

TFA Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) Regional Workshop

12 May 2021 Meeting Summary

INTRODUCTION

Opening speakers Abraham Baffoe (Africa Group Director, Proforest), Justin Adams (TFA Director), and Sabali Meschi (TFA Africa Leader) kicked off the TFA Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) Regional Workshop with welcoming remarks and framing comments for the day. They provided messages on the background and accomplishments of TFA APOI, the importance of smallholder farmers in the region, and the intersections of food production, environmental protection, and rural development that contributes to robust livelihoods. The workshop was framed as an opportunity for everyone to share experiences, successes, lessons learned, and look to the future towards strengthening the investment case for Africa's agricultural sector as an engine for sustainable growth. The objectives were:

- Share progress, experiences, challenges, and lessons learned on the implementation of national action plans, and the legalization and/or institutionalization of national platforms in each country.
- Connect the APOI regional network to promote alignment and coordination of activities to mobilize collective action, strengthen the role of the national platforms, and ensure positive outcomes and impact in current and future phases of the APOI by outlining key short- and longer-term goals and milestones, including going *beyond* legalization and institutionalization of the national platforms.
- Learn about the design and implementation of successful smallholder-focused projects and schemes from a cross-sector perspective to inform discussions on Day 2.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER HONORABLE ROBERT K. FAGANS SR.

Keynote speaker Honorable Robert K. Fagans Sr., Deputy Minister for Planning and Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Liberia shared his reflections on institutionalizing the APOI Platform in Liberia.

The current institutional home of Liberia's National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL) is the Ministry of Agriculture, where stakeholders are engaged in an ongoing process to formalize NOPPOL into an existing government structure backed by legislation. This institutional foundation will enable its support in implementing and monitoring all national initiatives in the sector, including the TFA APOI national principles and actions. The draft legislation will be presented to parliament for passage into law and cabinet endorsement, ensuring the independence of NOPPOL and providing opportunities for active multi-stakeholder dialogue and participation.

The Deputy Minister also highlighted challenges facing sustainable palm oil development in Liberia. Specifically, he underlined complexities surrounding Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes and land rights; lack of financing for development of outgrower programs; ambiguity around environmental restrictions on land conversion; and financial sustainability. However, he is confident that with future support, the country will be able to deliver on the government's commitment to sustainable palm oil development in Liberia.

APOI NATIONAL PLATFORM UPDATES AND COUNTRY BREAKOUT GROUP REPORT-OUTS

Each country shared brief updates on their successes, challenges, and opportunities in terms of institutionalizing or legalizing their TFA APOI national platforms. Following the presentations, country teams met in small groups to discuss the steps they need to take to ensure their platform is sustained over the long-term; how the platform leads in proactively identifying and implementing investment and partnership opportunities to sustainably develop the oil palm sector in their country or state; and what key in-country stakeholders need to be engaged to seize those opportunities. Each country shared brief report-outs on their small group discussions. The platforms shared many of these key priorities.

Key Priorities

- ✓ Sustainability
- ✓ Build on Existing Processes
- ✓ Effective Communication
- ✓ Mobilize Resources (Human & Financial)
- ✓ Create Investible Projects
- ✓ Engage Private Sector
- ✓ Technical Capacity
- ✓ Fundraising Training
- ✓ Increase Govt Support
- ✓ Better Planting Inputs
- ✓ Consult Key Stakeholders (incl. Rural Communities)
- ✓ Raise Awareness of Platform
- ✓ Cross-sector Collaboration, Partnership
- ✓ Land Security & Rights
- ✓ Inter-professionalization
- ✓ Follow Best Practices
- ✓ Create Incentives (e.g., Increase Market Access)
- ✓ Financing Mechanisms
- ✓ Certification (e.g., RSPO)



CAMEROON

In Cameroon, the RSPO national interpretation process is underway and in the public consultation stage. The national palm oil strategy draft is being finalized in preparation for the national validation workshop. Likewise, Proforest, WWF, and other stakeholders are currently discussing how to formalize the national platform with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, with an agreement that a multi-commodity platform is needed. Yet lack of government commitment and leadership, and lack of funding, are hindering implementation of the national action plan. The team sees the potential to institutionalize the national platform and operationalize its sustainability plan; support for the establishment of a consultation framework for various stakeholders in the sector to ensure its sustainability and viability; and contribute to finalizing and popularizing the zoning plan being developed by the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) for better appropriation by stakeholders.

Cameroon's small group discussion focused on key priorities for anchoring the platform to existing national and regional strategies/processes underway; empowering and formalizing the platform through an effective communication strategy; mobilizing financial and human resources; creating or identifying bankable projects; and garnering interest from the private sector. The team noted that the platform is well-positioned to share information with other stakeholders, involve other ministries, and mobilize resources. They highlighted key challenges, including how to overcome reluctance among private sector actors in financing palm oil and establishing credibility of the inter-professional/platform consultation framework that enables all actors to engage. Upon institutionalization, the actors will develop an action plan and will develop bankable projects, so the team views it as fundamental to formalize and operationalize the platform.



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

In CAR, the national platform has been institutionalized; national principles have been created and validated; the national action plan is developed and being implemented; inventory and mapping of small-scale oil palm plantations in southwest CAR has been carried out; and capacity has been built for the national platform members on good practices in oil palm plantations. Primary challenges include lack of sustainable funding for the national platform, lack of motivation of private sector actors, and the absence of initiatives to increase palm oil production for national needs.

Looking forward, key strategies are structuring the sector into producer organizations, processors, and traders; strengthening the technical capacity of the platform through training on fundraising techniques; strengthening the platform's financial capacity to mobilize funding; advocating for increased government support in the implementation of the national platform's action plan; mapping savannahs, degraded forests, and old abandoned plantations for their rehabilitation; and strengthening the capacities of the Institute of Agronomic Research for the production of high-performance plant material.



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

In Côte d'Ivoire, key challenges to the national platform's long-term sustainability include motivation of platform members; financing platform activities; and compliance with commitments to achieve objectives. Key opportunities and next

steps include finalizing and formalizing the platform by the Interprofessional Association of the Oil Palm sector (AIPH) Board of Directors; meeting with all members of the platform; and developing and implementing communication and awareness raising programs at the national level.

The CAR and Côte d'Ivoire country teams were in a small group together. In their discussions, they highlighted opportunities to collaborate with state and private institutions on land rights issues to seek land security for actors in the palm oil sector and to mobilize funds that advance APOI objectives. They also noted that the APOI secretariats should be responsible for identifying and following up with stakeholders not formally part of the platform to explain the APOI objectives and engagement opportunities and benefits.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

In DRC, the national platform key achievements are institutionalizing the platform, implementing the TFA principles for palm oil production, and regaining government commitment to including palm oil production in the national strategy for agricultural recovery. The strategies for long-term sustainability are organizing the inter-professional chain from identification to the organization of producers, transporters, distributors, and final consumers, as well as housing the platform in the technical arm of the Ministry. Challenges include securing government commitment and maintaining sufficient platform funding. Key opportunities include the availability of funding/technical and financial partners and the possibility for the platform to benefit from a budget line on behalf of the DRC's Public Treasury.

In their small group discussion, DRC's country team noted that a key next step to ensure their platform's sustainability will be building inter-professionalization and including different actors (e.g., producers, transporters, consumers, unions) to establish a holistic approach and build understanding of different roles and responsibilities across the sector. They also discussed the need to mobilize rural communities and small producers, in addition to private sector, government, CSOs, international organization, and technical and financial partners.



EDO STATE, NIGERIA

The Edo State platform has various strategies for long-term sustainability, including development of a sustainability plan, convening more virtual meetings to minimize costs, establishing strong systems and processes, and pursuing funding through robust public-private sector collaboration. A key challenge is securing adequate skills to pitch and fundraise for the platform's operations. The platform is implementing its Action Plan, is reducing deforestation, and enhancing the government's political will to tackle deforestation; utilizing a newly created database of smallholders in the state; and institutionalizing the platform, with the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources now serving as the official home of the platform and a focal person appointed by the permanent Secretary of the Ministry.

During their country discussion, the Edo State team noted that the APOI platform needs sustainable funding, potentially by finding other partners and projects at the ministry level that could include APOI initiatives within their budgets. Likewise, the platform must be relevant to the government and private sector and be proactive in attracting more and different investment. To identify and implement opportunities, partnership is key: the private sector should take the lead with government guidance, and

the secretariat could be more inclusive (e.g., combination of NGOs and members) to appeal to stakeholders and nurture a sense of ownership.



GABON

Gabon's country team shared strategies they have identified for institutionalizing the platform, which included advocacy and implementation of a fundraising strategy, financial mobilization of stakeholders, partnerships with international NGOs, and project proposals. Fundraising support for action plan implementation posed the biggest challenge. Updating their national RSPO interpretation and validating their APOI national platform sustainability plan were key successes.

Gabon's country team discussion outlined key next steps to ensure the platform's sustainability, including establishing a clear institutional framework to involve rural communities through the formalization of FPIC and analyzing the compatibility of the legal framework with the sector's development. Likewise, they emphasized that processes of structuring and reorganization must be done in stages in order to ensure success in the long-term. They noted that rural communities and small producers must be mobilized, along with private sector, government, CSOs, international organization, and technical and financial partners.



GHANA

The Ghana platform will not be institutionalized and will remain a multi-stakeholder platform. The team is continuing to partner with key stakeholders to support the operationalization of the Tree Crops Development Authority (TCDA) and looking for further opportunities to partner with ongoing and future initiatives to share lessons from the APOI process to promote sustainable commodity development in Ghana. The platform will continue to work closely with the government to provide technical support in the development and implementation of its regulations for sustainability and gender equity.

Ghana's country team discussed how the platform will monitor management of the Tree Crop Development Authority (TCDA) during their small group discussion. The platform will need to support TCDA by identifying funding, ensuring sustainability is always a top priority, and providing guidance on best practice, innovation, and governance when needed. To proactively identify and implement investment and partnership opportunities, they plan to formalize communication channels, engagement, and contribution to TCDA, including necessary technical support.



LIBERIA

The Liberia team identified primary strategies for long-term sustainability: institutionalizing their national platform; developing and adopting a standard operating procedure/regulatory manual; and partnering with other relevant multi-stakeholder platforms, networks, and working groups. Inadequate funding to remunerate platform secretariat staff, lack of legal backing of the platform, government interference with internal platform management, and governmental staff turnover were identified as key challenges. Opportunities exist in the Government of Liberia's commitment to following international protocols, agreements, and conventions; ensuring free stakeholder participation in

national and international processes through enabling policy environments; and having an existing framework for the platform to implement and coordinate.

In their small group discussion, Liberia's country team discussed the need for the private sector and government to create a stable financing mechanism for smallholder communities and for the private sector to be actively engaged and working with the platform to ensure the implementation of principles. So that the platform is sustainable and independent, the public and private sectors must collaborate to implement the strategy, which relies largely on solid sources of financing. With more financing, the platform needs to look at the possible investments available to help medium and smallholder farmers produce quality products to gain market access (e.g., facilitating RSPO certification, and accessing technology to improve quality production).



REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Republic of Congo national platform has three priority strategies for long-term sustainability including support for the private sector, promotion of sustainable palm oil and its derivatives, and climate-smart agriculture. Key challenges include securing funding for the implementation of the action plan, mapping potential for oil palm development in the savannah and the agricultural cadaster, developing the legal framework on climate-smart agriculture, and getting certification for palm oil products. Opportunities exist in high-level political will for profitable and sustainable agriculture; the diversity of natural resource governance processes; broad interest in sustainable agriculture; growing interest of the private sector to participate in dialogues; and opening the platform to other commodities in the context of promoting climate-smart agriculture. Successes highlighted among others included the APOI platform's institutionalization; creating the platform's sustainability plan; and the completion of consultation meetings.

The Republic of Congo country discussion focused on a principal strategy of creating initiatives for private operators to participate in platform activities to access the market and climate financing. To ensure the platform's sustainability, they discussed mobilizing funding, facilitating market access for the sale of agricultural products, setting up a mechanism to generate revenues to finance the platform's activities, setting up a certification mechanism for agricultural products, opening the platform to other commodities, and pursuing climate-smart agriculture. In terms of investment and partnership opportunities, their goals are to move beyond palm oil to climate-smart agriculture overall; ensuring access to finance for small-scale producers; establishing an advocacy tool for the government to address stakeholder needs; and supporting small-scale producers in selling their products (e.g., through certification, product access, and credit).



SIERRA LEONE

Successes achieved in Sierra Leone include training and capacity-building; collaboration and engagement with palm oil companies; and platform engagement with palm oil companies for better integration of standards into their work. Their key strategies for long-term sustainability of the national platform including developing a sustainability plan, convening meetings with development partners and stakeholders to identify potential funding sources for platform sustainability; receiving government declaration and support for the Platform; and registering TFA APOI SL with the corporate affairs commission as a national multi-

stakeholder organization. The primary challenge is raising sustainable funds, which prevents hiring full-time staff to manage the platform.

Sierra Leone's country team identified two key steps during their small group discussion: getting the platform legalized and institutionalized with the government (potentially via a MOU); and earning government buy-in so they will integrate the APOI concept into their agenda. In terms of engaging key stakeholders, they outlined that finding funding for specific issues (e.g., social issues, work on FPIC); building a social dialogue on robust process for implementation to align government and companies' work; and engaging both government and palm oil producing companies could help them achieve their next steps and capitalize on opportunities.

ENGAGING PALM OIL SMALLHOLDERS – CROSS SECTOR PERSPECTIVES PANEL

Following the country updates, four panelists from across various sectors spoke about their experiences engaging palm oil smallholders. The four panelists included:

- **Samuel Awonnea Avaala, General Manager, Benso Oil Palm Plantation**
- **Victoria Wiafe-Duah, Regional Project Director, West and Central Africa, Partnerships for Forests (P4f)**
- **Prince Joe Okojie, Special Adviser on Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security Programme, Edo State Government, Nigeria**
- **Berta Pesti, Head of Secretariat, Central African Forests Initiative**

Their reflections focused on the following key themes.

COMPANIES' ROLE IN SMALLHOLDER ADOPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL BEST PRACTICES

Companies have a proven business case to work with smallholders and should support smallholders by bringing finance and human capacity to bear to encourage sustainable behaviors. One example highlighted was from the Benso Oil Palm Plantation (BOPP), where company-smallholder relationships are symbiotic with mutual benefits to both parties. Since many companies already have certain corporate social responsibility values – such as sustainability, inclusiveness, and gender equity – programs that empower smallholders fit well with existing strategies.

STRATEGIES FOR ATTRACTING PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT

While many beneficial programs exist in concept, attracting interest and investment for implementation is a challenge many smallholder initiatives face. One successful case study is the Adum Smallholder Oil Palm Plantation Project, which attracted P4F to play a supporting role in its implementation. The project provides economic incentives for smallholders to comply with RSPO requirements and conserve the forest, in addition to mobilizing finance for smallholder development. It has piloted this program in three communities covering 1,400 hectares, with huge potential for scaling. The goal of the program is to establish landscape governance to bring whole landscapes under participatory management, with support to set up community enterprises with incentives for forest conservation during periods where oil palm is not ready for harvest.

P4F has played a role in the project for various reasons. The concept aligns with their core regional strategy: promoting, producing, and restoring business models in the palm oil sector to unlock sustainable investment. The project encompasses communities with high poverty rates and the landscape flanks forest reserves that were under threats from illegal logging and mining — so the initiative had the potential to have high social and environmental impact. Finally, P4F saw a strong partner in the company, given their existing sustainability commitments and principles already emphasizing smallholder engagement. These themes can be used as a model for other programs looking to attract interest and resources for implementation.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING SMALLHOLDERS

Governments can work to better advocate for the interests of smallholders through programming that meets both social and environmental goals. For example, in Edo State, the government has tried to ensure interests of marginalized populations are well-represented and larger palm oil estate developers collaborate with smallholders. Through their Edo State Oil Palm Plantation (ESOPP) program, they have partnered with Proforest to take inventory of forest assets and identify forests for regeneration or reallocation for agricultural use when regeneration is not possible. When deemed for agriculture, the land is allocated to private sector investors to develop palm oil estates, with the condition that some of the land will be earmarked for smallholders.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH THE CENTRAL AFRICAN FORESTS INITIATIVE (CAFI)

The CAFI has many upcoming opportunities relating to smallholder efforts in Central Africa. CAFI has made many commitments in sustainable agriculture, including supporting the implementation of the government's policy in the sustainable development of the agricultural sector, locating agro-industrial plantations in savannah areas, and promoting zero-deforestation agroforestry for farmers' crops in forest areas. They are working on mapping agricultural potential (e.g., in palm oil, cocoa), mapping the agricultural domain, developing zero deforestation agriculture, proposing an independent monitoring system, and developing and improving traceability systems. They are also working on a program on integrated land use planning or multisectoral spatial planning to support the development of sustainable agriculture and green economies in Central Africa.

CONCLUSION

In addition to hearing reflections on the day's conversations from Sabali Meschi of TFA and Abraham Baffoe of Proforest, to close the meeting, Dr. Honoré Tabuna, Commissioner in Charge of the Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development Department for the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) talked about how ECCAS can help the Congo Basin countries in implementing their action plans and how the APOI platform aligns with their regional interventions and strategies.