

Community mapping for responsible palm oil

Recommendations related to the EU RED

Expansion of oil palm plantations often violates local people's land rights. This has already resulted in thousands of conflicts between communities and companies. For responsible palm oil production, the EU RED should demand that companies facilitate communities to document their land boundaries before plantation establishment. This can be done through community mapping.

Recommendations

- Biodiesel from oil palm cannot be counted against the blending targets of the EU RED as long as the land is not mapped at the local level. Community mapping should involve the establishment of the village boundaries (without remaining land disputes), the communal land rights and the type of vegetation and land uses.
- The EU RED is recommended to benchmark with and adhere to the revised RSPO Principles & Criteria.
- Companies should be required to prove that community maps have been used for proper site identification and internal zoning of plantations, to allow for local food crop production and biodiversity preservation.
- Each palm oil company should be required to put the land deal they made with farmers in an outgrower arrangement on paper, including a map of their land and their rights, and to give it to the owners when establishing the plantation.
- In order to deal with the macro issues of biofuel production, the European Commission should (i) include spatial planning in the bilateral agreements with producing countries in accordance with RED Article 18, par. 4 on verification of compliance, (ii) include spatial planning and land-use rights in the Renewable Energy Progress Report in relation to ILUC and biodiversity in producing countries (Article 23, par. 5b and f), and (iii) include spatial planning as a compulsory instrument in the

methodology for dealing with ILUC (par. 85).

The need for proper planning

In many palm oil producing countries customary village boundaries are rarely documented on official maps. Consequently, government authorities may lease lands that are used by local people to oil palm companies. This has led to conflicts between companies and communities, sometimes even violent ones. Only if plantations are properly planned, taking account of local stakeholders interests and local land claims, such conflicts can be prevented. Spatial planning is also crucial to ensure a balanced rural landscape, with space for the production of local food crops such as rice and fruit trees, and a healthy environment.

What is community mapping?

Over the past two decades, in response to unclear land rights and associated conflicts, NGOs and independent experts have assisted hundreds of communities to map their village boundaries through a process of community mapping. This essentially means that villagers create a detailed and accurate cartographic map of their village or customary territory. Together they document the land boundaries and land uses, using simple Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and Geographical Information System (GIS) software. The boundaries between villages are established in consultation with neighbouring communities. The map is based on local people's own concepts and understanding of land use and land claims. Community maps enable local people to communicate their perceptions

of land rights and resource management systems with the government and other actors.

Community maps to prevent conflicts

In Indonesia, a district government can grant a temporary plantation permit to a company. The company then starts negotiations with communities located in the concession area and will look for a deal that involves local farmers in an outgrower scheme. When a deal is made, the company will map the lands and often starts planting immediately. While doing so, it is not uncommon for companies to appropriate lands of neighbouring communities that did not give their consent. Moreover, families involved in the outgrower scheme often do not receive their land rights on paper. This results in conflicts – both between communities and the company as well as among communities. When communities map the lands themselves and solve border disputes between them, such conflicts can be avoided. Before plantation establishment, companies should therefore support communities located within the concession area to document the boundaries of their lands and land uses. Only then communities can negotiate on an equal footing, and give their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Community mapping can thus help improve plantation planning by companies, which will eventually benefit both companies and farmers. Community maps also help empower local communities in negotiating deals with oil palm companies.

Implications for the EU RED

According to Article 17 of the European Union Renewable Energy Directive (EU RED) an oil palm plantation established on village lands after January 2008 cannot be regarded as sustainable unless the land is properly mapped and the type of vegetation established (par.17.3). For this, community mapping is the most appropriate tool.

In order to deal with the macro issues of biofuel production and indirect land-use changes (ILUC) caused by the expansion

of oil palm plantations (par. 85), proper spatial planning is pivotal. Various RED articles require that the European Commission provides more attention to macro and local level spatial planning (Art. 18.4 on verification of compliance by including spatial planning in the bilateral agreements with producing countries; Article 23.5b and f on the Renewable Energy Progress Report in relation to ILUC and biodiversity in producing countries; par. 85 on spatial planning as a compulsory instrument in the methodology for dealing with ILUC).

The use of community maps to demarcate areas that are used for local food production is important in this regard. It will help develop a balanced regional spatial plan, which takes local food security and customary land use rights into account.

Further reading

- Momberg, F., Atok, K. and Sirait, M. 1996. Drawing on Local Knowledge: A Community Mapping Training Manual. WWF-Indonesia Programme.
- Sirait, M. 2009. Indigenous Peoples and Oil Palm Plantation Expansion in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Universiteit van Amsterdam and Cordaid Memisa.
- Kusters, K. et al. 2013. Formalising participatory land-use planning – Experiences from Sanggau District, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Both ENDS. www.bothends.nl/nl/Publicaties

Film: 'Mapping our future'

(<https://vimeo.com/61715444>)

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