

Sustainable Action Conference 4.0 – Sustainability as the New Economic Advantage

More certifiable land. More smallholders.

Sustainable certification, traceability and
smallholder inclusion: two goals for 2030



Speakers of the strategic session on stage at SAC 4.0, Kota Kinabalu, 21 October 2026.

INSIGHTS FROM THE STRATEGIC SESSION

From Agriculture to Forestry – Building Sustainable and Equitable Natural Resource Value Chains

The Magellan Sutera Resort, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah · Featuring 2030 takeaways from Lawrence Chia (AFI) and Joseph de Cruz

Certificates are the baseline, not the finish line

At the Sustainable Action Conference 4.0 in Kota Kinabalu, panellists agreed that buyers and regulators now expect a wider assurance system around certification, and that it must keep smallholders in, not push them out.



Lawrence Chia (right) in discussion with the moderator.

SIX THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION

01

Certification becomes assurance

Geolocation, transaction-level traceability and continuous data now sit alongside certificates.

02

Standards fit for smallholders

Simpler requirements and affordable verification, set in consultation with small producers.

03

Share costs and benefits

Buyers support producers through credits, premiums, long-term partnerships and finance.

04 · Demand is the bottleneck

16.2 → 30+ Mt

One certifier certifies 16.2 million tonnes today and could certify over 30 million if demand caught up.

05

Rubber and forestry

Rubber relies on smallholders (see the GPSNR case study); forestry is limited where too little land is certified.

06

Haze is a landscape problem

Fire bans need viable, affordable alternatives to burning for small growers.

Two goals for 2030

Asked for the single change that matters most by 2030, two speakers gave complementary answers: one about the supply of land, the other about who is included.



The panel of the strategic session, From Agriculture to Forestry.

01 Lawrence Chia, AFI

More certifiable land

WHY IT MATTERS

A region with too little certified land cannot anchor a sustainable downstream industry, however strong the certificate.

WHAT IT NEEDS

Landscape-scale certification, growth through higher yields rather than new land, and demand that absorbs certified volume.

02 Joseph de Cruz

More smallholders in the sustainable supply chain

WHY IT MATTERS

Smallholders produce much of the commodity base, especially in rubber, and cannot be pushed out of the market.

WHAT IT NEEDS

Simpler standards, affordable verification, and pay that rewards sustainable producers over neighbours who are not.

One programme, not two

Certifiable land at scale needs smallholder land. Smallholder inclusion lasts only if certified land feeds markets that pay for it.

RUBBER · GPSNR

How the rubber industry works together

Stefano Savi, CEO of the Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber (GPSNR), showed how a whole value chain can share the cost of sustainability. Most natural rubber comes from independent smallholders, so collaboration is the only way to reach them at scale.

2018

Launched in Singapore, initiated by the Tire Industry Project

5

Stakeholder groups, from tyre makers to smallholders and NGOs

2025

First year of its shared investment mechanism

HOW THE MONEY FLOWS



WHAT THE PROJECTS SUPPORT



LESSONS FOR OTHER COMMODITIES

Collaborate before you compete

Competitors agree common standards on human rights, land, biodiversity and traceability.

Downstream pays upstream

Buyers fund the change they ask producers to make, instead of passing on the cost.

Smallholders at the table

Producer representatives help shape the rules, the way to Joseph de Cruz's 2030 goal.

Make sustainability pay

The main barrier to both goals is economic: sustainability costs producers money the market does not yet reliably return.

CHALLENGES

- Weak demand leaves certified capacity unused.
- Rising data and traceability demands can price smallholders out.
- Expansion into new land still outpaces yield gains.
- Fire remains cheaper than mechanical clearing.

ENABLERS

- Industry-wide shared funds, as GPSNR shows in rubber.
- Premiums, credits, long-term offtake and finance from buyers.
- Digital tools and AI to cut audit cost and improve data.
- A global agenda instead of separate national ones.

SIX RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Certify at landscape scale
Group or jurisdictional certification brings smallholder plots in.

2 Differentiate the standard
Proportionate rules for smallholders, firm outcomes such as no burning.

3 Reward good practice
Certified farmers earn more than uncertified neighbours.

4 Grow demand
Buyers commit to absorb available certified volume.

5 Digitise verification
Geolocation, digital records and AI lower the cost of proof.

6 Coordinate globally
Aligned standards across markets create a level playing field.

CONCLUSION

Sustainability scales only if it protects livelihoods, rewards good practice and levels the field. More certifiable land and more smallholders are two measures of the same success.