

# Towards the sustainable production of palm oil

## Which research do we need?

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### Background

**A complex system of constraints.** The cultivation of oil palm has become emblematic of the trade-off between development and conservation that agricultural commodities have to face: matching an increasing global demand while preserving the capacity of land to provide ecosystems services, preserving natural forests and respecting the rights of local communities. This challenge illustrates how local productions are tightly connected to more global socio-economic and environmental issues in the context of global changes. Such changes constitute a whole constraint system resulting from present and forecasted changes in the global production conditions and factors. Among these factors are the world population growth and consumptions, especially in emerging countries, the depletion of natural resources and the increase in energy prices, the growing public awareness and claims on product quality and environment conservation.

**RSPO delivers only part of the answer.** In the aim of providing solutions to these controversial issues, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was created in 2004 as a business-to-business initiative bringing together NGOs and private stakeholders under a voluntary certification scheme. The forces and weaknesses of the RSPO initiative are related to its business-to-business origin and intrinsic nature. Indeed, the Roundtable has been very efficient in installing and formalizing a difficult multi-stakeholders dialogue and its success in terms of registered members speaks for itself. Maintaining the structure itself and keeping it attractive is a very hard job which consumes most of human and financial resources devoted to RSPO [1] and raises concerns about the participation of "minority voices"[2]. Other observers outlined the need of addressing several key issue in order to reinforce the beneficial impacts of RSPO on the sector [3,4].

**Questions to researchers.** The RSPO P&Cs were designed to provide a shared framework for the producers who are willing to voluntarily commit themselves towards a sustainable palm oil production but not a detailed methodology and control points to actually assess the impacts. Hence decision makers still do not have all the information required to systematically avoid pitfalls or make all appropriate choices. The RSPO P&Cs need to be revisited and associated to complementary diagnosis steps in the light of the broad diversity of cropping systems involving oil palm and the constraints these systems have to face.

### Strategy

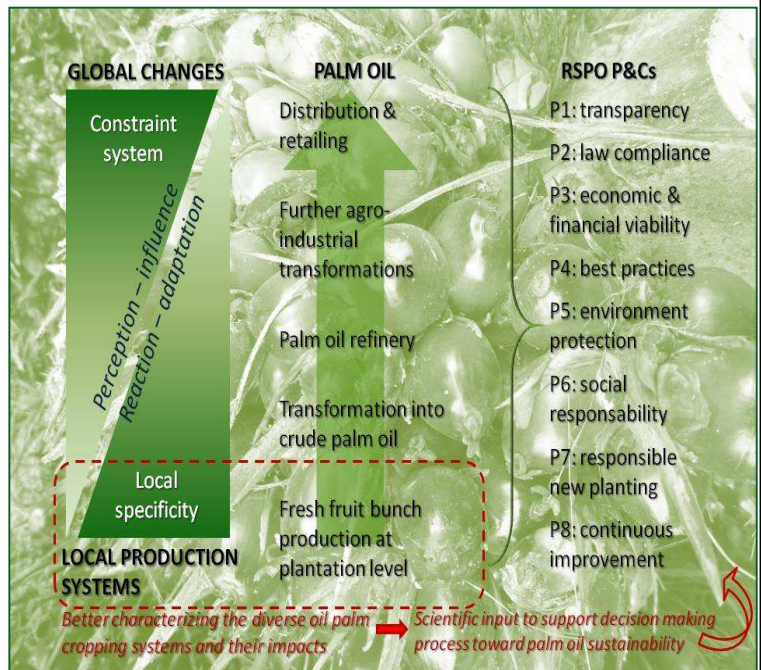
- ❖ To provide new science-based knowledge and tools useful to ensure the sustainability of the systems or to implement new sustainable systems,
- ❖ To involve stakeholders in the innovation process through multi-agent modeling or workshops,
- ❖ To identify obstacles and bottlenecks and analyze whether they are related to some inherent incapacity of oil palm cropping systems to adapt or/and to insufficient efforts in making knowledge and tools accessible to end-users

### Priorities

- ❖ To characterize the diversity of agricultural practices & their respective impacts on the environment and local communities
- ❖ To favor multi-disciplinary research projects
- ❖ To support international cooperation
- ❖ To provide end-users with useful tools for sustainable production

### Research and Development activities

- Ecological intensification of oil palm cropping systems
- Participative analysis of socio-agronomic determinants of smallholders' cropping systems
- Governance of palm oil value chain
- Impact of palm oil production on the livelihood of local communities
- Working conditions in plantations
- Participation of smallholders in decision making
- Management of an international network on socio-environmental indicators: *PalmiNet*
- Analysis of landscape dynamics & ecosystem services
- Land use planning & multi-agent modeling
- Involvement in the RSPO GHG Working Group
- Life Cycle Analyses of differentiate oil palm cropping systems
- Modeling the environmental impacts & developing Agro-ecological indicators, such as I-Pesticides, I-N, I-biodiversity or I-GHG [5].



### References

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## SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL: CHALLENGES, A COMMON VISION AND THE WAY FORWARD

### POSTER PRESENTATIONS

#### Towards the sustainable production of palm oil: which research do we need?

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The cultivation of oil palm has become emblematic of the trade-off between development and conservation that agricultural commodities have to face: matching an increasing global demand while preserving the capacity of land to provide ecosystems services, and preserving natural forests.

Towards the aim of providing solutions to such controversial issues, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was created in 2004 as a business-to-business initiative bringing together NGOs and private stakeholders under a voluntary certification scheme. The forces and weaknesses of RSPO are related to its business-to-business origin and intrinsic nature. Principles and criteria were designed to provide a shared framework for stakeholders who are willing to voluntarily commit themselves towards a sustainable palm oil production but not as a detailed methodology and control points to actually assess the impacts. The RSPO principles and criteria thus need to be revisited and associated with complementary diagnosis steps integrating the broad diversity of oil palm-based cropping systems and the constraints these systems have to face.

Our strategy is:

- To provide science-based knowledge and tools to ensure the sustainability of production systems or to implement new sustainable systems
- To involve stakeholders in the innovation process through multi-agent modeling or workshops
- To identify obstacles and bottlenecks and analyze whether they are related to some inherent incapacity of oil palm cropping systems to adapt or/and to insufficient efforts in making knowledge and tools accessible to end-users

The generation of multidisciplinary research networks which are able to deliver science-based products of direct interest for end-users is now of paramount importance.

#### Clear Labels, Not Forests: how labelling palm oil will support the drive towards sustainable production

Helen Buckland, Sumatran Orangutan Society, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JE, UK

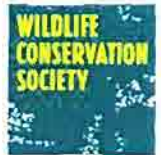
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Palm oil is in high demand as an ingredient in many food items, driving rapid expansion of monoculture plantations, often at the expense of biodiverse forest ecosystems. Palm oil is found in up to half of all top-selling grocery brands in supermarkets across Europe. Currently, there is no requirement in the EU for food manufacturers to label palm oil or palm kernel oil on packaging, and it is usually labelled as 'vegetable oil'.

The Clear Labels, Not Forests campaign supports the mandatory labelling of palm oil, which will help to drive demand for certified sustainable palm oil from Europe.

# symposium

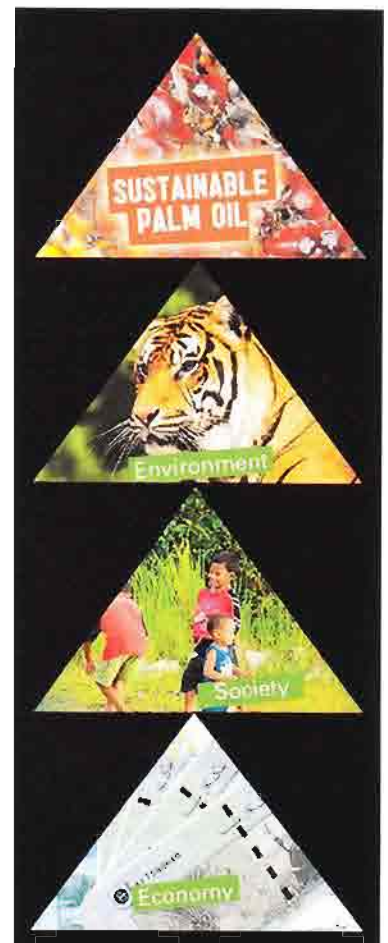
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