

Coffee Landscapes Forum: 10 Years of Conservation International's Sustainable Coffee

Q&A Report

11th December 2025

[To watch the video recording, click here.](#)

Below are the questions asked live through the Zoom Q&A function. Some logistical comments have been, and attendee names have been removed.

- Given the shifts in sustainable coffee landscapes and multi-stakeholder partnerships, what skills or profiles are most in demand today for professionals aiming to contribute to this space?
 - *Michael Kobori: There are many changes happening in sustainability today. Based on these, it will be important to not only have sustainability knowledge; knowledge of business practices and supply chains will be crucial. In addition, some of the skills that I valued as a chief sustainability officer were influencing, collaboration, persistence, creativity/innovation, and ability to take initiative. Hope that is helpful.*
 - *'@Micheal: Thank you, Michael; this is very insightful. I appreciate the clarity on both the technical and leadership skills needed to contribute effectively to this space. This was extremely helpful.*
- On climate change, has the Challenge built or found a collaborative platform for growers to share primary data to help calculate Scope 3 GHG emissions?
 - *Niels Haak: Thanks for this question - we're actually in the final stages of collaborative study to establish national level coffee carbon footprint baselines for 5 countries in LatAm based on primary data. The results will be publicly accessible.*
 - *Maybe landscape initiative should involve different sectors that are present and depend on the landscape? Think of metals & mining, textiles, various commodities in food sector? Go beyond single commodity. Maybe then you can find critical mass of companies.*

- I am a generalist climate change adaptation planner. I am surprised by the low curiosity in the industry about climate thresholds of production for the climate change over the productive life of current crop and the required replacement rate with varieties which will sustain productivity. Why do I see that in this sector when there are other sectors more engaged with these ideas? What can people like me do to change that?
 - *Have you heard about World Coffee Research? >200 coffee companies are investing in research to build access to climate-resilient coffee varieties. Could be an interesting first stop in your exploration of this space:*
<https://worldcoffeeresearch.org/about>
New varietal development is a long-term play, but I know this group has been working to build strong partnerships in all origins where they operate, including Uganda. I'm sure they'd love to engage with you - try reaching out at info@worldcoffeeresearch.org
 - *Ruchira Joshi: Starbucks have our own breeding program with the largest private collection of coffee varieties at our innovation farm in Costa Rica. Our research is open source, and we are members of WCR. We distribute several million coffee seedlings for free across many of the origins (including in East Africa) we source from.*
- I'm very interested in the initiative just mentioned - roasters coming together to measure emissions! Can you speak about that opportunity?
 - *I expect it will come up again today but please reach out to scc@conservation.org and we'll be happy to send you more info!*
- A key challenge in the sustainability of the coffee industry I am seeing at the moment is the rising prices of inputs (fertilisers etc) and volatility of the coffee supply squeezing farmers - how do we ensure to drive the value case for young farmers in the supply chain to continue to ensure supply?
 - *Michael Kobori: As Ruchira from Starbucks is just sharing, it is important for the global brands to link procurement to more sustainable practices to ensure farmer profitability and productivity.*
- To the CI & SCC leadership: To truly meet the 2030 goals, we need the voices of Indigenous smallholder growers. Would you commit to waiving membership/entry fees for Indigenous coffee cooperatives? This would remove the primary barrier to their full participation in the Challenge.

- *Niels Haak: thanks for raising this, Rijul. Actually, in a deliberate effort to keep barriers to entry as low as possible, there are no membership dues associated to participation in the Challenge. Also, the resources/ materials we develop are publicly accessible. I do recognize the need to do more, particularly to lower barriers around language.*
- *Michael Kobori : Excellent point. One of the keys to success for the Better Cotton Initiative, as I mentioned, is that it is a truly multi-stakeholder initiative. Farmers are represented in the governing council, in addition to the global brands, suppliers, and NGOs. This ensures the viewpoints and leadership/engagement of key stakeholders are represented.*
- *I agree that the lack of strong Indigenous voices in this conversation is slowing our progress and real / viable solutions.*
- *Thank you both. Niels—that is excellent news regarding the zero-free structure; I appreciate the clarification. You are spot on that language is often the invisible barrier. Michael, the BCI model you mentioned is the goal: moving beyond just 'participation' to having smallholders and Indigenous growers represented on the governing council is exactly the shift in agency we need.*
- *It's not just about inclusion; it's about efficacy. If we want viable, long-term solutions, we need the deep ecological knowledge that these communities hold. We can't afford to leave that expertise off the table.*
- are you aware of the Nespresso landscape restoration in Brazil? They looked at cost of droughts to supply and used this as a budget. I think they came up with a sort of subscription model of businesses using the land. Any comments on this approach?
- "Given how rapidly consumer expectations are evolving — especially across younger generations who now demand not only sustainability from brands but measurable social impact — I'm speaking as the GM of an organization that addresses UN SDG #1, fighting poverty through plastic waste collection and enabling companies like Henkel, LVMH, and SC Johnson to embed certified Social Value into their purpose strategies. Yet, I don't see the same level of awareness or commitment within the coffee industry."
- great to hear Laurent's perspective, acknowledging that the future of the coffee industry is DIRECTLY linked to coffee farmer's capacity to produce and THRIVE!! When will we make farmer success and assuring that THEY have the resources and appropriate knowledge needed to achieve true resilience as the driving force of our

work (as opposed to companies using their "sustainability work" primarily for marketing)??

- *Michael Kobori: Monika: As Ruchira and a number of panellists have indicated, it is vital to link the profitability and productivity of coffee farmers to global brand procurement. A number of companies have done and are doing this. It will be important for the participating brands of the Sustainable Coffee challenge to do this.*
- *thanks Michael, and yes -- I agree that attitudes and actions are shifting within the industry. However (and I also have been deeply engaged in these conversations and initiatives for decades) -- we continue to see a disproportionate "top down" attitude and are missing out on the VAST potential of farmer innovation, knowledge and leadership towards truly sustainable and appropriate solutions.*
- How can we as an industry improve in setting principles and practices in our value and supply chains. How can companies work more collectively to see common risks and share on the co-benefits?
 - *Niels Haak: Thanks Nitesh - this is exactly the type of alignment we're trying to foster across the industry through the Sustainable Coffee Challenge. On the need for "in setting principles", I would encourage you to take a look at the high-integrity in setting principles that CI is collaboration with many partners recently developed - <https://www.conservation.org/projects/advancing-insetting-for-climate-nature-and-people>.*
- I want to celebrate your umbrella approach to sustainability. Our common goods and resilience can only be protected and achieved by collaborative action.
- Measuring sustainability at scale is exceedingly difficult. How does this initiative define acceptable limits for biodiversity and climate impacts, and how do you ensure this stay within planetary boundaries?
- Hi, I am (name) from Ethiopia. Coffee is big business globally. Majority of sustainability issues should be addressed at the small-scale farmer's level. Farmers are always under pressure to ensure sustainability targets. I suggest that each of the big companies should reach out and work with the smallholder farmers. Any comment on EUDR compliance and the impacts on coffee sustainability?
 - *Michael Kobori: Completely agree with you and this is what made the Better Cotton Initiative successful.*

- It's like Ruchira says, I don't think it is the will that lacks, see Laurent. It's practical impact full and scalable mechanisms and possibly co-finance that lack. Cooperation is needed for that.
- I see the strong industry and CSO support for the sustainable coffee challenge. I am also hearing the need for financing and funding to continue scaling up profitability and resilience. How does the coffee challenge engage with MDBs/IFIs/bilateral and similar "investors"? We have heard innovative approaches to leverage climate finance for scale. Is the coffee challenge looking to those climate finance approaches in specific country/landscape settings?
 - *Niels Haak: Thanks (name)! Hopefully the example that Raina provided re the GCF-supported AROMA program the answer to your question*
 - *Partially yes, I get the sense it is more grant financing? I would be interested to understand the SCC's activities around mobilizing private financing for investments required in the supply chain.*
- Focus is needed and role division, 100 collective actions is weakness in itself.
- Well said Ruchira!!!!
- Ruchira, great to hear about your proactive offtake agreements; how do these agreements work if extreme weather / other factors impact yields?
- sound has echo
- Congratulations to the SSC, partners and sponsors in driving the conversation and agenda on sustainable coffee over the past ten years. Seeing the scale of the challenge at hand, what would make your CFOs triple the available resources structure for on farm resilience and supply resilience in the next 24 months?
- Very interesting point from Ruchira about governance. That, added to the other comments about the role of farmers on the Challenge could be an interesting point to explore in the future.
- Which system or approach for MVR are using that initiative.
- "Do you think that just capacity building and increase of income is enough for SHF to invest in the « innovative/ good reg.ag » practices?
 - *Ruchira Joshi: Short answer - no, it is not. Small farmers are incredibly smart and just like business stakeholders want to see short term (immediate increase) and long term (over years) income benefits and profitability. That is why industry actors are only one part of the solution. Ag in general is a rural*

development issue that requires a variety of stakeholders not least local and national govts.

- Do you think that SHF or farmers have already a business/ production strategy, and therefore, all the capacity building is not always implemented due to alignment on needs and financial capacity?"
- Also, it is great to commit. Another matter is to deliver.
- Great to hear about the collective opportunities on the finance and outcomes side. Would be great to hear more about how we could collectively address price efficiency pressures and market volatility effects on producers and the landscapes they depend on, and how can we build a stronger bridge between collective sustainability support at the landscape level and procurement actions that can pull that resilience through the value chain.
- There has been much discussion on collective investments from corporations and public sector. Easier said than done, pls share some strategies and best practices that will work to bring about collective change and interventions.
 - *Michael Kobori: As I mentioned, the Better Cotton Initiative has identified and tested many strategies and best practices for bringing about collective change and interventions.*
- is there an underlying need to rethink the economics of coffee, which is based on an assumption that coffee is a commodity, while sadly climate change is possibly changing this, and leverages a commodity market structure, with intermediaries (importers/exporters) that speculates on price, resulting in even greater volatility of price than what would be driven by supply shortages, impacting the industry actors
- Ruchira, the BCI is a great example - how do you see that playing out in coffee where the certification space is already very fragmented?
 - *Ruchira Joshi: Million-dollar question ;) You are right the voluntary standard system space was somewhat lost in coffee, but I am willing to bet that our sustainability programs are closer together than we think. It will take courage of conviction and someone/ some org independently advocating and doing the heavy lifting work of creating a joint vision and repeating it x 100.*
- Given the overlap in sourcing regions and similar issues, is there any advantage in collaborating with the cocoa industry? Or tea? It is wild to me how siloed the sectors are when the challenges are the same. Last week, at Innovation Forum's

Scope 3 event, we discussed how “sustainability” should be reframed as “risk and resilience” to make the business case. Glad to hear the intersection of climate risk and farmers in how you’re all thinking about the challenges. Often those issues are also siloed. It’s rare to hear the apparel industry used as an example of success for others to follow!

- can we access the sustainability report of these coffee companies?
- The Challenge will, in future, be the place to go for achieving climate impacts in coffee. For the panellists: what key practical deliverables would you like the Challenge to focus on?
- Maybe landscape initiative should involve different sectors that are present and depend on the landscape? Think of metals & mining, textiles, various commodities in food sector? Go beyond single commodity. Maybe then you can onboard critically mass of companies.
- This is my first time attending such a discussion, and I find it truly impressive. I am pleased to participate in this 10-year milestone event of the Sustainable Coffee Challenge, hosted by Conservation International. This occasion marks an important moment for the global coffee community as we reflect on a decade of progress and prepare to address emerging challenges such as climate change, landscape resilience, and the growing need for sustainable investment and funding. I look forward to learning from the distinguished speakers and engaging with global partners on innovative strategies and finance mechanisms that can strengthen coffee-producing landscapes and support long-term sustainability. Thanks to all for this impressive experience and for the valuable insights you have shared about the challenges in the coffee sector.
- On the guidelines/frameworks, beyond legislation, has the SBTi been of any help for the coffee industry?
- Southwest Ethiopia is one of the world’s centres of origin and genetic diversity for *Coffea Arabica*. Semi-forest coffee, Forest-coffee systems, and smallholder farmers grown coffee are mainly grown in the area. But currently some challenges such as forest degradation, climate variability, low market incentives, and limited de-risking mechanisms for farmers. These challenges need collaboration of stake holder. How can the Sustainable Coffee Challenge work more closely with local cooperatives, research centres, and regional governments in Southwest Ethiopia to co-design long-term landscape strategies?

- A comment from last week: consumers are already paying for these challenges with higher prices. They just don't know it, because it's framed as an abstract idea around "inflation."
- We're seeing regenerative agriculture emerge as a central pillar in corporate climate strategies across the coffee sector. How are you embedding regenerative and circular practices into your mitigation and adaptation strategies, not just as CSR, but as a core business investment? More specifically, how are you investing in producer organizations to co-develop scalable, practical solutions that reduce supply chain risk, secure future sourcing, and deliver measurable impact both for the business and for farming communities?
- As traditional coffee exporting countries increasingly become coffee-consuming countries, how does the Sustainable Coffee Challenge see its engagement changing with the players in those more localised supply chains? Something like Juan Valdez Café in Colombia (understanding that Juan Valdez is also an MNC)
- The adoption of global standards to identify, capture and share data, such as GSI standards, can support the interoperability and therefore make more efficient EUDR processes among multiple supply chain actors.
- can you share the "Huila" (?) MRV case just mentioned?
 - *Please send us a quick message at scc@conservation.org. We'd love to share some materials about it! Essentially, together with IDH and Solidaridad, CI has been assessing the feasibility of a collective MRV protocol for sourcing region-level decarbonization, starting in Huila, Colombia but with the vision to develop a global protocol that can be replicated elsewhere to coordinate actions in sourcing regions. Complementing this work we're also establishing a regional level emission factor for Huila.*
- EUDR: Imagine where we could be today if the EU had stated that only coffee grown under shade cover, with clear milestones for increasingly diversified shade, RATHER than satellite tracing backwards with technology that continues to evolve and change and slowly be understood by all.... what we got with EUDR today is the result of lack of consultation with critical stakeholders -- and in particular the producers themselves. ;-)
- * Only shade grown allowed in EU markets. :-)
- How does water, both quality & quantity play into the Sustainable Coffee Challenge?

- From medieval guilds to modern industry roundtables, companies have been convening for centuries to solve these shared problems - yet the pattern has not changed - hence why these discussions still consume carbon - coordination without innovation just reproduces the status quo ~I hope we get to discuss some innovation !!!
- '@Raina, loved your take on local MRV. It's the missing piece we usually overlook. Any chance you have some links or papers you've written on this? Would love to read more.
- Amazing discussion and clear indications. Looking forward to aligning our actions, Niels and all!
- Thank you so much.
- "I'm an MIT Professional Sustainability Program Candidate and I would love to collaborate and find synergies. I have experience and knowledge in the coffee value chain.
- On the MIT side, I have deep knowledge of sustainability, sustainability measurement methodologies, system thinking based in engineering, LCA and sustainability project development. If anyone is interested, I would love to chat".
- thanks everyone.
- Is there a farmer led / owned MRV certification scheme?
- Great conversation and work!
- Congratulations SCC and CI Team!! 10 hard working years.
- Thank you.
- Thank you. Great Job!
- Thanks to all.
- Excellent discussion. Thank you!