TFA 2020 Action Plan on Oil Palm Development in Africa

The Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 (TFA 2020) is a Public Private Partnership which has as its principal goal to reduce tropical deforestation across the globe. Its focus is on agricultural commodities like palm oil, soy, paper and beef products which drive over 50% of such deforestation. Members of the TFA 2020 include the 400 companies of the Consumer Goods Forum (including Walmart, Tesco, Nestle, Unilever and Colgate), the governments of the Indonesia, Liberia, Netherlands, Norway, UK and USA and a growing number of environmental and social NGO's. For more information see **www.tfa2020.com.**

The initial focus of the TFA 2020's activities has been Southeast Asia and the Amazon basin, regions which have had high rates of deforestation over the last three decades. The group would now like to turn its attention to forested countries in Africa where historical deforestation rates have been low but where, more recently, major palm oil companies have begun processes to secure land or have already established plantations on a large scale.

The palm oil industry, both producers and purchasers, would like to learn from experience in Indonesia and Malaysia – building on the successes but also avoiding the mistakes. Accordingly they are proposing to work together with governments and civil society in west and central Africa to agree on a set of principles to govern how palm oil will be produced in the region in the coming decades.

Our vision is a prosperous palm oil industry which brings jobs and wealth to local communities but which is environmentally and socially sustainable and protects the rich tropical forests of the region.

The goal of the initiative is to develop a framework that takes account of the ambitious development plans of countries in Africa, while addressing both environmental targets for reduced deforestation, land use and greenhouse gases, and also social indicators on issues such as land tenure and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Current context of palm oil in Africa

The oil palm originates from west and central Africa and has been grown there for centuries, but large-scale commercial production was pioneered in Southeast Asia (which still produces 90% of the total) and is relatively recent in Africa. However, it is now expanding rapidly across many countries in the Congo Basin and West Africa.

In response to this growth many actors have begun to engage in discussion about the potential social and environmental impacts of the palm oil sector and how to manage them. A variety of initiatives have emerged which are helping to support responsible oil palm development and production that:

- Exclude **primary forest** from clearance
- Maintain or enhance **high conservation value (HCV)** areas
- **Minimise greenhouse gas emissions** from deforestation or clearance of areas with high carbon stocks
- Avoid and protect **peat areas and fragile soils**
- **Recognise land rights** and appropriately consults with and **obtain the consent** of local people regarding activities on affected land.

Responsible companies are already employing these practices.

However, many questions and challenges remain. For example:

- There are a number of important requirements such as **land-use planning** and **clarifying land-tenure** which cannot be led by companies but are an essential component of the 'enabling environment' needed to implement responsible production effectively
- Improved **governance and legal compliance** is a very important tool to ensure better practice across the sector as a whole and not just among leading companies
- The goal of 'reducing deforestation' in a region where **not all countries have a history of high deforestation rates** and where there is an urgent imperative to support basic human development, needs to be further discussed and clarified
- There are limited resources to **help smallholder farmers** in the sector improve their yields and profitability
- There is no strategy to **rehabilitate old and abandoned palm oil plantations**
- There is a **chronic lack of capacity** within companies, governments, NGOs, communities and consultancies which limits the ability of all actors to implement sustainable approaches effectively.

Therefore an initiative which brings together the TFA 2020 partners with their different focus, skills and approaches may be exactly what is needed to **transition the oil palm sector to a sustainable driver of long-term,** low-carbon development in the region.

Proposed objectives

The proposed objectives of the initiative will be:

1. To build a partnership between governments and private sector, supported by civil society, to agree and implement a set of **principles for responsible practice** across the whole palm oil sector in the region, particularly for expansion. This will build on existing national and international initiatives and legal frameworks and include a locally-adapted approach to 'reduced deforestation';
2. To support governments and civil society in developing the **enabling conditions** required, in particular land-use planning, clarification of tenure rights and capacity building;
3. To support leading **companies in implementing sustainable practices** to provide a benchmark for further improvement of the sector;
4. To support **improved smallholder production and livelihoods** through both direct support from companies and through existing multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Next steps

The approach for achieving the objectives will be to:

1. Establish agreement between leading companies and governments in the region to take the initiative forward;
2. Invite participation by all interested governments, companies, smallholder groups and civil society organisations in the region;
3. Identify the key stakeholder groups and to map current and planned activities related to oil palm in the region so that TFA 2020 can build on what is already happening while also highlighting gaps where additional activities may be needed;
4. Develop and build consensus on a commitment to principles of responsible practices for the palm oil sector together with a roadmap describing how different actors will contribute to its implementation;
5. Convene a high-level event where leading companies and governments supported by civil society organisations sign up to the accord/ commitment and roadmap;
6. Develop an implementation programme for the region and for signatory countries which draws on the strengths and commitments of different TFA 2020 partners and other local partners;
7. Support implementation, which is likely to include activities such as monitoring progress and meeting annually to report, discuss and share experience.

As a first step to begin the development of the initiative, Unilever, on behalf of the CGF companies, has contacted governments of Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria to invite their participation. All other palm oil producing countries would also be welcome to join. A planning meeting between representatives of companies and governments is being planned to allow discussions about how the initiative will develop towards the planned high-level event.

TFA 2020 Partners have asked Proforest, based on their wide experience in the sector and region, to facilitate the further development of the initiative, supported by the TFA 2020 Secretariat and overseen by a steering group made up of TFA 2020 partner organisations. Anyone interested in further information or participating in the initiative should contact Proforest or the secretariat.

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