

Pioneering the art of collaboration between NGO & the private sector.

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Reminder why Oxfam participates in the RSPO

Oxfam is an international confederation of organizations working together in 98 countries and with hundreds of partners and allies around the world to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. We work directly with communities and we seek to influence the powerful to ensure that poor people can improve their lives and livelihoods and have a say in decisions that affect them.

Oxfam also works with the private sector, in a critically constructive way. Companies are the engine behind the economy, and if done responsibly, hold the key to “green and fair” economic development. Development is blocked, however, when companies decide to work purely for their own profit and lose sight of their social responsibility. The policies and practices of companies should not impact negatively but rather benefit the livelihoods of people living in poverty, and should not be at the expense of human rights or the environment. We therefore choose to engage with companies, for instance about their roles and responsibilities in international value chains and international investment, or to explore collaboration with Oxfam or other social/development NGOs in development projects.

For Oxfam, the most critical issue of the continuously growing palm oil sector is its pressure on natural resources, land, water and forest in particular. In Oxfam’s recently launched multi-year campaign GROW, the palm oil sector features because of its commercial pressure on land, in campaign terms: land grabbing. Hundreds or possibly thousands of historical land conflicts need to be resolved and new ones prevented. That’s the main reason why we are in the RSPO.

The RSPO in 2011: what have we achieved together?

- Principles and criteria include social elements (legality of land, FPIC by communities) and have been tailored to smallholders
- Systems of verification, trade and traceability, inclusive of smallholders
- Over 10% of palm oil is produced sustainably, of which 50% is sold.
- Grievances panel started to function
- Dispute Settlement Facility will start its first case soon.
- RSPO trademark enables brands and consumers to buy responsibly
- Increased visibility of the problems and the solutions

The RSPO in 2011: what we haven’t achieved yet

- There are still hundreds of land rights conflicts RSPO members are involved in
- Long list of grievances in process of handling and monitoring
- Independent smallholders not yet certified
- Challenges around the trace and traceability system, it is leaking
- Challenges around auditing. What does true social auditing mean?
- Is RSPO capable of showing real impact in the field?
- Market transformation is happening, but does it go fast enough?

2012 is the year of the truth: the credibility of the RSPO is at stake!

More visibility through the trademark leads to more vulnerability for the RSPO members. The issues mentioned above put the credibility of all stakeholders involved at risk. Especially the visible ones. Strong brands, whether they are food manufacturers, retailers, banks OR NGOs, face the highest risks. To give you an example: recently the makers of a Dutch television documentary accused Oxfam of working together with criminal companies. We were portrayed as naive. And supporting a greenwashing machine. How long can we continue to tell the outside world optimistically that RSPO and its members are in the process of improving? When the trademarks puts us all in the spotlights? Change is needed on the ground. Visible change, we, all stakeholders, need to show impact.

What will we as Oxfam do?

The time is up for talking at length. Systems are in place to urgently take action. RSPO needs to move from paperwork to fieldwork. From dialogue and working together on improving the RSPO “behind the scenes” Oxfam will have to shift towards holding stakeholders accountable more publicly. In September Oxfam, therefore, launched our report Land and Power- the growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investments in land. Sime Darby features as one of the companies with a long lasting land conflict in Sanggau, West Kalimantan. This presentation will report the latest progress in the case on the basis of engagement with Sime Darby and verified field sources.

What does Oxfam want the RSPO and its members to do?

The RSPO needs to ensure credibility by solving the most pressing issues:

- Market transformation needs to go faster: traders, manufacturers and brands should speed up their commitments purchasing 100% certified sustainable palm oil
- Producers need to get 100% certified and ensure new plantings comply to the RSPO planting procedures
- Conflicts over land need to be structurally addressed and solved as soon as possible
- New conflicts need to be prevented from happening
- RSPO needs to put structures in place to quickly solve land conflicts
- RSPO needs to show measurable positive impacts on the ground
- RSPO needs to put in place systems of independent monitoring and linking and learning.

Oxfam, just like the other stakeholders of the RSPO and hopefully all in the room want sustainable palm oil to be contributing to social development. RSPO and its members need to start to show that it is. RSPO needs to really deliver.