

TRIALLING THE HCV APPROACH FOR SMALLHOLDERS

Progress update | November 2015

Oil-palm farmers on three continents have been trialling the HCV smallholder approach this year. The approach has been specially designed for smallholders to identify High Conservation Values where they farm and to agree on a plan for monitoring and protection.

It has become an important requirement of certification schemes like RSPO and of buyers' responsible sourcing policies for growers to manage the six types of HCVs. But HCV assessments that follow the traditional approach are long and complex, and the process can be too costly for smallholders to undertake. Therefore SHARP and the HCV Resource Network have developed a simplified HCV approach for smallholders for use in low- or medium-risk landscapes.

The approach uses cost-effective yet robust methods which are suited to smallholders' needs and capacities. There are four main steps: scoping; preparation; dialogue; and verification and monitoring. First, a desk-based screening of forest, peat soil and other data takes place to confirm that the smallholder production landscape is not high risk for HCVs. This covers HCV 2. Then a Group Manager takes over to lead smallholders

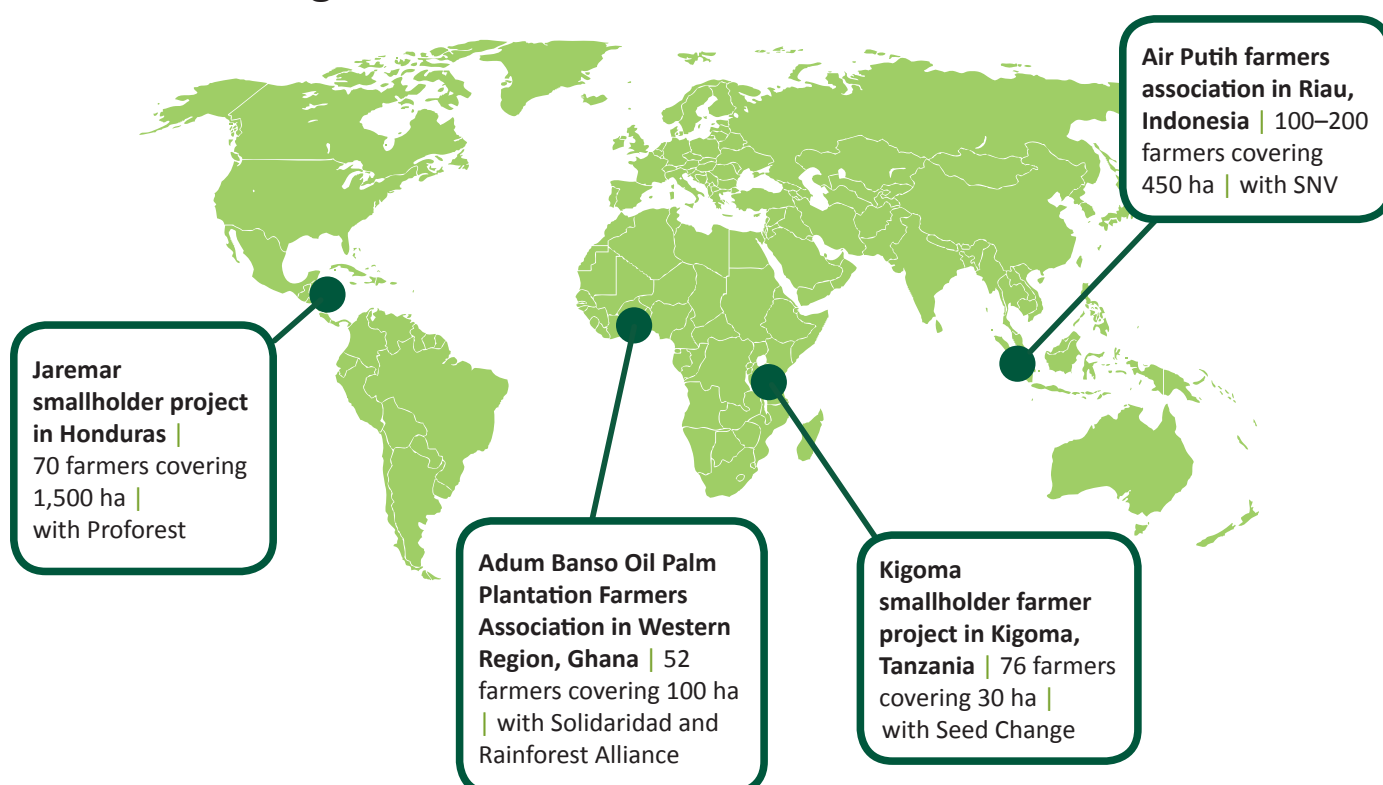


Image: Daniel Arancibia

and local communities through a participatory assessment and planning process for the remaining five HCVs. Via a series of workshops, the aim is to develop a set of production and land management practices, with provisions for monitoring and review. The involvement of a partner such as an NGO or palm oil company may be needed to add capacity and technical support.

The approach was endorsed for controlled field testing by RSPO in February 2015. The process is overseen by a taskforce with representatives from the RSPO working groups on smallholders and on biodiversity and HCV.

The field-testing sites



Tanzania site report



Image: Seed Change

RSPO and HCV are foreign concepts in western Tanzania so field testing of the HCV smallholder approach among farmers in Kigoma Region has involved a significant amount of awareness-raising. The trial is led by the NGO Seed Change, which is working with a group of independent oil-palm smallholders.

Beatrice Fuchs of Seed Change reports that the approach has been well received by both farmers and local government officials. Farmers have readily engaged with the Group Manager and contributed indigenous ecological knowledge.

Villagers participating in the workshops focused on their need to keep water sources clean and keep food and other basic resources intact. Identifying HCV species was challenging as lists of threatened animals in the region are not easily available and some work was needed to persuade farmers of their importance. “Our workshop series focused heavily on the direct benefits farmers receive from correct environmental management practices,” Beatrice reports.

With a set of precautionary practices agreed for managing the identified HCVs, the trial is at the verification stage. The Group Manager conducts frequent farm visits and participating smallholder have begun a self-verification process, with monthly check-in meetings planned. Seed Change plan to expand the training series to all of the farmers and villages where they work in the near future.

Early lessons from the trials

- The stakeholder workshops are vital for refining information on probable local HCVs.
- Visual materials help with identifying species and explaining the HCV concept at the workshops.
- There may be a range of capacity needs for various stages of the process, depending on the nature of the organisations involved.
- Coordination between the Group Manager, support staff and stakeholder organisations is key.

Indonesia site report

Unlike in Tanzania, the Indonesian field test is taking place in a context where awareness of RSPO is high and farmers’ familiarity with HCVs is growing. In Sumatra’s Riau Province, a group of independent smallholders approached SHARP’s regional focal point, SNV to support them in the process of attaining RSPO group certification.

Asosiasi Anugrah, a farmers’ association in Air Putih village, supplies nearby RSPO-certified palm oil mills. Aiming to bring their practices up to RSPO standard, around 100 smallholders have begun a trial of the HCV approach. WWF is a key stakeholder in the process, having been involved in operations to maintain wildlife populations of Sumatran elephant and tigers in and around Tesso Nilo National Park, which lies just a few kilometres from Air Putih.

A desk-based geospatial risk assessment indicated that the smallholder plots themselves are not sited in a location where risks to HCVs are high. The trial has now advanced beyond this first level of risk assessment to facilitate dialogue in the field. Farmers are assessing for themselves the probable presence of different HCVs in the landscape. They are also considering precautionary practices to maintain these HCVs. A table of recommended practices has been drawn up with a view to adoption by the association. This includes steps for monitoring and future evaluation of any change in HCVs. The process in the field is led by a Group Manager recruited by the farmers’ association from a local cooperative. Technical support from SNV has proved critical here. It is very challenging for a Group Manager appointed from amongst the farmers to manage even this simplified HCV approach. This is useful learning as HCV RN and SHARP work to refine and adapt this approach.



Image: SNV

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