Understanding the impacts of RSPO: exploring the options

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What do we mean by impacts?
‘Impacts’ means different things to different people

**USERS (certified entities, businesses, public procurers)**
- Demonstrable change over time in certified entity
- Research on geographic hot spots and key risks
- Business case, ROI
- Information for sustainability reporting, due diligence requirements

**NON-USERS**
- How do standards work?
- What issues do they address?
- What type of assurance or governance do they have?
- Is certified really different from non-certified?
- Verification of theory of change, conditions of success

**OTHER STAKEHOLDERS (NGOs, governments, media...)**
- Measurable, attributable impact of standards
- Demonstrable change over time in certified entity
- Comparisons of effectiveness across standards and between standards and other tools
- Credible synthesis of evidence

ISEAL Global Impacts Platform scoping interviews 2017-2018

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**What type of research or evidence is needed to meet stakeholders evidence needs?**

Palm seeds © Malaysian Palm Oil Council RSPO
Today

Certified plantations

Cost/benefit
Practices applied
Status of sustainability outcomes of interest

On-site data | Business process data | Remote sensing

In (these) certified plantation(s), \( x \) is true....

But how do I know if the performance in certified plantations is good or better than average?
Certified plantations today are more/less than non-certified plantations.
Certification is associated with stronger/weaker non-certified plantations.

Matching: Were these plantations very similar before certification?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before certification</th>
<th>Today</th>
<th>Some time after</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same plantations pre-cert</td>
<td>Certified plantations</td>
<td>Certified plantations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change over time in:
- Practices applied
- Status of sustainability outcomes of interest
- Profitability

Trends, improvement, change... in (these) plantation(s)
But what if prices, legislation also changed over this period? Could the change be due to these factors?

RSPO caused ... / the impact of RSPO is....
Covers one period in time | Tracks change over time | Compares pre-cert to post-certification
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Examines certified only | Examines certified versus non-certified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research design</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-site data</td>
<td>Business process data</td>
<td>Remote sensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent researcher</td>
<td>RSPO commissioned, independent researcher</td>
<td>RSPO produced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Match approach to purpose and need! Match communications to approach!

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What evidence is now available?

Much more on ISEAL member standards than other market based mechanisms.

Steady growth in studies and monitoring reports.

Most rigorous evidence on coffee and forestry, in limited number of countries.

Most rigorous studies compare certified versus non-certified – without change over time.

New technologies and better business process information are opening new options.
Thank You