

Impacts of RSPO certification on land-use planning by smallholders

Report available at www.sensorproject.net or at Booth 2



Anissa Maghfira, Dik Roth, Maja Slingerland

Presented by Jennifer Lucey on
behalf of the SEnSOR programme


SEnSOR
Socially and Environmentally
Sustainable Oil Palm Research
www.sensorproject.net

- 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 understand resources



- This talk focuses on interactions between social and environmental factors in the smallholder context
- Conducted by Dr Maja Slingerland, Dr Dik Roth and Masters student Annisa Maghfira



Rationale

Two options for increasing yields:

- 1) Intensify production on existing land
- 2) Expand production into new land

- Expanding production may put forests and peatlands at risk
- Therefore, if RSPO certification can increase yields per ha for smallholders sufficiently through better agricultural practices, this could improve livelihoods without the need to expand into forests or peat

We wanted to find out if RSPO was impacting on smallholders' decisions to expand or intensify

Methods

- Petaling area of Jambi, Sumatra
- Compared smallholder communities who were uncertified or working towards certification
- Over a period of two months
- Semi-structured interviews and participant observations
- Qualitative story analysis technique to analyse interviews from smallholders and key stakeholders
- Compared results with those of existing published studies to validate findings



Question 1: Which factors affect smallholders' land planning decisions?

Expansion

- Plasma farmers
 - Expand into areas that will produce high yields
 - Rarely expand into forest and peatland
 - Limited by land availability and mill capacity
- Spontaneous migrants
 - Expand to provide future land assets for family
 - Often into cheap forest or peat land
 - Limited by securing enough for children, parents become too old to clear, or not enough capital



Question 1: Which factors affect smallholders' land planning decisions?



Intensification

- Limited by knowledge, fertiliser, quality seedlings and funds
- Plasma farmers
 - Often have income to intensify
 - But often prefer to expand
 - Saturated mills encourage production of better quality fruit bunches
- Spontaneous migrants
 - Lack access to knowledge and income
 - Do not expect intensification to pay off due to low quality seedlings
 - Motivated by land as the asset rather than income from oil palm

Question 2: How does RSPO certification affect these decisions?

- RSPO Training helped smallholders working towards certification increase yield quality
- RSPO focused on plasma farmers so did not affect expansion into forests because there were none near by and/ or they preferred to expand into agricultural land
- Spontaneous migrants that expanded into peat or forest had not heard of, were not interested in, or could not pursue certification because of land titles issues and seedling quality
- **RSPO is having limited impact in the most vulnerable areas**



Conclusions

- Motivations for expansion and intensification strategies were linked to farmer circumstances
- RSPO certification has some positive impact on intensification in plasma lands through training
- There is no evidence that RSPO is influencing any parallel reduction in expansion.
- Limited mill capacity is likely to be a major cause of any shift from expansion to intensification by encouraging production of higher quality fruit.
- The RSPO is having negligible impact in the most vulnerable areas



Recommendations

- RSPO should focus more on improving its reach to smallholders operating in vulnerable frontier lands
- We should prioritise measures and policies which assist non-plasma smallholders to gain formal land titles and access to quality seedlings
- And develop incentives and opportunities for improving livelihoods through intensifying production as a more compelling alternative to clearing natural forests and peatlands

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Petra Reitberg who conducted initial scoping surveys, and to all the community members who participated in the study

Anissa's masters study was supported financially by an LPDP Scholarship (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education)



Photo credits: Annisa Maghfira
Background photo: SEARRP