

Learn from the oil palm development experiences to promote the sustainability of the sector

Sylvain RAFFLEGEAU

CIRAD, UMR INNOVATION, F-34398 Montpellier, France.

INNOVATION, Univ. Montpellier, CIRAD, INRAE, Institut Agro, Montpellier, France.

In response to a high international market demand, global palm oil production boomed from 1 Mt CPO in 1960 to 78 Mt in 2021. Large-scale projects usually involving partnerships between governments and agribusinesses companies were the main drivers of the agricultural expansion of oil palm plantations mainly in southeast Asia, but also in Africa and Latin America. As a result, agribusinesses owning 60 % of the oil palm plantations dominate the oil palm sector that has also led to the development of smallholders owning 40 % of the oil palm plantations. Beside this success story, the major impacts of the rapid conversion of large areas into plantations were direct or indirect deforestation and social conflicts between agribusinesses and smallholders or local populations. Over the past 20 years, experiences of sustainable expansion and management of oil palm plantations coexist with business as usual situations. We propose to draw lessons from these recent experiences to promote the sustainability of the sector by discussing the opportunities and risks of various models of oil palm development.