SCOPING THE POTENTIAL UNINTENDED IMPACTS OF THE RSPO CERTIFICATION STANDARD ON BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL HABITATS

DR JENNIFER M. LUCEY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD/ SEARRP

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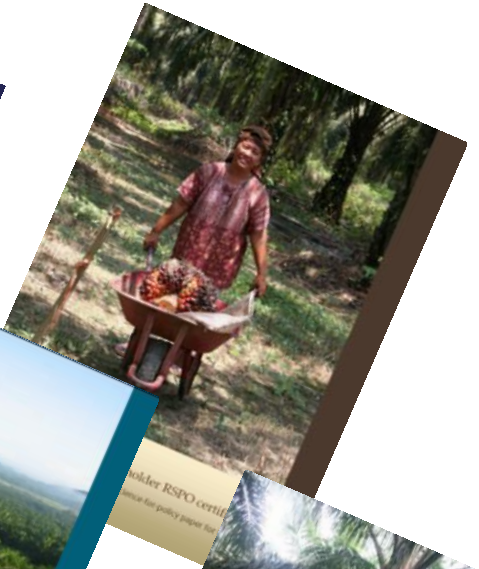

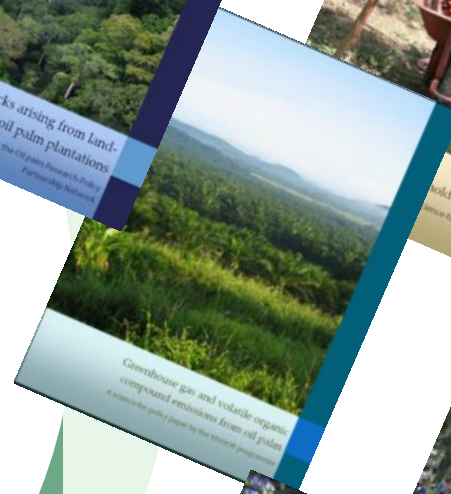

SEnSOR

Socially and Environmentally Sustainable Oil Palm Research

- A multi-disciplinary scientific research programme focused on testing the impact of certification
  - Our funding comes from RSPO, UK/ Dutch government and industry
    - Academic peer-reviewed research and easy-to-digest resources

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

- One of the three key impact aims of the RSPO is to protect and enhance ecosystems
- RSPO is working to achieve sustainability within a complex system of interacting political, social, environmental and economic factors, which are sometimes conflicting.
- Therefore, principles and criteria designed with the best intentions, can sometimes have unforeseen and unintended impacts.
- It is vital we understand what the unintended effects of the RSPO are, in order to make sure we are accounting
- Key topic in the RSPO's research agenda

METHODS

- There is very little existing evidence about unintended impacts of RSPO
- Our intention was to scope the possible impacts the standard might be having
- **Positive or negative**
- Searched the literature for evidence of unintended impacts from a wide range of conservation and sustainability initiatives
- Searched for any studies focusing on the RSPO
- Conducted surveys with stakeholders at last year's Roundtable.

RESULTS

- The study yielded 11 types of possible unintended impact

- They fell into three main categories:

1. unintended impacts associated with conflicts between environmental requirements and economic imperatives,
2. displacement of biodiversity declines and natural habitat loss,
3. positive unintended impacts.

CONFLICT WITH ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES

- A large increase in forest loss in areas in areas now owned by certified plantations prior to NPP implementation (Carlson et al. 2018; Gatti et al. 2019)
- Studies did not determine whether these areas belonged to RSPO members at the time of clearance, but a large difference in deforestation levels compared to the rest of the industry (Carlson et al. 2018)
- Recorded for other initiatives (Lueck & Michael 2003, Baird et al. 2009)

- Oil palm yield driven policies could be encouraging practices that intensify oil palm production at the expense of environmental considerations and possibly livelihoods (Suwarno et al. 2019)
- Certified smallholders were more likely to have monocrop plantations and used large amounts of herbicide to control weeds (Suwarno 2019; de Vos 2019)
- Polyculture farming could be better for biodiversity (e.g. Azhar et al. 2014) and for creating more stable income streams.

DISPLACEMENT OF BIODIVERSITY DECLINES

- The RSPO policy on biodiversity conservation has focused on forests and now has stringent no-deforestation criteria
- Evidence of this scenario from other initiatives in Costa Rica (Fagan at al. 2013) and USA (Wu 2000)
- Valuable ancient grasslands are difficult to identify and poorly protected by national law (Parr et al. 2014)
- Grasslands are being converted in Colombia (Lopez-Ricuarte et al. 2017) and Gabon (www.rspo.org)

- A relatively small proportion of the industry is RSPO
- Evidence suggests a strong bias towards certification in uncontentious areas, leaving vulnerable forest and peatlands available to unscrupulous growers (Carlson et al. 2018)
- Pattern also occurs among smallholders (Maghfira 2018)
- This scenario has occurred for other initiatives such as fishery US restrictions (Helvey et al. 2017)

POSITIVE UNINTENDED IMPACTS

- There is strong evidence for protected area initiatives (Di Lorenzo et al. 2016)
- And evidence of spillover over short distances from set-asides in oil palm (Lucey et al. 2014)
- But many HCVs are poor quality (Scriven et al. 2019) and so spillover is likely to be minimal currently

- Funding research directly (e.g. Asner et al. 2018), collecting data through HCV monitoring and assessment, encouraging interest from the wider scientific community (eg. Deere et al. 2017)
- Translating into positive benefits through evidence based policy development within the RSPO (e.g. riparian management guidelines) and beyond (e.g. HCS approach which is also being adopted in rubber, pulp & paper, and cocoa sectors)

PRIORITISING RESEARCH AND POLICY ACTION

- We scored the potential unintended impacts based on:
  - the likelihood of occurrence,
  - the potential extent of the impact,
  - the ease with which the impact may be addressed by the RSPO

- Each of the three categories was scored (1=low, 2=medium, 3=high) and the total score (max possible =9) was used to determine the highest priority impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TOP THREE PRIORITIES

Priority 1: Displacement of biodiversity declines and habitat loss to non-members

Score: 8/9

- Continue working to be inclusive
- Extra efforts are needed to target groups of growers who are not currently engaged in the sustainability agenda

Priority 2: Displacement of biodiversity declines and habitat loss to non-forest habitats

Score: 7/9

- Policy should be strengthened to explicitly recognise other ecologically important non-forest habitats
- Clear, detailed guidance for HCV assessors tasked with identifying these areas to avoid expansion into these areas

Priority 3: Proliferation of new knowledge to benefit biodiversity and habitat conservation

Score: 7/9

- Encourage and facilitate the collation and sharing of biodiversity data
- Coordinating and streamlining survey methods would also enhance future research

THANK YOU

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RSPO Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

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