialised focus on key risk areas aligns with sustainable goals, addressing critical sustainability challenges. The collaborative approach fosters investigations, knowledge sharing, and system resilience, promoting continuous improvement and collective action. Together, these elements form a robust framework, advancing sustainable palm oil practices in the industry.”

“There are resource challenges in the form of a shortage of qualified auditors, a lack of clarity among local experts, and the need for continuous training to enhance expertise. Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures, such as investing in capacity building programmes and fostering partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Effective communication and collaboration with NGOs present an opportunity to jointly respond to sustainability concerns and strengthen the credibility of RSPO certification.

Clear scheme guidance plays a pivotal role in minimising variability and ensuring consistent auditing practices. Additionally, improving the supply chain accountability system is essential to encourage certification adoption and ensure proper claims throughout the supply chain, fostering transparency and accountability at each stage. By proactively addressing these areas, the RSPO can enhance its effectiveness and drive positive change in the palm oil industry.”



**Jan Pierre
Jarrin Peters**
RSPO Program
Manager, ASI



Adriana Cala
Global Technical
Manager (RSPO P&C),
SCS Global Services

Exploring Sustainability Approaches and the Ideal Auditors



Additionally, the forum sought input from participants regarding their current sustainability approaches and their expectations on audits and auditors.

The feedback revealed a strong commitment to sustainable business practices within the surveyed group. The ranking of aspects based on their importance highlights the significance of a robust Assurance System, emphasising the need for a reliable and comprehensive auditing process.

Furthermore, the participants expressed a moderate level of confidence in RSPO audits. This suggests that there is room for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of audits in detecting and addressing non-compliance issues.

The participants also highlighted the importance of integrity, commitment, knowledge of local language and customs, empathy, and consistency as essential qualities for skilled auditors. These qualities align with the goal of promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical practices, contributing to the achievement of sustainability objectives.

Overall, the feedback reflects a collective commitment to sustainability and an acknowledgment of the key areas that require attention. It underscores the importance of continuously improving auditing processes to further enhance sustainability practices within the palm oil industry.



How would you describe your company's current approach to sustainability?

91% *Our company prioritises sustainable practices and minimises environmental impact in our operations*

Please rank the following aspects based on their importance to your company in achieving its sustainability goals.

4.7/5 *Robust assurance system*

3.9/5 *Labour and human rights*

3.8/5 *Deforestation and land conflict*

How do you rate your confidence in RSPO audits effectively identifying and addressing non-compliances among growers?

3.7/5 *Confidence in RSPO audits*

What qualities should a skilled auditor have, in addition to competency, ethics, experience and a positive attitude?

Integrity Commitment

Knowledge of local language and customs

Empathy Consistency