



A collection of 18 green icons arranged in a circular pattern. The icons represent various themes: a leaf, a recycling symbol, a globe with an arrow, a bar chart with an upward arrow, a leaf in a container, a hand holding a seedling, an axe and tree stump, wheat stalks, a fuel pump, a handshake with a building, a network of nodes, a palm tree with a drop, a dollar sign, a yen sign, an euro sign, and a seedling with leaves.

Conference Highlights
28 May 2025

Keynote Speakers

Ms Grace Fu

Minister for Sustainability and the Environment and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, Republic of Singapore

YB Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani

Minister of Plantation and Commodities, Malaysia

Fireside Chat Speaker

Mr Sunny Verghese

Executive Director, Co-Founder and Group CEO, Olam Group

Panellists

Panel 1: Navigating Shifts in Global Trade and Markets

Ms Fay Fay Choo

Asia Cocoa Director, Mars Inc

Dr Petra Meekers

Chief Executive Officer, SIPEF

Ms Anne Rosenbarger

Global Engagement Manager, Supply Chains, World Resources Institute (WRI)

Panel 2: Balancing Growth with Sustainability – The Future of Production in ASEAN

Mr Craig Tribolet

Deputy Director, Sustainability, APRIL Group

Mr Agam Fatchurrochman

Head of Sustainability Communication Compartment, Gabungan Pengusaha Kelapa Sawit Indonesia (GAPKI) / Indonesian Palm Oil Association (IPOA)

YBrs Encik Mohamed Hafizin Mohamed Tajudin

Chief Executive Officer, Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO)

Ms Helena Ooi

Head of Strategy, Maybank Singapore

Mr Olivier Tichit

Director, Communications and Sustainability, Musim Mas

Moderators

Associate Professor Simon Tay

Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA)

Ms Cheryl Chen

President, S&P Global Foundation; and Senior Director, Social Sustainability, S&P Global; Council Member, SIIA

Ms Khor Yu-Leng

Associate Director (Sustainability), SIIA

The Singapore Dialogue on Sustainable World Resources

The Singapore Dialogue on Sustainable World Resources (SWR) is the flagship sustainability event of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), serving as a vital platform for fostering dialogues among governments, the private sector, experts, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Past keynote speakers have included Ministers from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Panel discussions have featured chief executive officers of major multinational corporations, financial institutions, investors, and leading global experts.

The inaugural SWR was in 2014, following the severe transboundary haze that affected the ASEAN region in 2013. Over the years, the dialogue has focused on key issues related to the region's resource sector, such as sustainable supply chains, green finance, and climate cooperation. The SWR has grown into a premier platform for policymakers, business leaders, and NGOs to share knowledge, best practices, and to advance national and corporate commitments towards a sustainable ASEAN. Through cross-sector collaborations and media coverage, the SWR also raises public awareness of sustainability issues.

12th SWR:

Sustaining Sustainability: Reinventing Commodity Industries

The 12th SWR explored the current tensions between economic priorities and climate action, highlighted by the second Trump administration's rolling back of environmental regulations, withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, and introduction of trade tariffs. ASEAN and Asian economies now need to contend with a rapidly shifting policy and business landscape – agricultural producers must meet food security targets, increasing fuel needs in the form of biodiesel and sustainable aviation fuel consumption, while still exporting agricultural commodities for revenue.

Speakers at the 12th SWR highlighted the need to maintain momentum on sustainability amidst global uncertainty, the gaps that the world needs to address to achieve a food-security future, prospects for innovation and intensification in agricultural systems, the implications of trade and traceability policies, and the importance of enabling smallholder farmers to ensure that they are included in these transformations.

Acknowledgements and Reach

The 12th SWR brought together over 190 participants, with the largest proportion of attendees coming from the financial services sector, followed by NGOs and academia, and the agribusiness and forestry sector. The 12th SWR achieved a total of 15 mentions across national, regional, and sustainability-focused media outlets, including CNA, The Straits Times, The Edge Singapore, New Straits Times, TV3, China Daily Hong Kong, Eco-Business, and Mongabay.

We would like to acknowledge and thank our donors and partners who have contributed to the success of the Dialogue: Key Donor – Evonik, Gold Donor – Royal Golden Eagle (RGE), Silver Donor – Musim Mas, and Supporting Organisation – Singapore Malaysia Chamber of Commerce.

Sustaining Sustainability Amidst Global Uncertainty

Keynote Address by Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, Republic of Singapore

“Climate change waits for no one. We need to maintain the momentum of climate action in spite of the global headwinds, and keep a steady course in achieving the green transition,” said **Ms Grace Fu**, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, Republic of Singapore, in her keynote address at the 12th SWR.

ASEAN countries have already been impacted by extreme weather events in recent months. In the second half of 2024, intense floods swept across Malaysia and Thailand, displacing thousands of people and causing millions of US dollars in damages. Heatwaves are now increasingly frequent across the region. Myanmar recorded its highest ever April temperatures last year, reaching a sweltering 48.2°C, and the Philippines also experienced a severe heatwave from March to April 2025.

The rules based multilateral system is under pressure, with rising trade barriers, and supply chain disruptions. As a result, governments and businesses are reassessing their priorities, including cutting back on action against climate change. Political support for decarbonisation is losing momentum and climate finance is becoming more elusive. But climate change remains an undeniable fact, and its impact is increasing.

“We are seeing real turbulence in the world of trade,” said **Associate Professor Simon Tay**, Chairman, SIIA, in his welcome remarks at the dialogue. “This can really have a chilling effect on investment... it’s more difficult to invest in a low-carbon future, because you need certainty [and] longer horizons, to make your product and process more green.”



“Climate change waits for no one. We need to maintain the momentum of climate action in spite of the global headwinds.”

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Deepening ASEAN Cooperation on Climate Action

“It is imperative for ASEAN to deepen our cooperation in climate action. Fortunately, we are not starting from ground zero, and ASEAN countries must build on the work that has been done and continue the spirit of cooperation to take ASEAN forward,” said Ms Fu.

Of the 10 ASEAN countries, eight have committed to an economy-wide net-zero target or carbon neutrality, and the region is working towards an ASEAN Power Grid to enhance regional energy security and decarbonisation of the power sector.

Importance of Sustainability in ASEAN's Agribusiness and Forestry Sectors

Ms Fu added that agribusiness and sustainable forestry practices have a pivotal role in ASEAN countries' climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. ASEAN countries are among the world's leading producers of agricultural commodities, contributing to about 80 per cent of global palm oil, 80 per cent of global natural rubber, and 20 per cent of global rice production. However, agriculture and forestry activities also currently produce a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions.

“Sustainable agribusiness and forestry practices are instrumental in climate action and resource conservation. By avoiding unsustainable farming practices, such as burning stubbles and slash-and-burn techniques, we could reduce the risk of deforestation and transboundary haze,” Ms Fu said. “Sustainable agribusiness and forestry practices [are] therefore an imperative, not an option.”

Singapore remains committed to supporting sustainable agribusinesses despite not having a significant traditional agriculture industry. Ms Fu noted that Singapore is a finance hub for many agribusinesses and commodity trades in the region, and Singapore is collaborating closely with regional partners to develop climate-resilient crops and sustainable farming practices. For instance, the National University of Singapore's Tropical Marine Science Institute is studying the impact of climate change on ASEAN's agricultural sector, with the study expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2026.

“We cannot return to unsustainable plantation expansion at the expense of natural ecosystems,” said Prof Tay. “Agriculture will remain an economic driver for the region, but we need smarter and greener business models. This is not a matter of ideology, but pragmatism.”

Achieving a Food-secure Future

Fireside Chat with Mr Sunny Verghese, Executive Director, Co-Founder and Group CEO, Olam Group

“How do we [achieve] a food-secure future for the growing population, increasing per capita incomes on a sustainable basis, without destroying the planet? In my view, the food sector and the agricultural production sector faces eight major gaps or challenges,” said **Mr Sunny Verghese**, Executive Director, Co-Founder and Group CEO, Olam Group. Mr Verghese was speaking in a fireside chat segment on “**The Future of Food and Agribusiness amidst Economic and Climate Challenges**” at the 12th SWR.

“We need to increase food production by roughly 56 per cent from what we are producing today by 2050 to feed an estimated 10 billion population,” Mr Verghese said.



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Eight Gaps to Achieving a Food-secure Future



Food Production: Total global population is rising, and per capita consumption of calories is also increasing alongside incomes



Land Use: To produce food for 10 billion people by 2050, the world will need to add new farmland and plantations – an area roughly twice the size of India



Emissions: Agriculture currently accounts for about a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions; the sector needs to be net zero if global warming is to remain within 1.5°C



Biodiversity: As the world loses species, lack of diversity could have consequences for food security; livestock and crops could be vulnerable to disease



Food Waste: A third of the food that the world produces becomes waste; major investment is needed to reduce food loss



Water Management: It takes about one litre of water to produce a calorie of food; better irrigation and precision agriculture is needed to reduce water use in food production



Livelihoods: Almost 90 per cent of rice farmers are below the living income line; as farmers are already struggling, they have no capacity to improve their productivity



Innovation: Research and development is needed to develop solutions to the above challenges and gaps

“[These issues] can be solved mainly through innovation breakthroughs, not incremental productivity growth,” Mr Verghese said, calling for greater investment in research and development, to create solutions for these challenges.

Summing up the discussion, **Ms Cheryl Chen**, President, S&P Global Foundation; and Senior Director, Social Sustainability, S&P Global and Council Member, SIIA warned that the world’s food and agricultural systems are perilously close to collapse, in a way that will be very costly or impossible to reverse. Ms Chen was the moderator for the fireside chat with Mr Verghese.

“There has to be a systemic, transformative change at every level, whether it is at the government policy level, whether it’s at the corporate level, or whether it’s in our individual lives. Only when that transformative action is taken in a very urgent way, then we [will be] able to meet these challenges,” said Ms Chen.



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Ms Cheryl Chen

President, S&P Global Foundation; and Senior Director, Social Sustainability, S&P Global; Council Member, SIIA



Innovation and Intensification

Highlights from Keynote Address by YB Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani, Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, Malaysia, and 12th SWR Panels

“We do have to recognize that climate has had an impact on the production sector. Just simply look at the production in Indonesia, Malaysia, [in the] last few years, we have seen the impact of drought [and] dry periods,” said **Dr Petra Meekers**, Chief Executive Officer, SIPEF. SIPEF is a Belgian agribusiness group which produces palm oil products, as well as bananas, natural rubber, and tea.

Dr Meekers was speaking on the 12th SWR’s panel on “**Navigating Shifts in Global Trade and Markets**”. She pointed out that the long-term effects of climate change are coming together with a continued growth in global population and a corresponding increase in demand for agricultural commodities. In particular, China and India are becoming larger consumers and processors of agricultural goods.

Ideally, the agricultural sector should have an inclusive, and stable supply chain based on high-yielding productive farms, said **Ms Fay Fay Choo**, Asia Cocoa Director, Mars Inc. Forward-looking agroforestry models need to pay attention to soil health, pollination, water utilisation, and the rights of both workers and local communities.

Ms Anne Rosenbarger, Global Engagement Manager, Supply Chains, World Resources Institute (WRI) noted that government bodies, private sector, and financial institutions all have a shared interest in strengthening food security. In a world of uncertainty, both policymakers and businesses are trying to create an environment of consistency.

“Resilience, to us, is looking at innovation,” Dr Meekers said, outlining SIPEF’s approach to R&D. “We have heavily invested into technology.” SIPEF’s technology department in Singapore is looking at the company’s supply chain and finding ways where technology can improve resilience. For example, SIPEF is exploring ways to create more resilient hybrids, working with research partners to develop new types of seeds.



“Resilience, to us, is looking at innovation. We have heavily invested into technology.”

Dr Petra Meekers
Chief Executive Officer, SIPEF

Sustainability in Malaysia’s Commodities Sector

“Malaysia is strongly committed to the global sustainability agenda. We have set out ambitious sustainability targets,” said **YB Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani**, Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, Malaysia in his keynote address at the 12th SWR.

YB Datuk Seri Johari highlighted Malaysia's aim to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, while retaining at least 50 per cent of its forest cover indefinitely. As Malaysia is the second largest producer of palm oil, behind Indonesia, and also a producer of other commodities such as rubber and cocoa, this means that Malaysia's commodity industries must intensify their production on existing land with no deforestation. "That's our commitment to the world," he said.



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Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, Malaysia

Indonesia's New National Priorities

"The change of administration from Jokowi to Prabowo [has] changed our business environment," said **Mr Agam Fatchurrochman**, Head of Sustainability Communication Compartment, *Gabungan Pengusaha Kelapa Sawit Indonesia* (GAPKI, or the Indonesian Palm Oil Association, IPOA). "Jokowi was famous for his infrastructure programme and downstreaming of [the] minerals industry. However, Prabowo has changed [national] priorities to self-sufficiency in food and energy."

Mr Agam was speaking on the second panel at the 12th SWR, on "**Balancing Growth with Sustainability – The Future of Production in ASEAN**".



“The change of administration from Jokowi to Prabowo has changed our business environment.”

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Head of Sustainability Communication Compartment, *Gabungan Pengusaha Kelapa Sawit Indonesia* (GAPKI)

The Prabowo administration's self-sufficiency targets have been introduced alongside an ambitious national goal to achieve eight per cent GDP growth by the end of President Prabowo Subianto's time in office. Indonesia's producers are now faced with a trilemma, a question of how to balance output between food, fuel, and exports. Mr Agam said that agricultural commodity companies now need to produce more food crops, while still supplying palm oil for Indonesia's domestic biofuel needs, as well as exporting palm oil overseas for trade revenue.

To achieve these targets, the Prabowo administration is expanding the role of state-linked and military-linked companies in Indonesia, for instance establishing Danantara as a new sovereign wealth fund. One of the newly restructured businesses under Danantara is Agrinas, with three main subsidiaries in food, palm oil, and fisheries.

The Indonesian government has been transferring land from the private sector to Agrinas' control, which has made it the world's largest plantation company by land area. These moves are in line with the Prabowo administration's efforts to bring more of Indonesia's resource economy under state control. However, this is causing some confusion in the private sector, and commodity businesses are now seeking clarity from the government about the new operating environment in the country.

Improving Yields and Efficiency

Although Indonesia is pushing to boost domestic palm oil use through downstreaming plans and the Prabowo administration's higher biofuel mandates, while also seeking higher export revenues, Mr. Agam noted that national palm oil production has remained largely stagnant over the past five to six years with only marginal growth. This limited output is unlikely to keep pace with rising demand both at home and in global markets.

International cooperation is needed to increase yields, not just in Indonesia but in other producing countries. GAPKI has been working with its industry counterparts in Malaysia and other palm oil producing nations in Africa and Latin America to exchange agronomic and technical knowledge, as well as transferring genetic material and pollinators.

Speaking alongside Mr Agam on the production panel, **YBrs Encik Mohamed Hafizin Mohamed Tajudin**, Chief Executive Officer, Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) added that the replanting of oil palm crops likewise needs to be prioritised. Oil palm trees have a productive lifespan of about 25 years after they are planted, with their yields declining towards the end of this period. Major business groups regularly replant their trees, but many smaller companies as well as smallholder farmers have trees that are overdue for replanting. The problem is that small businesses and farmers need financing for their replanting efforts.

"We need more innovative financing solutions that will meet the demand of different players across the supply chain, for small businesses and big growers as well," said YBrs Encik Mohamed Hafizin. "[Currently] the only source of funding that small businesses [can] rely on, naturally, would be government support, and this is not sustainable."



“We need more innovative financing solutions that will meet the demand of different players across the supply chain.”

YBrs Encik Mohamed Hafizin Mohamed Tajudin
Chief Executive Officer, Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO)

New Products and Markets

More needs to be done to ensure there is sufficient global demand for sustainably produced commodities, which will incentivise businesses to improve their practices rather than selling their output to leakage markets. MSPO is convening a new grouping of palm oil companies, FMCG businesses, financial institutions, think tanks, and other stakeholders called the MSPO Impact Alliance to explore new opportunities for the industry and position palm oil production to meet the world's needs.

Commodity businesses need to consider moving “from volume to value”, said **Mr Craig Tribolet**, Deputy Director, Sustainability, APRIL Group. APRIL Group is one of the world's leading producers of pulp and paper products. APRIL has traditionally been a business-to-business (B2B) company as a commodity supplier, but the group has now entered the business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplace. APRIL is also exploring new product categories, such as turning their wood pulp and fibre into fabrics for the fashion industry. However, Mr Tribolet acknowledged that such pivoting is difficult, as it is a high risk move for companies.

Commenting on the issue of developing new products and technologies, YB Datuk Seri Johari concluded his keynote speech at the 12th SWR with an overview of Malaysia's efforts to find new uses for the products and co-products of its commodity industries, including turning waste and residuals into biomass and biogas for electricity generation, and biofuels for transport. He called for cooperation between Malaysia and Indonesia, as the region's leading vegetable oil and oleochemical producers, in exploring these areas.

“Sustainability [at the national level] is not enough... we need to [work] together with neighboring countries to make sure that we share experience with them,” YB Datuk Seri Johari said.



From Tariffs to Transformation

Highlights from 12th SWR Panels

“Agriculture is... often central and the initial target of trade issues. It’s very political, which makes sense because it’s the foundation of basic needs like food security,” said Ms Rosenbarger.



“Agriculture is often central and the initial target of trade issues. It’s very political, which makes sense because it’s the foundation of basic needs.”

Ms Anne Rosenbarger

Global Engagement Manager, Supply Chains, World Resources Institute (WRI)

In addition to the insecurity caused by climate-related risks, agricultural and development planners must contend with policy uncertainty as countries implement new trade rules. Echoing Ms Rosenbarger’s point, Ms Choo observed that the trade tariffs introduced by the Trump administration in the United States are having a tremendous impact on certain agribusiness industries. Around half of America’s total cocoa butter imports come from Asian producers, including Indonesia and Malaysia. From the ASEAN standpoint, around 25 per cent of Indonesia and Malaysia’s cocoa production is exported to the US, making these sectors particularly vulnerable to shifts in tariff policy.

Discussions on the impact of shifting trade rules continued across both panels at the 12th SWR, from the session on “**Navigating Shifts in Global Trade and Markets**” to the industry discussion in the dialogue’s second panel on “**Balancing Growth with Sustainability – The Future of Production in ASEAN**”.

“Europe and North America, if you include the big FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods companies) and their sales, account for about 40 per cent of [global] grocery market sales,” said **Ms Khor Yu-Leng**, Associate Director (Sustainability), SIIA, who moderated the second panel. “The demand from these regions is highly significant.”



“Europe and North America, if you include the big FMCG companies, account for about 40 per cent of grocery market sales. The demand from these regions is highly significant.”

Ms Khor Yu-Leng

Associate Director (Sustainability), SIIA

Moving Forward Amidst Challenges

“It’s a tough time to be part of a commodity business,” said Mr Tribolet. Mr Tribolet identified four main issues that APRIL Group and their counterparts in the sector are dealing with: regulatory pressure, market volatility, shifting commodity trends, and a lack of transparency in supply chains.

In the same way that the Trump administration has slashed American support for climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives, there have been reports of multinational companies backsliding on their sustainability commitments.

“Fundamentally, our response to these current market pressures... is staying the course. You’ve heard of other large entities using this opportunity to steer away from their commitments. For us, this is the chance to recognise that our ambitious growth targets and our sustainability commitments are the same,” said Mr Tribolet. “It’s our position that a resilient business is, by definition, a sustainable business.”

“There’s no getting away from the fact that conditions are tough, but that is also an opportunity for us to be smarter, more agile, and to use sustainability for innovation,” Mr Tribolet said.



“It’s our position that a resilient business is, by definition, a sustainable business.”

Mr Craig Tribolet
Deputy Director, Sustainability, APRIL Group

Mr Olivier Tichit, Director, Communications and Sustainability, Musim Mas, said that companies need to go further in pursuing sustainability and transparency, as part of futureproofing and forward thinking in their business plans. Companies need to build the supply chains of tomorrow, not the supply chains of yesterday.

“[Financial institutions need to] take into consideration the transition risks that clients are facing, the climate exposure, and kind of resilience that we would want our clients to have,” said **Ms Helena Ooi**, Head of Strategy, Maybank Singapore. “We’re essentially looking at the totality of how future-proof is the business model that our clients have, whether it’s large corporations or smallholders.”

As a financial institution, Maybank is working to help its clients through the green transition, not only in dealing with new regulatory requirements, but in finding new opportunities for innovation and partnerships. Maybank has launched a series of white papers outlining the bank’s pathway towards net zero emissions by 2050. This roadmap started with the power and palm oil sectors in 2024, and Maybank has since expanded its decarbonisation strategies to the steel, aluminum, automotive, and commercial real estate sectors.



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Ms Helena Ooi
Head of Strategy, Maybank Singapore

EUDR: Driving Transformation

Although the Trump administration's tariffs have captured headlines in 2025, from the agribusiness industry's perspective, the European Union's policies could be an even bigger transformative shift.

Under the European Union's Regulation on Deforestation-free products (EUDR), businesses importing and exporting cattle, soy, palm oil, cocoa, coffee, wood, and rubber into or out of the EU must prove that the products did not originate from recently deforested land. The EUDR is a controversial policy, with commodity producers in ASEAN as well as importers in the EU complaining that the new rules are difficult to comply with, particularly for small and medium enterprises and smallholder farmers.

The full implementation of the EUDR has already been delayed once, from the end of 2024 to the end of 2025. The European Commission has recommended that the regulation's start date be postponed by another year, as the EU's digital system that will handle transactions for all goods covered by the EUDR is not ready for deployment.

Currently, most media reports on the EUDR have focused on the frictions and pain points surrounding the new regulation. Malaysia has objected to the EU's deforestation risk classifications, saying it is based on outdated data. NGOs have also noted that the EUDR's risk system overlooks governance and human rights issues.

But Ms Rosenbarger argued that the ramifications of the EUDR go beyond the regulation itself. She noted that the EUDR only impacts a segment of agricultural exports going to the EU. The real impact of the EUDR is in changing the way policymakers and industry think about traceability and transparency.

Over the past few years since the EUDR was first introduced, agricultural producing countries in ASEAN have implemented national digital traceability and data collection systems. In addition to meeting the EUDR's reporting requirements, these systems are also achieving national objectives within ASEAN countries – for example, supporting Indonesia's ongoing efforts to map and recognise the land areas held by farmers, ensuring that they are operating legally.

Dr Meekers agreed that the EUDR needs to be seen as part of a broader push for transformation. Alongside the EUDR, EU regulators are introducing other rules such as the directive on corporate sustainability reporting (CSRD) which will affect multinational companies operating in the European region. Although some countries are backsliding on the environmental commitments, there is a wider long-term effort in the European region to raise the bar for sustainability and set higher standards.

Enabling Smallholder Farmers

Highlights from 12th SWR Panels

The advent of the EUDR has drawn attention to the fact that smallholder farmers in ASEAN need to be included in traceability systems, so they can retain access to higher value overseas markets and be reached by government assistance programmes. YBrS Encik Mohamed Hafizin said that governments must step in to help smallholders deal with modern digital and data requirements.

“[We] must be inclusive, not by lowering the standards, but by creating an ecosystem that supports inclusivity,” said YBrS Encik Mohamed Hafizin. He explained how Malaysia’s MSPO standard for palm oil includes and supports smallholder farmers through accessible certification processes, technical training, and capacity-building initiatives.

Amidst the current interest in digital traceability, governments, businesses, and smallholder associations need to work together to ensure there is no duplication of effort and that smallholder farmers have consented to their information being shared. “It doesn’t make a lot of sense for multiple entities to be going out and [collecting data from smallholder farmers], putting them into... systems that don’t promote each other,” Ms Rosenbarger said.

Engagement with smallholder farmers is crucial for achieving resilience and transformation in the agricultural sector. Estimates vary, but it is thought that around 60 to 70 per cent of food in the ASEAN region is grown by smallholder farmers, and smallholders also produce a significant proportion of tradable export commodities, between 40 per cent to over 80 per cent depending on the industry.

As Mr Verghese observed in the fireside chat session, the low incomes of smallholder farmers is a major barrier to progress. Speakers across both panels at the 12th SWR agreed that the ASEAN region needs to equip and enable smallholder farmers, ensuring that they have access to financing, education, tools, and good planting material.

“We need, most importantly, to impact smallholders,” said Mr Tichit. Agribusinesses need to ensure that smallholders are included in efforts to bring the latest technology and practices into supply chains. Mr Tichit added that smallholder farmers need to be supported in this technology adoption, rather than being forced to change their farming methods. “They have to be enabled, not directed, not instructed,” he said.

“The path for smallholders towards the modern, inclusive, and sustainable supply chain, particularly when you talk about coffee and cocoa, is tremendous,” said Ms Choo. The implementation of collaborative agroforestry models can help provide smallholders with a living income while simultaneously achieving biodiversity and environmental protection goals.



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Mr Olivier Tichit
Director, Communications and Sustainability, Musim Mas



“The path for smallholders towards the modern, inclusive, and sustainable supply chain is tremendous.”

Ms Fay Fay Choo
Asia Cocoa Director, Mars Inc



12TH
SINGAPORE DIALOGUE ON
SUSTAINABLE
WORLD
RESOURCES

SINGAPORE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Panel 2

Balancing Growth with Sustainability – The Future of Production in ASEAN

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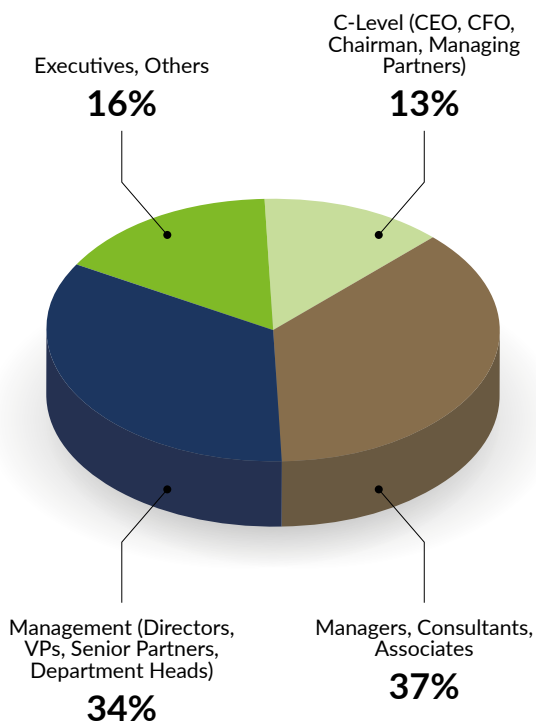
Conclusion

Speakers at the 12th SWR warned that although current global economic conditions are not as bad as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the initial outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Trump administration's trade tariffs are causing uncertainty in global markets. There is a danger of both countries and private sector companies backsliding on their sustainability commitments.

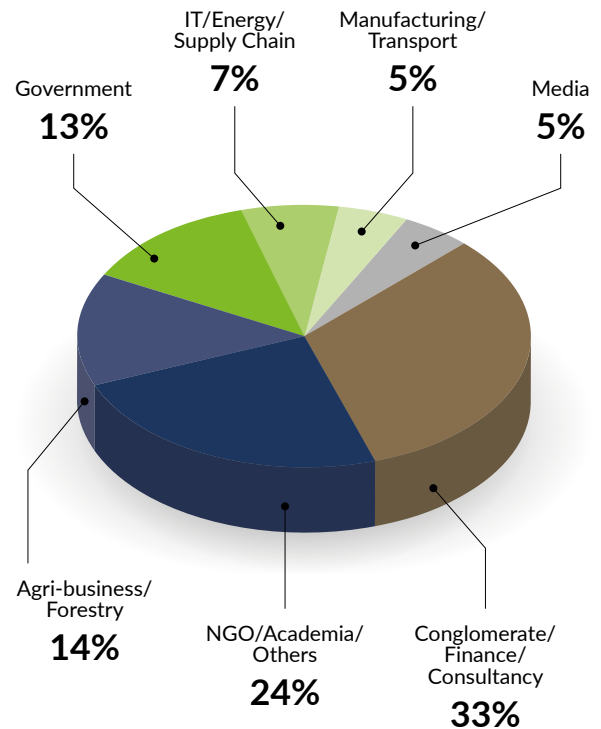
Despite these global headwinds, it is important that policymakers and businesses stay the course on sustainability. Beyond the urgent need to address environmental concerns, ASEAN economies must build resilience in food and agricultural systems to meet future challenges. Innovation is needed to support intensification, productivity, and circularity within the region's agricultural industries. Cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation is necessary to exchange technology and knowledge, alongside financing to support this transformation. The SIIA hopes to explore these issues in future instalments of the SWR.

Participants and Media

Profile of Participants



Participants by Sector



Note: Total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The 12th SWR achieved a total of 15 mentions across national, regional, and sustainability-focused media outlets, including CNA, The Straits Times, New Straits Times, The Edge Malaysia, China Daily Hong Kong, Eco-Business, and Mongabay. Media coverage of the 12th SWR highlighted Ms Fu's comments on Singapore's engagement with its ASEAN neighbors in agri-tech and food security, YB Datuk Seri Johari's remarks on Malaysia's sustainable agriculture and commodity sector commitments, Mr Verghese's views on the gaps that must be addressed to achieve a food-secure future, as well as the issues surrounding the EU's forthcoming implementation of the EUDR.

Selected Articles:

- [Malaysia commits to global leadership in sustainable palm oil industry](#), New Straits Times, 28 May 2025
- [NUS studying climate change impacts on Asean's agriculture sector to enhance food security: Grace Fu](#), The Straits Times, 29 May 2025
- [Ministers look to more Southeast Asian cooperation on decarbonization](#), China Daily Hong Kong, 30 May 2025
- [EUDR risk classifications omit governance & enforcement failures, critics say](#), Mongabay, 3 June 2025
- [Palm oil waste can potentially replace Malaysia's coal power capacity, says minister](#), Eco-Business, 3 June 2025
- [Olam CEO lists 'eight major gaps' to close for a food-secure future](#), The Edge Singapore, 8 August 2025

About the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA)

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Established in 1962, the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) is a not-for-profit, independent think-tank committed to policy-relevant research, analysis, and discussions on regional and international politics, economic policy, and sustainability. Our work serves as a bridge between policymakers, business leaders, and other stakeholders to nudge policy change through dialogue and collective action.

We provide insights and perspectives for businesses in navigating a complex world and help Singaporeans with sense-making and responding to issues they care about. We aim to contribute to a region that is inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous – An integrated, sustainable, and globally competitive ASEAN and a Singapore that is an open, dynamic hub and responsive node.

We have been consistently ranked as one of the leading think tanks in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in the Global Go-To Think Tank Index by the University of Pennsylvania. Since 2017, the SIIA was ranked the No. 1 independent think tank in Asia. We were recognised as one of the top 50 think tanks globally, excluding the United States of America. In 2019, we were recognised as the No. 1 think tank in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific (excluding India). In 2020, we were also recognised as one of the think tanks with the best policy and institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

About the SIIA's Sustainability Programme

Our Sustainability Programme began in 1997 when we organized Singapore's first haze dialogue with the Singapore Environment Council on the critical haze problem. The programme has evolved to address a broader range of sustainability issues like agribusiness and forestry supply chains as well as the leveraging of green finance to advance ASEAN's climate action and carbon neutrality goals. Since 2014, the Singapore Dialogue on Sustainable World Resources (SWR), our annual flagship conference, provides a platform for discussion in the region about key sustainability challenges.



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