

RSPO

Roundtable on
Sustainable Palm Oil



Photo credit: RSPO PT BGA

RSPO ASSURANCE FORUM 6

Conducted virtually on 19 January 2023

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Disclaimer: All the information presented in this report was deemed correct at the time the forum was held.



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AB	Accreditation Body
ASC	Assurance Standing Committee
ASI	Assurance Services International
CB	Certification Body
CPP	Conflict Prevention Platform
P&C	Principles and Criteria
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

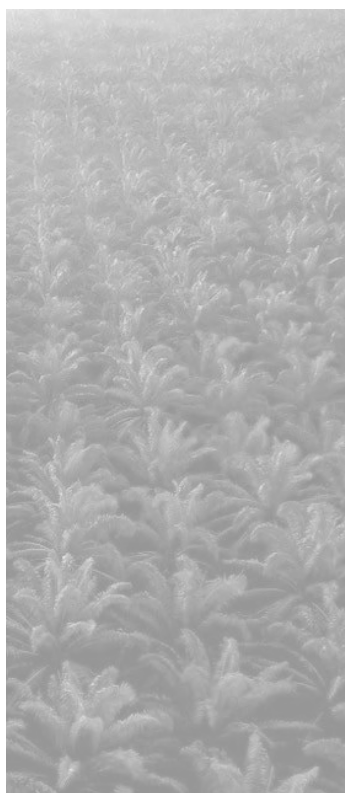
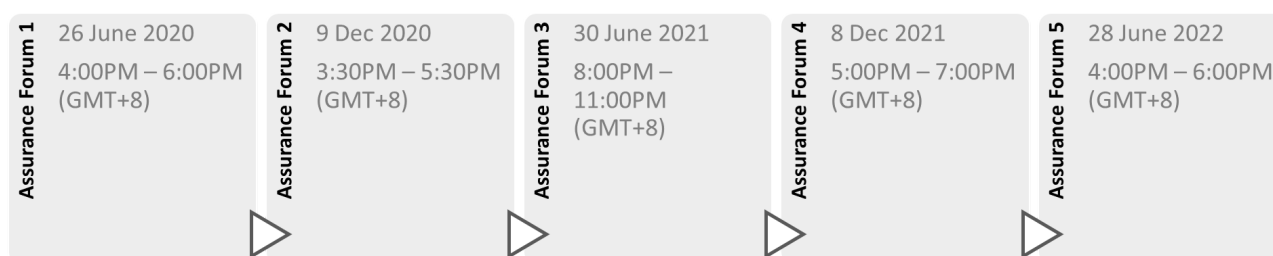


Photo credit: RSPO

The RSPO Assurance Forum is a bi-annual event organised by the RSPO Secretariat with the support of the Assurance Standing Committee (ASC). Its primary objective is to facilitate a transparent and collaborative dialogue between the Secretariat, the ASC, RSPO members and non-members alike.

With the aim of improving the RSPO Assurance Systems, each forum focuses on a specific theme related to assurance. This serves as a basis for discussions and knowledge transfer among stakeholders. To ensure broad participation from individuals across different time zones, the Assurance Forums are held virtually. This approach has proven effective in gathering a diverse range of perspectives.

The following is a list of past Assurance Forums:



Details of the recently concluded **Assurance Forum 6**, which this report will discuss in detail are as follows:

- Date: 19 January 2023
- Time: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM (GMT+8)
- Venue: Virtual meeting via Zoom (link: <https://zoom.us/j/96120487591>)
- Recordings: Available upon request via the Secretariat

This report details the discussions of the Assurance Forum and summarises the whole session conducted.

The RSPO Assurance Forum 6 held on 19 January 2023 centred on the theme of “**Mitigating Allegations Through Effective Assurance**”. Departing from its regular format, the forum featured two interactive sessions that included questionnaires from Mentimeter. Participants were encouraged to actively discuss and provide constructive feedback to further enhance the RSPO’s Assurance Systems. Below is the agenda for the two hour forum.

- 1.0** Welcome Remarks
- 2.0** Ground Rules & RSPO Impact 2022
- 3.0** Setting the Scene
- 4.0** RSPO’s Media Monitoring Process
- 5.0** Interactive Session 1 (gathering feedback via Mentimeter)
- 6.0** Lessons Learnt: Verification Assessments of Sime Darby Plantation Berhad & Socfin
- 7.0** Interactive Session 2 (gathering feedback via Mentimeter)
- 8.0** Questions and Answers Session
- 9.0** Summary of Feedback from Mentimeter
- 10.0** Closing Remarks

Photo credit: RSPO



Participants

A total of 47 participants, including representatives from the Secretariat, RSPO service providers, members and non-RSPO members attended the forum. The Secretariat would like to thank the participants for joining. A complete list of participants is provided below:

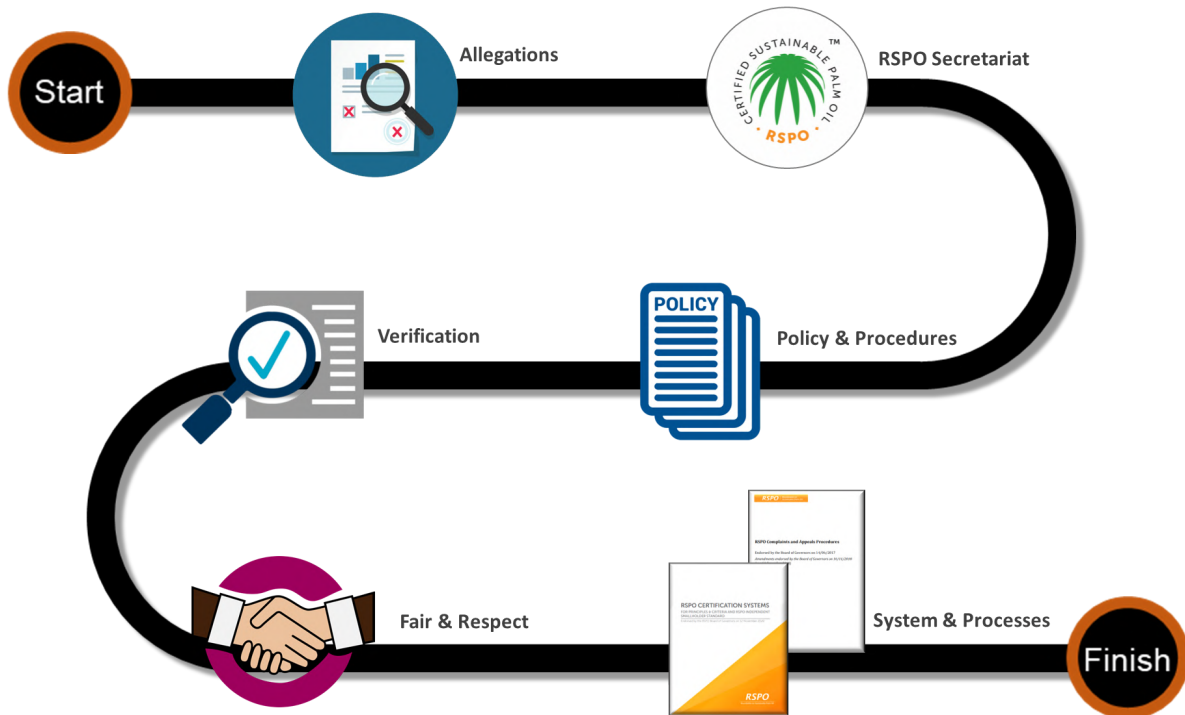
Participants	
Name	Organisation
Agus Purnomo	Golden Agri Resources (ASC Co-Chair)
Kamal Seth	WWF Singapore (ASC Co-Chair)
Lee Kuan-Chun	P&G (ASC member)
Mariama Diallo	SIAT Group (ASC member)
Michal Zrust	Lestari Capital (ASC member)
Paul Wolvekamp	Both ENDS (ASC member)
Marcus Colchester	Forest Peoples Programme (ASC member)
Paula den Hartog	Rainforest Alliance (ASC member)
Joel Argueta	SCS Global Services
Thijs Pasmans	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) NL
Matthias Diemer	Lestari Capital
Ardiansyah	Mutuagung
Irene Castillo Regidor	Spanish Foundation for Sustainable Palm Oil
Matthias Wilnhammer	Assurance Services International (ASI)
Jan Pierre	Assurance Services International (ASI)
Aernida Abdul Kadir	SIRIM QAS
Arie Soetjiadi	High Conservation Value Network (HCVN)
Hafiz	Intertek
Dian S Soeminta	TUV Rheinland

Participants

Name	Organisation
Chaiyaporn Seekao	BSI Group
Diana Ratna Devie	PT Austindo Nusantara Jaya Agri
Ruth Silva	High Conservation Value Network (HCVN)
Kamini Sooriamoorthy	SIRIM QAS
Salasah Elias	Kulim
Iqbal Jailan	Bureau Veritas
Laurentius Baskara	Daemeter
Farkhani Noor	RSPO Secretariat
Adilatul Fitry	RSPO Secretariat
Kasih Putri Handayani	RSPO Secretariat
Irene Fischbach	RSPO Secretariat
Tiur Rumondang	RSPO Secretariat
Diego Pierrend	RSPO Secretariat
Amirah Nabilah	RSPO Secretariat
Esti Nuringdyah	RSPO Secretariat
Ahmad Amirul Ariff	RSPO Secretariat
Marisa Engel	RSPO Secretariat
Aryo Gustomo	RSPO Secretariat
Freda Manan	RSPO Secretariat
Fay Richards	RSPO Secretariat
Agit Supriadi	RSPO Secretariat
Joseph D'Cruz	RSPO Secretariat
Muhammad Ajmal	RSPO Secretariat
Shazaley Abdullah	RSPO Secretariat
Wan Muqtadir	RSPO Secretariat

Setting the Scene

To help participants understand the theme and discussions that will be conducted in the forum, Wan Muqtadir, RSPO's Head of Integrity, presented and explained the ideal process flow on how the Secretariat would handle allegations against its members.



Top: Current RSPO process flow in handling allegations

Whenever the Secretariat receives an allegation, depending on the context and situation, it can be perceived positively or negatively. Therefore, the Secretariat will activate its current mechanism to address any allegations through the implementation of robust systems and policies to prevent and manage such allegations. The RSPO can enhance its credibility, transparency, and accountability if it takes proactive measures.

The Secretariat will later conduct a verification for the allegation with the purpose of providing valuable insights into managing such situations. This is carried out by obtaining all relevant

information, conducting interviews, and gathering necessary documentation. The RSPO believes that being fair and respectful to all relevant parties and stakeholders plays a crucial role in its commitment to becoming a sustainable leader in the palm oil industry.

Effective communication and prompt actions are critical for the RSPO in managing allegations. This approach reinforces the RSPO's commitment to ethical and transparent practices, which are essential in fostering stakeholders' trust and confidence through compliance with RSPO systems and processes.

The RSPO Communications team employs two primary tools to monitor its members and brands for potential allegations.



This tool is used to monitor print and broadcast media, as well as digital platforms to track specific terms related to members' names or topics that require monitoring. It enables the Secretariat to stay informed and take appropriate actions to manage any emerging allegations.



Over 80 million pages are monitored on the Internet daily, covering social media, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, forums, and other online platforms. This approach provides a holistic view of both online and offline activities related to the RSPO, enabling the Secretariat to identify emerging issues and to engage with stakeholders more effectively.

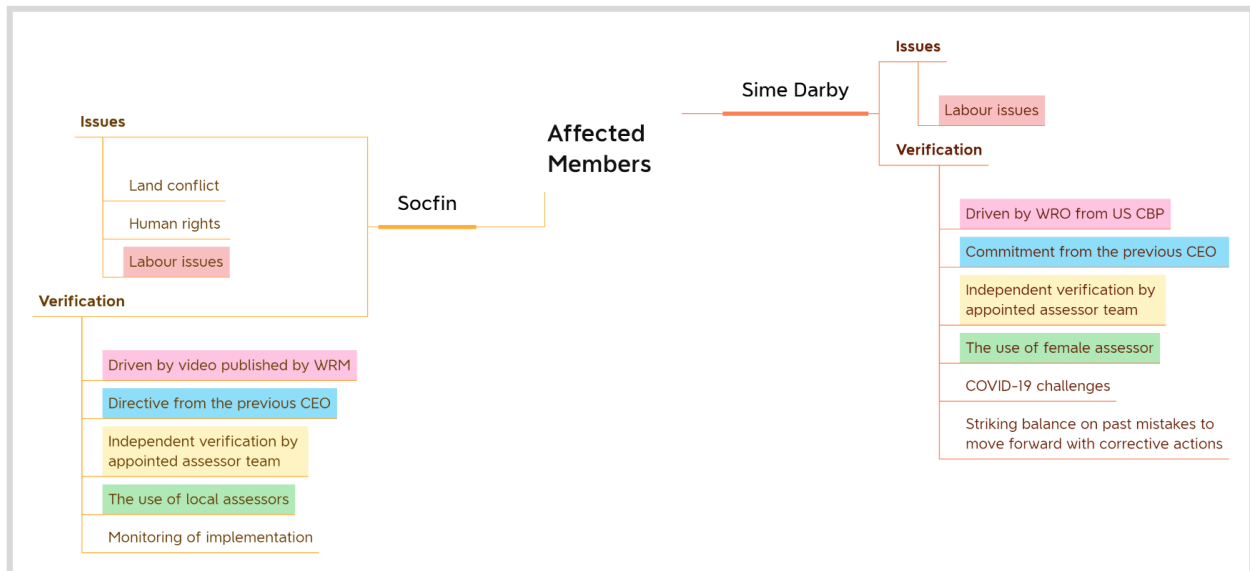
40+
potential
allegations
spotted by
RSPO in year
2022

To ensure the timely identification and management of emerging allegations, the Secretariat has established an ongoing, automated monitoring process that involves scanning of keywords. When an allegation is detected, the Secretariat is notified immediately and takes steps to confirm its authenticity with the RSPO Membership Unit and Certification Unit. Additionally, the RSPO Risk Unit and Communications Unit hold monthly meetings to review allegations against its members and develop effective strategies for managing them.

The Secretariat supports its members that come under scrutiny by providing the necessary information and resources. However, the RSPO and its members are often viewed to be operating in a defensive position, which has resulted in negative perceptions from some stakeholders. To address this, the Secretariat is taking proactive steps by providing more data and responding swiftly to any allegations to reinforce the value of RSPO certification. To deal with more serious allegations, RSPO is reviewing a Crisis Management Process, which includes a task force that will continuously monitor any arising cases.

Verification Assessments of Sime Darby Plantation Berhad & Socfin

The RSPO Secretariat has recently completed independent and comprehensive on-ground verification assessments of Sime Darby Plantation Berhad (SDPB) and Socfin, in response to allegations related to labour issues for both companies, as well as land conflict and human rights issues for Socfin.



The Verification Assessment Process

An independent verification assessment was initiated internally upon receiving allegations against the RSPO members. At this phase, the Risk Unit and Certification Unit under the Assurance Division worked with the Communications Unit to investigate the validity of the allegations, conduct desktop research, and propose the next course of action for managing the allegations.

After the proposed actions were submitted to the Chief Executive Officer and consultation was held with the ASC, decisions were made to appoint local assessors (for Socfin) and a female assessor (for Sime Darby). Field visits were then conducted, and the independent verification assessments were carried out unannounced. Detailed findings were presented to both Sime Darby and Socfin, highlighting weaknesses in the companies' existing systems and processes that need to be addressed.

Lessons Learnt

Three key lessons were learned from the independent verification exercises:

- An unannounced audit is a **viable option** for verification assessments since it is not a certification audit.
- The National Interpretation plays a vital role in handling cases related to local issues and customs against the expectations of the RSPO P&C 2018 standards.
- Commitment and cooperation from companies facing allegations, as well as local communities and related NGOs, are crucial to the success of field verification.



INTERACTIVE SESSION 1

To start off each discussion, total of 47 participants were given a code to log into www.menti.com (Mentimeter*) and answer one question. Feedback from the Mentimeter was then used to guide the discussion. The actual snapshots of participants' responses in Mentimeter are provided in the link.

**Mentimeter is an audience engagement platform with easy-to-use features such as dynamic word clouds, live and instant polls, entertaining quizzes and interactive Q&As. A real-time display of participants' responses was shown as they are received.*



Photo credit: RSPO

Q1: “When I read about an allegation towards RSPO members, the first thing that comes to my mind is.....”

The survey gathered from the participants show that innocent until proven guilty is becoming common conception among the oil palm industry player whether its from the growers, NGOs and auditors

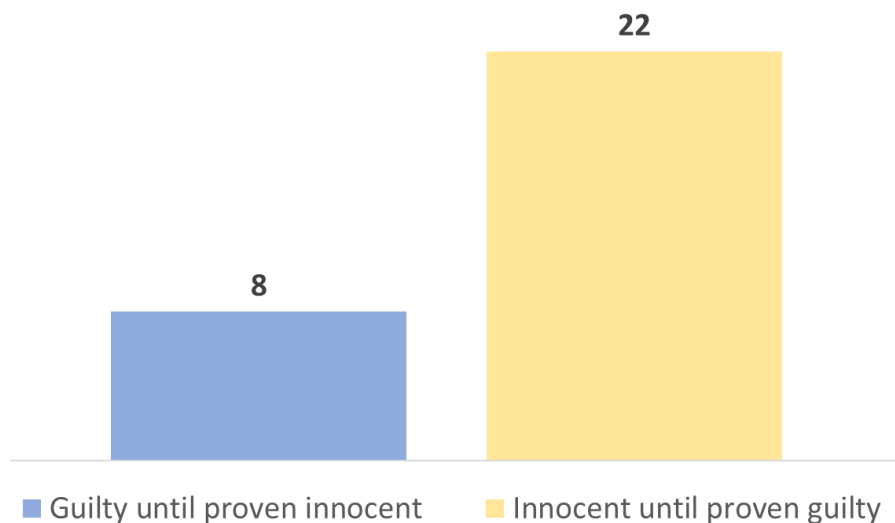
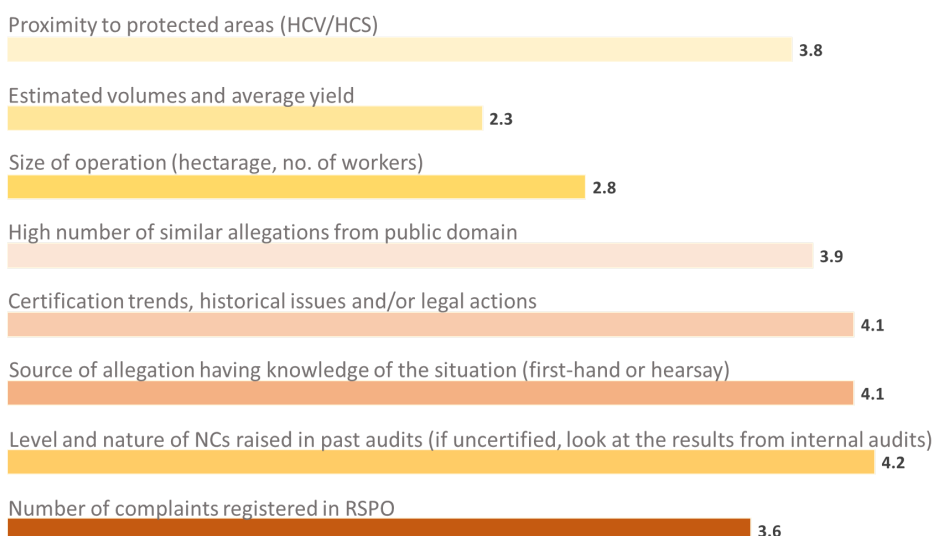




Photo credit: RSPO

Q2: In order to verify the credibility of allegations, please rank the importance of the following parameters.



The survey gathered from the participants show that level and nature of NCs raised in past audits is the highest because it is the easiest way to detect any recurrence issues. As for estimated volumes and average yield shows the lowest because all allegation should be treated equally despite the size of the company.



Photo credit: RSPO, Jonathan Perugia

Q3: How should RSPO inform the public of the measures taken to deal with certain allegations?

This question aims to gather suggestions on how the RSPO Secretariat can improve its current communication practices regarding the handling of allegations.

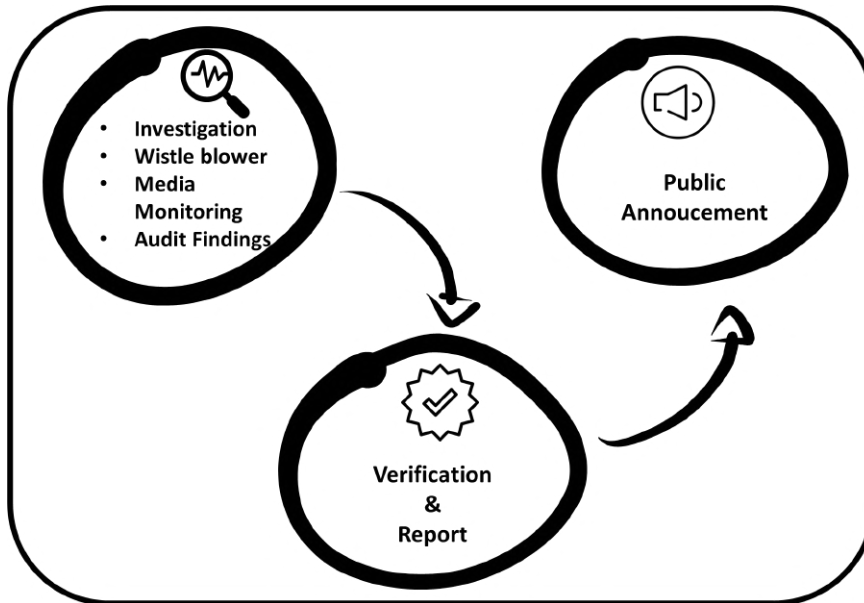
Participants were given an open-ended question and these responses have been edited solely for language accuracy without changing their intended meaning.

Communicate through official channels.

- Issue a statement on what you plan to do, you do not have to have all the answers.
- Once measures are agreed, post them in one place on the website so people know where to look whenever an issue comes up. This should only be done once allegations are investigated.
- Issue press releases and conduct media interviews.
- Issue an official statement through your official channel.
- Acknowledge allegations on the website. Note next steps, timing, owner and where to find out more details, when ready.
- Issue statement of actions taken (or not) and the rationale behind them.
- Provide communication in a clear manner to counter the allegations happening in the public domain.
- Explain the internal process to the public (i.e. certification, risk, grievance, communications).
- Comms and other teams involved need to tell the public through all our media channels about the progress being made.
- Upload a statement on the RSPO website and/or keep it ready when asked for.
- Practise proactive communication.
- Published statements in the media or any social media platforms.
- Publicly acknowledge all allegations and the steps taken. Explain how you determine which are valid. Document follow-up for valid ones. Show when allegations lead to system improvement (not just case by case response).
- Make public statements explaining what actions are planned, being undertaken and/or findings from investigations.
- Using online media such as the RSPO website, but this should only be published after the allegation has been verified
- Update via RSPO website, besides contacting the affected parties.
- Have a section in the RSPO website to address allegations.
- Hold a public/open webinar/press conference, to showcase that RSPO is addressing the allegations and taking action in accordance with its SOP. *

Conduct investigation and produce report

- RSPO needs to show concern and look into complaints and not just downplay or assume concerns are invalid.
- Produce a brief report per allegation, ensuring transparency and confidentiality. Issue an annual summary report about trends, insights, learnings and improvements.
- Continuously clarify their scope, processes in place, and provide relevant and accurate data.
- Issue a statement on initial action taken and do a follow up statement once the investigation process is complete. Done by a person of authority.
- Register the allegations on the RSPO website immediately. But the public needs to understand that allegations need to be properly investigated. Hence, fix a timeline for the investigation window and update the result of the investigation once confirmed.
- Publish a tracker for the allegations.
- Allegations also can be partially valid (depending on the point of view of the party). RSPO should investigate the issue(s) raised, without jumping immediately into the conclusion that it is an allegation/complaint.
- RSPO should state what is acceptable and not, show it is concerned, and inform its next steps.
- Analyse which specific area or subject is the allegation and work with the areas/units involved to address the topic.
- Provide a report and be ahead.
- Build a proof structure and investigate from upstream to downstream. There needs to be a specific person to audit this.
- Response time concerning the investigation and a possible resolution from RSPO should be carried out more effectively as well as be presented to the public to be seen on the website, press release, with specific communication depending on the allegation.
- Not do anything, let them use the Complaints procedure.



It is crucial for RSPO's branding and reputation management to inform about any allegations, as it promotes transparency, accountability, and prevents potential future issues. Downplaying or invalidating incoming allegations should be avoided, and instead, RSPO should take a few proactive actions and show its concern by taking appropriate measures. Maintaining neutrality and openness to improvement is an important aspect for the Secretariat to avoid whitewashing when dealing with allegations.

Although the Secretariat is proactive in identifying such allegations and monitoring media coverage, internal discussions and investigations to assess allegations may raise questions about RSPO's credibility. There may be instances where the public or certain organisations have indications of non-compliance or issues with RSPO members, but there is no clear mechanism or platform to report these concerns before they escalate to become allegations.

Therefore, **the Secretariat must have a robust and transparent system in place to manage incoming allegations and address potential red flags, to prevent issues from escalating.** The outcome of the investigation should be documented in a report that takes into

consideration any necessary confidentiality measures and is prominently displayed on a visible platform, not just social media, which is ephemeral. These reports should be consolidated to produce an annual summary that includes analysis, trends, lessons learned, and system improvements for relevant parties.

Figure at the top shows an exemplary process of how allegations should be managed. Public announcements can only be made once a proper verification and report have been completed. This shall take into account information derived from investigations, whistle blowers, media monitoring and audit findings.

Photo credit: RSPO

INTERACTIVE SESSION 2

To start off each discussion, total of 47 participants were given a code to log into www.menti.com (Mentimeter*) and answer one question. Feedback from the Mentimeter was then used to guide the discussion. The actual snapshots of participants' responses in Mentimeter are provided in the link.

**Mentimeter is an audience engagement platform with easy-to-use features such as dynamic word clouds, live and instant polls, entertaining quizzes and interactive Q&As. A real-time display of participants' responses was shown as they are received.*

Photo credit: RSPO, Jonathan Perugia



Photo credit: RSPO, Jonathan Perugia

Q4: When certified members face allegations, what do you expect certification bodies (CB) and accreditation body (AB) to do?

This question seeks to explore the views of stakeholders on the potential roles that certification bodies and accreditation body could play in mitigating the risk of incoming allegations faced by certified RSPO members. The allegations often stem from issues identified in audit findings that are picked up by interested parties.

Participants were given an open-ended question and these responses have been edited solely for language accuracy without changing their intended meaning.

Certification Bodies to conduct thorough investigation in the next audit.

- CB needs to respond with a short summary of their audit.
- To check during every audit (initial, surveillance), and report it in the audit report.
- Depends if the allegation is related to the certificate?
- CB can send representatives as normal people that engage with local people depending on the allegations.
- If it was directly to the certificate and the CB's operations, the CB can initiate a special audit.
- The CB or AB related should respond and show involvement.
- To further check and increase sampling during the next audit.
- Field checking as soon as possible.
- If it is related to the audit, it is the CBs' responsibility and they need to investigate, at no cost. This will also incentivise them to do better in audits.
- Provide evidence/relevant data that the allegations have been verified during audit.
- CBs are responsible as per ISO 17021. They have to review and address risks to their certification activities

Accreditation Body to monitor CB's performance

- If CBs have failed to identify a problem/non compliance, then they have a conflict of interest to look into an allegation as they are being asked to check their own homework. AB can review performance of CB but is not usually mandated to investigate.
- A truly unannounced audit that can capture reality in real time.
- Allegations are just allegations. Why does the CB need to police this issue? Unless we are directed by RSPO, then we will conduct a proper investigation.
- I think unless the allegation concerns issues with the certification audits, there is nothing the CB & AB should do.
- AB should be informed by the CB that an unannounced audit will take place to be aware and also take specific measures.
- Investigate and provide evidence if the allegations are false.
- CB and AB should be involved and provide relevant data for the case.

The Secretariat needs to have clear procedures to manage allegations.

- The grievance mechanism should be implemented transparently and effectively.
- Looking at the RSPO's complaint panel.
- Proof whether innocent or guilty.
- Issues, before becoming allegations, should always be evaluated during audits, but when it comes to allegations, there should be clear procedure from RSPO, not the CB.
- To make sure that RSPO is aware and taking it up.
- Follow the RSPO procedures for complaint handling.
- There is a defined process by RSPO for how complaints shall be investigated by whom and by when .
- Verification: Root cause? Background Check? Responding with the designed actions / immediate corrective actions.
- Cross-check evidence with other expert organisations on the subject, and accompanied by the CB and the AB.
- Other expert specific organisations that can carry out the investigation.
- RSPO should take this up and decide actions needed by the member themselves, the CB or the appointed third party.
- The RSPO procedure does state that if there is any complaint, the CB is allowed to do a special audit. However, the procedure could be tightened to ensure there is a special clause to address complaints/grievances.
- Clearly demonstrate that they have looked into the allegations carefully, since these allegations also undermine the credibility of the people doing the certifying.

1. Scope of audit is important to determine how allegations are investigated.

Certification Bodies (CBs) and Accreditation Bodies (ABs) are expected to have robust, transparent, and impartial systems in place to deal with allegations, as there is a direct link to the certification process. Even though incoming allegations may not be related to or within the scope of the certification, CBs play an important role in ensuring a successful audit and preventing potential allegations.

2. Desk review can help set an alert to CBs before audit begins

According to the RSPO Certification System document, Certification Bodies (CBs) are required to conduct a preliminary assessment before beginning an audit in order to gather all relevant information related to the audit scope and RSPO Principles and Criteria. This is to ensure that if a Unit of Certification or its parent company has any allegations or complaints against them, the CBs can take them into account prior to the certification audit, thereby helping to prevent potential future allegations.

Another scenario where CBs play an important role in preventing potential allegations is when they have the ability to spot any potential red flags that have not been classified as non-conformities yet, whether it is a systemic or isolated issue during the audit. The CBs should take note of these issues and conduct follow-up monitoring during the next audit to ensure that the potential risks are properly suppressed and managed. This helps to ensure that any potential issues are addressed before they can escalate into allegations.



Allegations are more likely to occur if potential issues are not identified by the CBs in the next audit, especially if there are changes in CBs or auditors for the next audit cycle, or if the findings are deemed less important or invalid.

3. Role of Accreditation Body is to oversee performance of CBs

The Accreditation Body (AB) can only review and evaluate the performance of the Certification Bodies (CBs), but not the certificate holders themselves. Any action taken by the AB depends on whether the context of the allegation falls within the certification framework or scope, which will determine the principle of subsidiarity and the accountability of the CBs. The AB may also take over any investigation by the CBs that have been violated, not conducted properly, or not completed within the given time frame, and design more comprehensive and immediate corrective actions.

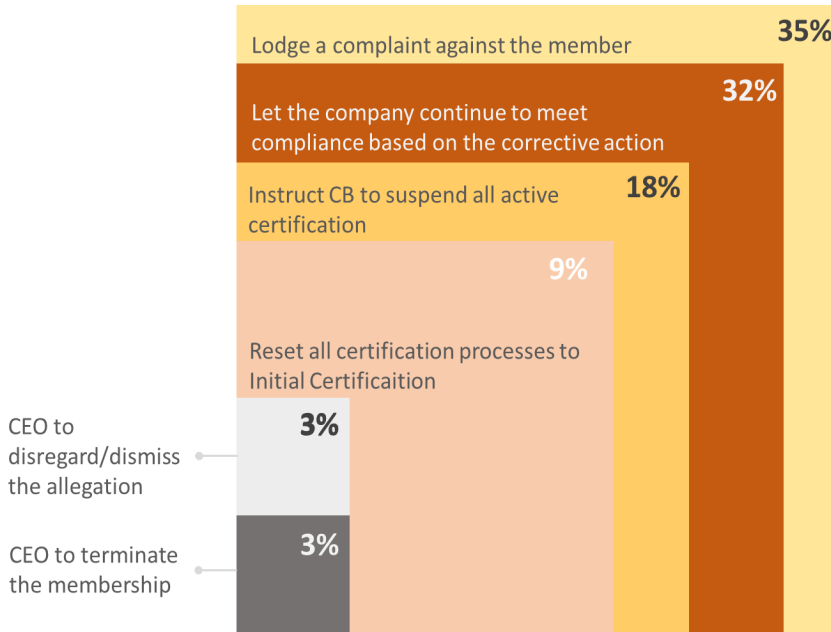


Photo credit: RSPO

Q5: When verification & reporting were completed, if more or further allegations (within the same scope emerge), RSPO should....

This question seeks to explore how the RSPO should respond in the event of recurring allegations within the same scope. It is important to have a clear plan of action in place for dealing with such situations to determine the appropriate escalation process and ensure that the RSPO Certification System is effective in identifying and addressing issues occurring in certified operations.

Discussion from Question 5



It is common for additional allegations within the same scope to arise even after an initial allegation has been verified and reported. This has occurred on multiple occasions in the past.

Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly investigate whether the initial allegation was true and determine the severity of the finding as a major or minor non-compliance. Recurring allegations may result from ineffective root cause analysis and corrective actions in response to the initial allegation.

The treemap above shows that a majority of participants prefer that a complaint be lodged against the RSPO member should there be any recurrence of allegations within the same scope even after verification and reporting were completed.

To address recurring allegations, an escalation process can be implemented where the response is based on the severity of the initial finding. For instance, if a minor non-compliance was identified in the initial finding, it should be raised as a major non-compliance in the next audit, while for a major issue, a sanction or suspension should be imposed in line with the RSPO Certification System document.

The severity of an allegation and the appropriate response depend on the specific circumstances of each case, as well as the outcome of previous investigations. The RSPO Secretariat currently does not have a specific tool to assess the severity of an allegation, apart from using the RSPO Risk Rating system and Principle and Criteria indicators to determine the criticality of the issue.



Photo credit: RSPO, Enhard Xavier Magaline

Q6: In the true spirit of a roundtable, if RSPO was to create a dialogue platform to deescalate allegations, how should it look like?

This is the last question posted to participants with the aim to gather suggestions for creating a dialogue platform to deescalate allegations by recognising the importance of open and constructive communication between the various stakeholders involved. It is important for the Secretariat to remain neutral and transparent when it comes to managing and providing solutions for all parties involved.

Participants were given an open-ended question and these responses have been edited solely for language accuracy without changing their intended meaning.

Independence and impartiality are the keys to a successful dialogue

- The CPP¹ pilot seems to be very positive. Is that a good model to use?
- A frank and unpublished dialogue can be organised and then follow up actions can be discussed.
- 100% independent, managed by professionals and not by members of RSPO.
- Clear, accessible, equitable, transparent, proportional, impartial, legitimate and intended for continuous learning.
- A dialogue should always be sought, being mindful of independence and impartiality, so that needs to be thought through.
- We should dismiss unfounded allegations after due consideration of evidence but if allegations are valid we don't 'deescalate' but should provide appropriate remedy and resolve problems, for example bringing operators back into compliance with the P&C.
- Stakeholder dialogue? In a transparent manner.
- Do investigation first. Ask members and CB to prepare evidence, do open dialogue between the member, CB and RSPO, with the AB as observer.
- Independent, transparent, anonymous and with options of dialogue and communication alternative channel. Strict time frame to respond to actions.
- Positive narratives of allegations, meaning RSPO evolves through time in addressing global challenges.
- Appoint a team of mediators who are professionally trained to handle conflicts. They should trigger the dialogue process before escalating further for further action.
- Consider the topic or concern of allegations and mechanism to prove their allegations.
- Interesting idea to see the dialogue (or debate?) in future, where RSPO Secretariat can be the moderator.

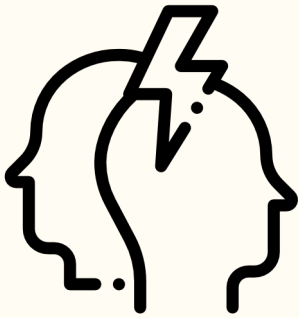
¹The Conflict Prevention Platform (CPP) is a pilot programme developed as part of the RSPO's Intermediary Organisation's (IMO) initiative with the main objective to reduce the reliance on bilateral engagement in RSPO's Dispute Settlement Facility (DSF).

Response from Question 6

- Dialogue is useful to share progress and learning but focus should be on preventing allegations by ensuring mechanisms to avoid non-compliance, creating channels for flagging apparent/emerging issues (before becoming allegations) and sharing responses.
 - It should be an interactive platform in which people can easily add documents, have a chat. Anonymity should be possible to the public.
 - Need to have an oversight mechanism to avoid bullying.
-
-



It is widely acknowledged that allegations need to be addressed before they become public complaints. This can be achieved through strict standards and requirements that serve as control mechanisms via an audit process. These mechanisms provide insights such as data and information through observations and non-conformities. However, despite the rules and processes in place, allegations will still occur, and the Secretariat has no absolute control over their validity. However, there are several approaches that can be taken by the Secretariat to manage incoming allegations in a professional and transparent manner.



The Conflict Prevention Platform (CPP) is a pilot programme developed as part of RSPO's Intermediary Organisation (IMO) initiative and has been implemented in Malaysia and Indonesia. The programme's main objective is to reduce the reliance on bilateral engagement in RSPO's Dispute Settlement Facility (DSF), which involves a complex process of filing formal complaints and reaching mutually agreed resolutions. The CPP pilot has yielded initial results that show the removal of the dynamic between complainants and respondents, as well as the need to file a complaint, and has created more space for conflicts to be de-escalated, rather than turning them into adversarial contests between the parties.

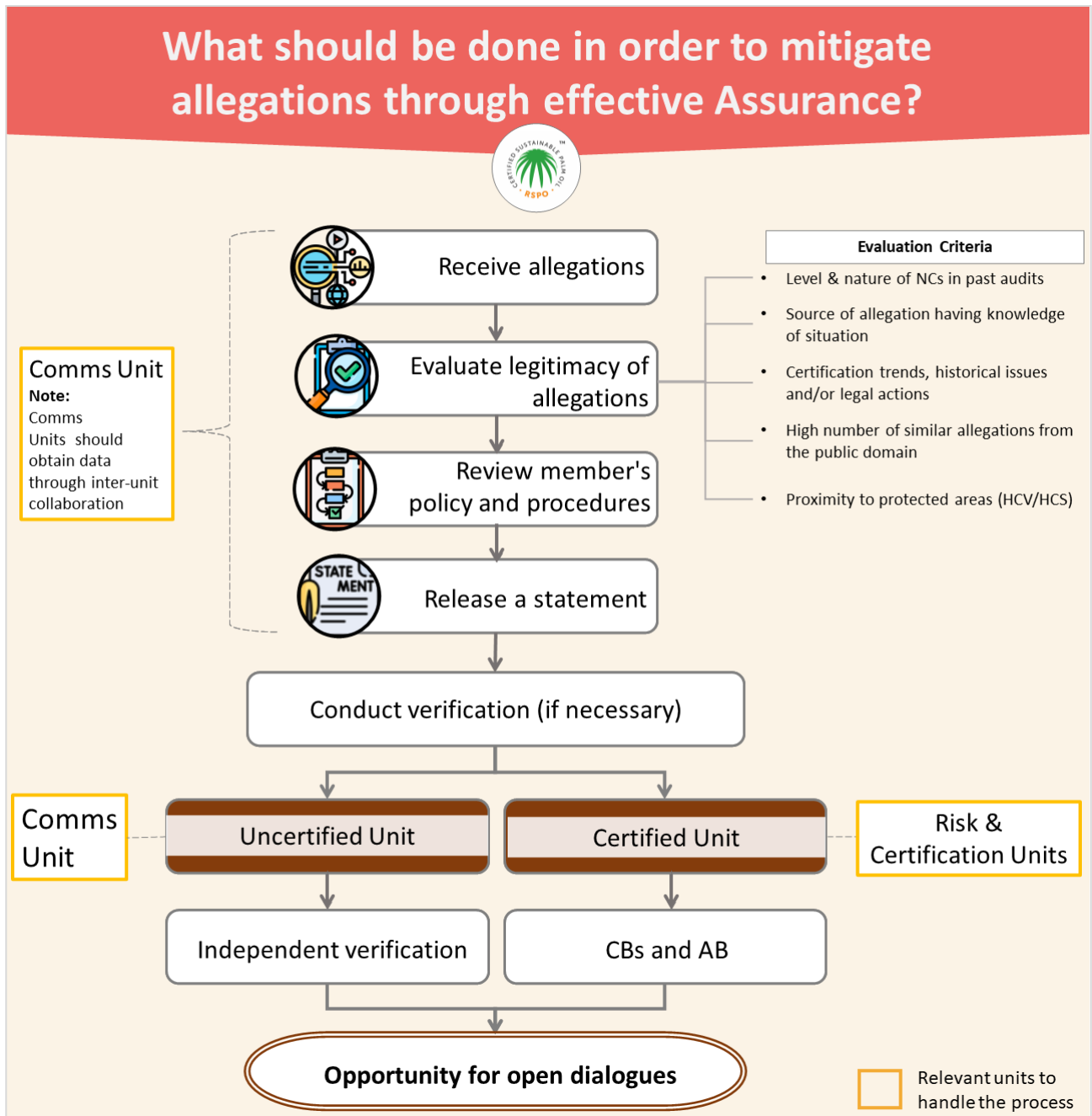


When an allegation is received, it is crucial for relevant parties to investigate its validity. Unfounded allegations can be dismissed after careful consideration of the available evidence. For valid allegations, it is important not to de-escalate the situation but to provide remedies and assistance to the RSPO member in question to bring them back into compliance with the RSPO Principles and Criteria. This approach not only addresses the issue at hand, but also helps to prevent future occurrences by promoting a culture of continuous improvement among RSPO members.



To establish an effective and transparent dialogue platform, it is essential to form a team of mediators who possess the necessary expertise and training in conflict resolution. To maintain neutrality, the mediators should not be affiliated with any involved parties, including the Secretariat. This approach differs from the current RSPO Complaints System as it is initiated when a whistle-blower identifies a potential issue through the RSPO portal or direct communication, prior to the escalation of the issue into a formal complaint. This approach promotes early dialogue, which may prevent adversarial conflicts, and enable potential issues to be resolved in a more collaborative and productive manner.

Given the nature of RSPO's multi stakeholder governance and the complexity of its operations and processes, it is essential to **acknowledge the challenges** involved in dealing with allegations. A well-structured approach is necessary to ensure that the **risks are identified** and addressed before they escalate. In this regard, the recent Assurance Forum provided some key insights which were taken into account in determining the next steps when mitigating allegations as follows:



The key takeaways from Assurance Forum discussions as illustrated in the chart above are explained below:

The Secretariat must have a robust procedure in place to manage incoming allegations. Verification of the allegations, roles and responsibilities of all parties involved (Secretariat, RSPO members, CB, AB, and others), actions that should be taken before, during and after any investigation should be included in the said procedure.

Release a statement outlining any new, credible allegations together with an action plan for the parties involved. This can be followed by regular updates until the investigation is completed. The statement should be posted on a fixed prominent section of the RSPO website.

Verify and investigate any valid allegation within a set timeframe and produce a concise and transparent report (with certain confidentiality accounted for) that includes accurate and relevant data, as well as any lessons learned and potential improvements.

The accreditation body (AB) needs to improve its procedures in monitoring CBs' performance. In some circumstances, AB may need to take over an investigation previously handled by a CB if it is incomplete or improperly carried out.

CBs' roles and responsibilities are critical as a third party verifier who acts as the eyes and ears on the field. CBs are required to be vigilant in order to spot and highlight any potential non-compliance that may result in allegations, as well as to conduct a follow-up check for that specific issue on the next audit.

A dialogue platform can be established if it meets all three key criteria: independence, transparency, and impartiality. The dialogue should be professionally managed by a non-RSPO party and should focus on ways to resolve allegations before they escalate into complaints and prevent allegations from recurring.



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RSPO is an international non-profit organisation formed in 2004 with the objective to promote the growth and use of sustainable oil palm products through credible global standards and engagement of stakeholders.

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