Towards Sustainable Palm Oil in Africa

Blog by: Ellen Griffiths, Proforest

The Tropical Forest Alliance Africa Palm Oil Initiative’s (APOCH) vision is a prosperous palm oil industry which brings jobs and wealth to local communities in a way that is environmentally and socially sustainable and protects the rich tropical forests of the region. The Initiative seeks to achieve this through the development and implementation of national and regional principles for responsible oil palm development that take into account the ambitious development plans of countries in Africa, while addressing environmental targets for reduced deforestation, land use and greenhouse gases, and social indicators on issues such as land tenure and the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Initiative brings together partners from ten palm-oil producing countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria (Nigeria is not an APOI member at a national level, but Edo State is at a jurisdictional level.), Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. The APOI is a collaboration between African governments, African NGOs and the private sector where stakeholders from governments, companies, civil society and indigenous and community groups work at both national and regional levels. The Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) is the Tropical Forest Alliance’s (TFA) first Signature Initiative coordinated by Proforest on behalf of TFA in partnership with a range of regional and national institutions.
The jurisdictional approach in action

Jurisdictional approaches bring stakeholders in a particular region together to agree goals and align their activities (e.g. enforcement mechanisms, monitoring and verification systems). This approach, and the partnerships it brings about, aim to ensure that efforts to develop sustainable commodity production and sourcing take a holistic approach. This in turn can lead to incentives for transformation at wider scales, and improve the long-term governance of all commodities within a landscape or region.

No one can tackle this problem on their own: it requires agreement on what needs to be done, and who should play each role. This is what we have achieved. It was a difficult process, but a rewarding one…and we are now energised to do more on the ground

Abraham Baffoe, Africa Regional Director, Proforest

The jurisdictional approach is already yielding results. For example, country teams have participated in two dialogues aimed at sharing results from a landscape initiative. One of these was the TFA 4th Regional Workshop, an event organised in close collaboration with the Cocoa and Forests Initiative (which brings together 35 cocoa and chocolate companies committed to ending deforestation and forest degradation in the global cocoa supply chain). Its members were able to learn lessons from the APOI, which will now be applied to their own activities.
Despite the enormous differences between these countries, in geography, culture, politics and language, the APOI successfully forged alliances between them and realised major achievements such as the Marrakesh Declaration, a governmental commitment to sustainable palm oil production across the region.

Economic advancement for smallholders

“Palm oil production is one way that smallholders are bringing themselves and their families out of poverty across the region,” says Afua Prempeh of Proforest in Ghana. “The APOI isn’t about stopping palm oil production; it’s about producing it responsibly, in ways which benefit smallholders by increasing yields without encouraging deforestation, while protecting the region’s vital High Conservation Values and High Carbon Stock forests and other ecosystems.”

An example of the benefits to smallholders can be seen in this video showing ‘Marigold’s Story’ – how best management practice training helped her, and how she passes on that knowledge to the farmers who use her oil palm plant nursery –

The APOI was also able to link to global companies in the palm oil supply chain through the Consumer Goods Forum, which had committed to reducing deforestation by half by 2020 but needed to act on this. The APOI has provided a channel for companies to implement their commitments.

What’s next?

The APOI has seen many significant achievements but still requires further efforts to achieve real change on the ground. The next step is to consolidate the progress made and ensure that the APOI’s vision – a prosperous palm oil industry that truly protects the remaining tropical forests of West and Central Africa – is fully delivered.

The full report is available online: www.proforest.net/APOIimpactreport
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