



## RUBBER

# WRS 2021 EXPLORES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH



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**D**ue to the Covid-19 pandemic, the global economy has witnessed one of the worst economic crises in history. It has exposed the weakness of our economic and social systems in many countries and rolled back decades of progress on poverty reduction, exposing social and economic equalities. The rubber economy has not been an exception. Earlier in 2020, a steep decline in prices affected both natural and synthetic rubber, with SGX TSR 20 prices declining by 26 percent during the lockdown period (April-June 2020, compared to January 2020). The closures of manufacturing activities worldwide and disruptions in the supply chain also prompted a sharp drop in rubber imports and consumption. Furthermore, the development of new mobility models, digitalisation, climate change and the development of the 'green economy' will be the driving forces that will determine the future of this sector.

The WRS 2021, organised by IRSG (International Rubber Study Group) together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and co-hosted by the Association des Professionnelles du Caoutchou Naturelle de Côte d'Ivoire (APROMAC) the Fonds Interprofessionnel pour la Recherche et le Conseil Agricoles (FIRCA), was a prime opportunity for leaders, experts, government

representatives and NGOs to discuss the current status of the rubber industry and explore the way forward to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. This year's WRS featured the very timely theme, 'Facing the Future: Inclusiveness, Sustainability and Growth for the Next Normal'.

The WRS 2021 was officially opened by HE M Jerome Patrick Achi, Prime Minister, Government of Côte d'Ivoire, in recognition of the important role that Africa can play as an emerging producer of natural rubber. The event has highlighted that the rubber economy could be a formidable engine for the continent, creating jobs and transforming its economic and social prospects, and providing opportunities for the youth and women – real key drivers of sustainable growth, development and peace.

The WRS 2021 witnessed 29 eminent speakers from all parts of the world, about 200 participants directly linked to the virtual platform and significant public participation in Côte d'Ivoire, where stakeholders in the rubber sector interacted in person during the event.

Innovative ideas and approaches emerged during the summit to address the new challenges that can change the global pattern of production and consumption in the rubber sector, market and policy discussions on new approaches in business and life to turn the crisis into an opportunity from the lessons learnt. Discussions around the decarbonisation commitment of

governments justifying sustainable and secure supply chains for raw materials were focussed on supply chain collaboration, ensuring that raw material efficiency, performance and traceability are dealt with holistically.

An important debate took place on the impact of climate change on natural rubber systems, which has potential economic, environmental and social risks, identifying a set of policy recommendations that could facilitate the work of all stakeholders in the rubber value chain.

The latest IPCC report, published in August 2021, has highlighted that human activity is changing the climate in an unprecedented and sometimes irreversible way. Actions on the adaptation of natural rubber systems to climate changes are urgently needed and further investigations into the potential contribution of rubber to climate change mitigation.

Work-based on scientific knowledge is the precondition to identifying correct pathways to preserve and support the growth and prosperity of the natural rubber economy worldwide. In this field, IRSG has had a leading role thanks to the support of important R&D organisations such as CIFOR/FTA, IRRDB and CIRAD.

In his closing remarks, Salvatore Pinizzotto, Secretary-General IRSG, has pointed out that the main common point that emerged during the World Rubber Summit is the need to formulate policies and put into place people-centred actions. "If we look at the natural rubber sector alone, it sustains 40 million people with their families around the globe with a supply chain generating more than USD 300 billion. Furthermore, about 90 percent of the total world natural rubber production is sourced by smallholders.

"To build an inclusive and sustainable rubber community, we need to work at local, national and international level – there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' solution – putting in place innovative forms of cooperation across national borders and a variety of actors – governments, business, academia and civil society. Reduce poverty-establishing mechanisms that could provide smallholders with an adequate income level, implement an effective technology transfer on the field and support education and training among farmers, especially young people and women. These are some of the policies needed to implement sustainability. Leveraging digital technology in farming and green finance options encouraging climate change adaptation are other key policies to assure emission reduction and social inclusion."

In closing the World Rubber Summit 2021, the Honourable KobenanKouassiAdjourmani, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Government of Côte d'Ivoire, has strongly stated that Africa is completely committed to implementing sustainability practices in the rubber sector, making sure that all the rubber value chain is equitable, profitable and transparent.

"Sustainability and circular economy are two aspects that we need to keep high on the agenda of all stakeholders in the rubber economy. We need to make sure that both natural and synthetic rubber sectors comply with the adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." ■