

# The Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative Lessons on the transition from the **Africa Palm Oil Initiative**









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# 1. Executive Summary

The transition of the Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) into the Africa Sustainable Commodities (ASCI) Initiative, mandated by 10 African governments at COP26, provides a useful case study in scaling up a multi-stakeholder initiative. This report outlines lessons learned from the APOI process, both from the initial setting up of the initiative and its institutionalisation in the 10 West and Central African countries. It also provides an assessment of where parties now stand and what is needed for the implementation of the full vision of the ASCI. Such lessons might be of use to other initiatives in other geographies as stakeholders work collectively towards the responsible sourcing and production of agricultural commodities, aiming for a global food system which benefits people, nature and climate.

## Key lessons elaborated in this report:

LESSON 1: The need for government leadership and political will

LESSON 2: Creating an enabling environment

LESSON 3: Tailor the approach to each national context

LESSON 4: Building on existing platforms

LESSON 5: Change is constant – adaptation is key

LESSON 6: Facilitation and effective communication are key to building trust and consensus

## Timeline and Progress

2012



Identified the need to bring stakeholders together to ensure sustainability was embedded in production of palm oil in Africa

2014



Inaugural meeting to agree strategy for a multi-stakeholder platform for sustainable palm oil development in Africa

2016



Seven African governments publicly committed to principles of sustainable palm oil development (The Marrakesh Declaration)

2018



Country platforms created for APOI through engaging governments, local communities, civil society and local private sector

2021



Five years of progress since the Marrakesh Declaration shared at CoP26 with commitment to include other commodities

2022



Countries sign the Africa Sustainable Commodities Declaration (ASCI) at CoP27 in Egypt

2030



Full implementation across ten countries and multiple commodities, including palm oil, cocoa, rubber



## 2. Acronyms

AFi	Accountability Framework Initiative
APOI	Africa Palm Oil Initiative
ASCI	Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative
CAFI	Central African Forest Initiative
CFI	Cocoa and Forests Initiative
CoP	United Nations' Conference of the Parties
CGF	Consumer Goods Forum
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
EFI	European Forest Institute
EU	European Union
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HCS	High Carbon Stock
HCV	High Conservation Value
ISU	the former International Sustainability Unit of the (then) Prince of Wales
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
P4F	Partnerships for ForestsTFA – Tropical Forest Alliance of the World Economic Forum
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## 3. Introduction

### 3.1 Aims and objectives

The evolution of the Africa Palm Oil Initiative into the Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative provides a natural pause to consider the lessons learned from the APOI process, as the initiative expands to include other relevant commodities in the ten participating African countries. This gives us a chance to reflect on the successes and challenges experienced as part of APOI, but will also allow us to feed those learnings into the ongoing ASCI process of relationship development between sectors, governments and all stakeholders. This report aims to show how the APOI multi-stakeholder process was undertaken, how it came to develop into the ASCI, and key learnings on success factors that could be used to scale up or improve on current work.



## 4. Context

### 4.1 – What is the APOI?

The APOI was the Tropical Forest Alliance's (TFA) first Signature Initiative coordinated by Proforest, in partnership with a range of regional and national institutions. The APOI's vision was for a prosperous palm oil industry that 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 sought to achieve this through the development and implementation of national and regional principles for responsible palm oil development. These took into account the ambitious development plans of countries in Africa, while also addressing environmental targets for reduced deforestation, land use and greenhouse gases, and social indicators on issues such as land tenure and the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

The Initiative brought together partners from 10 palm oil-producing countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria (originally Edo State under APOI), Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone. The APOI was a collaboration between African governments, African and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector, and saw stakeholders from governments, companies, civil society and indigenous and community groups worked at both national and regional levels.

Since its inception, the APOI has aimed to balance sustainability with economic development to ensure social and environmental concerns were addressed before the industry expanded. This occurred in three main phases:

1. The first step in addressing economic, social and environmental concerns was through a multi-stakeholder process at both national and regional levels to reach a high-level regional agreement about what sustainable palm oil looks like in West and Central Africa. This was realised through a collaborative process that resulted in the Marrakesh Declaration.
2. This shared vision was used as the framework to develop national principles in the 10 countries, based on their own development plans and wider national context.
3. National platforms were established to ensure the coordination at the

national level and success of the implementation phase, during which the APOI focused on developing high-impact partnerships to support the delivery of national action plans, as well as developing joint actions with other commodity supply chains – e.g. cocoa, rubber – in order to push forward the agenda to halt agriculture-driven deforestation in West and Central Africa.

#### **4.2 How did Partnerships for Forests support the APOI?**

APOI is coordinated by Proforest on behalf of the Tropical Forest Alliance, and is funded by P4F, a UK Aid programme. Each of the 10 platforms have been encouraged to seek co-financing throughout the grant period (reported to P4F at regular monitoring points), in order to demonstrate the value of grant funding as a leverage for other government and private sector investment.

The P4F support, which began in November 2016, has enabled the programme in each country to achieve the following;

1. Develop national principles and actions
2. Establish national and state coordinating platforms, and institutionalise the national platforms.
3. Create an enabling environment for the uptake of sustainability requirements
4. Build the knowledge of national stakeholders on sustainability tools and approaches such as the RSPO, FPIC, HCV and HCSA that are important elements of the national principles and actions of all the participating countries.
5. Integrate sustainability tools into national laws and regulations and increased uptake and implementation of RSPO sustainability requirements thereby increasing number of certified palm oil companies and hectareage of certified oil palm plantations in West and Central Africa.

Continuous engagement with governments has resulted in much greater commitments to the responsible development of the palm oil sector across the region. This is beginning to provide tangible outcomes in areas such as smallholder productivity, the adoption and implementation of FPIC compliance requirements in land allocations, the adoption of smallholder inclusion in oil palm development, and the integration of tools and approaches such as FPIC, HCS, HCSA. The APOI has also supported each of its 10 countries to develop sustainability plans that cover ongoing fundraising for the



operational costs of the national platforms, with the aim of each country becoming independently funded, away from the original donor-support model.

At aregional level, the support provided enabled regional meetings that brought together key stakeholders, which led to the Marrakesh Declaration in 2016 and subsequently, the ASCI Regional Declaration in 2022. Building on the concurrent progress at the national level, this allowed the final initiative to be a truly bottom-up approach, adding to its strength and sustainability.

## 5. Stakeholder engagement approaches from APOI to ASCI

### 5.1 Regional- and country-specific engagements

Building consensus at the regional level – the Marrakesh Declaration

At COP22 in Marrakesh, Morocco, seven countries agreed to a joint vision to transform palm oil production in West and Central Africa. This was expressed through a set of shared regional principles – the Tropical Forest Alliance Marrakesh Declaration for Sustainable Development of the Oil Palm Sector in Africa, known as the Marrakesh Declaration, which was signed on 16 November 2016.

Justin Adams, former Executive Director of TFA, noted that, "These countries are at the frontier of palm oil development, accounting for 75% of Africa's forests. Under the Marrakesh Declaration, governments have committed to implementing the Declaration's principles – of sustainability, good governance, partnerships, transparency, recognition of community and human rights – while promoting social benefits for farmers and protecting the region's rich tropical forests. "Negotiating the agreement was a significant achievement; previously, no regional standard for sustainable palm oil production was in place. The Marrakesh Declaration provided a roadmap for APOI countries with a clear message for all stakeholders. While countries determine their own approaches to achieving sustainable palm oil production, the Marrakesh Declaration represented a shared commitment to mitigating the main negative social and environmental impacts.



## A set of shared regional principles

By signing the Marrakesh Declaration, governments confirm that they:

- recognise the shared vision for a prosperous palm oil sector in the region that brings jobs and wealth to local communities, but which is environmentally and socially sustainable and protects Africa's rich tropical forests
- note the importance of the palm oil sector in economic development and in contributing to addressing rural poverty
- recognise the critical role of forests and forest conservation in addressing climate change
- acknowledge the role of agricultural commodity development as a driver of deforestation
- understand the importance of public-private partnerships in sustainable economic development
- are conscious of the need to promote, foster and accelerate the economic and social development of African countries in order to improve the living standards of their peoples and ensure food security and nutrition
- consider the relevant international and regional treaties and conventions that the signatories have ratified, and reaffirm the need to deliver on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Building consensus at the country level

As a first step to begin the development of the initiative at a country level, Unilever, on behalf of Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) companies, contacted the governments of Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria to invite their participation. There were series of engagements in-country at the national level with governments in oil palm producing countries to ensure their active participation and involvement in the process which made them feel welcome and paved the way for other countries to join. In September 2014, a high-level meeting hosted by Unilever and The Prince's Charities International Sustainability Unit (ISU), convened several African governments, business representatives, and donor governments, to explore the possibility of establishing a set of framework principles to govern how sustainable palm oil would be produced in West and Central Africa in the coming decades.

The APOI has formed links to global companies through the CGF, whose members had committed to reducing deforestation by half by 2020 but had not necessarily formulated solid action plans. The initiative then provided a structure companies to fulfil these commitments, which brought buy-in amongst global players in the palm oil supply chain.

The extent of governmental cooperation with the APOI was a major early achievement. "We focused on engaging with high-level African officials right at the start," said Ludovic Miaro III, formerly WWF Regional Palm Oil Program Coordinator, Central Africa.. "Once we had government commitment, it was easier to engage with

other key stakeholders through official establishment of the national palm oil platforms in each of the ten countries."

Joseph Lumumba, former TFA Regional Coordinator for Africa, noted, "The APOI is very good at engaging at the highest level. In African countries, government involvement and policy are very important; the private sector often follows the government's lead before operating."

The Marrakesh Declaration provided the building blocks for sustainable palm oil development in West and Central Africa. The next step was for each country to identify its own needs and priorities, and create a set of tailored national principles for sustainable palm oil development. Due to the considerable efforts of the country teams, all 10 participating countries now have national principles in place (with Nigeria's commitment to ASCI being an extension of the work done by APOI in Edo State). The documents have around 10 principles each, as well as milestones and a timeline.

Once each country had agreed its national principles, the next stage was to host a national workshop at which an action plan was developed to implement these. These national principles and action plans are now being implemented on the ground. In Central African Republic, for example, an inventory of the palm oil sector was conducted as part of the action plan development process. This will act as a reference for future interventions in the sector; before this, the country had little easily available information on the sector.

Country-level stakeholders have also undertaken further implementation activities, outlined in action plans, to ensure that palm oil development meets conservation and land use objectives:

- A land use planning process undertaken in Edo State, Nigeria, will ensure that palm oil expansion only takes place on land designated for agriculture.
- In Gabon, the APOI assisted the government in a series of meetings held to define what 'forest' means. This will support effective land use planning that allows for economic development while meeting conservation objectives.
- Land Rights Law and FPIC in Liberia – The Land Rights Act (2018) gives legal and regulatory backing, ensuring that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is required for all developers and investors on customary land.



- The application of the Republic of the Congo's national principles means that industrial plantations will be oriented towards savannah regions, reducing pressure on forests.

Once the national principles and action plans were agreed, national platforms were put in place and validated by governments. These platforms are the driving force behind the APOI; they have the remit to oversee the implementation of the national action plans and principles, and bring key stakeholders together for dialogue and action.

The national platforms play an invaluable role. From the beginning, we decided to work through them and ensure they included representatives from the private sector, from the government, from civil society. This is essential for continued engagement; if the Ministry of Agriculture is in the team, other people are more likely to listen.

Abraham Baffoe

Rather than duplicate efforts or confuse responsibilities, the APOI sought to build on existing national processes. In countries with existing platforms that played similar roles, such as the National Oil Palm Working Group in Liberia, the APOI worked within these structures. The national platforms also performed a facilitation role, sharing information and updates on what is happening on the ground. Proforest supported them by providing facilitators, selected from its partner organisations (usually an NGO).

Collaborating with diverse groups through the national platforms ensures that all interested groups had their say, helping to build consensus.

### 5.1.1. Process roadmap



Figure 1: The three phases of the APOI process

### 5.1.2 Decision making, transparency and accountability

Palm oil was the APOI's primary focus, but other commodities in the same landscapes and forest zone, such as cocoa and rubber, also drive forest loss. Acknowledging this, the approach used by APOI looked at all commodities and sectors within an area and aimed to identify problems, solutions, and who could find and enact these solutions.

This approach was backed by Abraham Baffoe, who noted, "This is the right scale to address deforestation. For example, palm oil production in Ghana is concentrated in the southwest; this is also where most of the country's remaining forest is found, where rubber is grown, where cocoa is grown. These are competing needs and threats; you cannot just look at palm oil."

Multi-stakeholder initiatives bring stakeholders in a particular region together to agree goals and align their activities (e.g. enforcement mechanisms, monitoring and verification systems). This approach, taken by the APOI, ensured 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.

One example of this approach was seen in country teams participating 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. This two-way exchange saw CFI members were learning lessons from the APOI, which will now be applied to their own activities, and vice versa.

It is through the success of the collaboration between these two commodity sectors that the ministers from the APOI countries decided to extend the remit of APOI to become the Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative in 2022, recognising that impact could only be achieved by working with other commodity sectors and initiatives towards a common goal.

Multi-stakeholder approaches can contribute to responsible commodity production in the following ways:

- They provide a solution to the challenge of implementing commitments (e.g. protecting conservation areas, recognising community rights) that are outside the control of individual producers.
- They can make certification cheaper, more efficient and more inclusive of small producers.
- They offer a platform for public–private partnerships, which can provide support and incentives for change, achieve transformation at scale and improve long-term governance.
- They align broader international sustainability policy efforts with country-level initiatives and partners on the ground.

## 5.2 What does the ASCI seek to do?

The Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative builds and expands upon the Marrakesh Declaration signed in 2016, which aimed to build a prosperous agricultural sector that brings jobs and wealth to local communities in a way that is environmentally and socially sustainable.

At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, signatories of the Marrakesh Declaration met to recognise and share five years of progress, particularly in securing legal frameworks for land rights, private sector commitments on restoration, and investment in smallholders to boost productivity while protecting forests.

Ministers agreed that the issues being addressed in palm oil were similar to those in other commodities, catalysing the transition to the Africa Sustainable Commodities



Initiative to ensure all sectors are aligned to drive positive outcomes for people, nature and climate. Governments have recognised the potential for growth in production of palm oil, cocoa and other agricultural commodities both to meet increasing global demand, and to contribute to food security and better livelihoods for millions of Africans, and the need to deliver this while protecting the continent's forests. The Congo Basin alone can hold 30 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to three years' of global fuel emissions, and its forests are essential for regional climate stability. Diversification of food production also provides resilience and improves each country's food security as well as helping to offset the impact of climate change.

The cross-commodity approach has other advantages for the 10 participating countries, such as synerising responses to demand-side changes, such as the recent EU deforestation regulation.

### **5.2.1 – Signing of ASCI, ministerial comments and country level impacts**

The new declaration was signed at COP27 in 2022, at the Ghana Pavilion, co-hosted with Côte d'Ivoire. The formal welcome was given by the Hon. Jean-Luc Assi, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Côte d'Ivoire. Opening comments were provided by Jack Hurd, Executive Director of the Tropical Forest Alliance, and Lord Zac Goldsmith, UK Government Minister for the International Environment and Climate.

#### **Signatories to the Declaration:**

**Hon. Pierre Hélé,** Minister of Environment, Cameroon

**Hon. Thierry Kamach,** Minister of Environment and, Sustainable Development, Central African Republic

**Hon. Jean-Luc Assi,** Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Côte d'Ivoire

**Hon. Desire M'Zinga Birihanze,** Minister of Agriculture, Democratic Republic of Congo

**Hon. Charles Mve Ellah,** Minister of Food and Agriculture, Gabon

**Hon. Yaw Frimpong Addo,** Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture, Ghana

**Hon. Jeanine M. Cooper,** Minister of Agriculture, Liberia

**Hon. Mohammed Abdullahi,** Minister of Environment, Nigeria

**Hon. Rosalie Matondo,** Minister of the Forest Economy, Republic of Congo

**Hon. Foday M. Jaward,** Minister of Environment, Sierra Leone

## Country level impacts and progress through APOI

### Cameroon

Regulatory framework - Cameroon has embedded the APOI principles into its National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Palm Oil Value Chain (2021-2030) in collaboration with government, private sector companies, producer associations/ co-operatives, and civil society.

Commitment to human rights – The National Plan embodies commitment to principles of gender equality, the rights of smallholders, workers' rights and the rights of local and indigenous communities as well as their livelihoods.

Cross-commodity dialogue – Cameroon is actively seeking investment to finance the sustainable development of palm oil alongside cocoa and rubber sectors, as a single pathway.

Emissions reduction – Key activities include promoting the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+), and committing to the national interpretation of RSPO standard.



Cameroon

### Central African Republic

#### Key milestones and progress through APOI

Smallholders coordination – The Inter-Professional Association will bring together all associations, cooperatives and the private sector to work with smallholders, backed by government commitment.

Technical input from industry – A collaboration between the national platform and Palme d'Or Agribusiness will build capacity on best management practices in oil palm planting, HCV-HCS training.

Long-term sustainability – Set up by the Minister of Agriculture, CAR is focused on forging strategic alliances to ensure it can move beyond the creation of principles and plans to long-term implementation and protection of resources.



Central African Republic

### Côte d'Ivoire

#### Key milestones and progress through APOI

Local community engagement – As part of APOI, the Village Savings and Credit Association was established to ensure representation and engagement at local community level.



Ivory Coast

Tackling issues in the landscape with HCV, HCS, FPIC – Key issues, such as forest and wildlife conservation, gender equality, smallholder training and certification, are tackled through partners at the landscape level. Partners were able to understand the importance of the identification of HCV and HCS and FPIC after the training organised by Proforest funded by IKI in San Pedro.

Zero deforestation – In 2016 Côte d'Ivoire signed a Zero Deforestation Agriculture Agreement with REDD+, endorsed by the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.



### **Democratic Republic of Congo**

#### **Key milestones and progress through APOI**

Supporting smallholders – Commitment to ensure support for smallholder production without the clearing of forests to enable that expansion.

FPIC, HCV and HCS at national level – Greater understanding of importance of FPIC, HCV/HCS in government, and adoption by IPLCs in field activities. Women, marginalised groups and IPLCs actively involved in the national platform and land-use management decisions.



### **Gabon**

#### **Key milestones and progress through APOI**

Increasing deforestation-free production – Training national stakeholders on HCV, HCS and FPIC; and how to implement requirements, so they can benefit from the expansion of oil palm and participate in the market.

Meeting international standards – Complying with international standards such as RSPO, HCV and HCS, Gabon has also made them relevant with the RSPO National Interpretation.

Protecting forest heritage – Gabon's model includes allocating land to integrate HCV and HCS area preservation. Gabon endorsed RSPO as a national norm and adopted a national guideline for oil palm development applicable to other agricultural commodities.

## Ghana

### Key milestones and progress through APOI

Gender mainstreaming – Gender equality and social inclusion have been a real focus to ensure that marginalised groups including women, migrant workers and young people are duly considered in the value chain.

Tree-Crop Development Authority – A new legal entity established to regulate six commodity supply chains – oil palm, coconut, mango, shea, rubber and cashew. TCDA assumes responsibility for APOI.

Farmers at the forefront – Increased investment in schemes by private sector companies to create job opportunities and wealth for smallholder farmers, including training to improve productivity of their farms.



## Liberia

### Key milestones and progress through APOI

**Enabling environment-** The government has launched a National Oil Palm Strategy, with land rights and local communities at the heart of production, development and forest protection. Through National Oil Palm Platform Liberia (NOPPOL) companies, FDA and civil society organisations are aligning in discussing how Liberia could implement the National FPIC Framework.

Legal backing for livelihoods –The Land Rights Act (2018) gives legal and regulatory backing – ensuring Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is required for all developers and investors on customary land.

Value of ecosystems – Communities must be consulted about any use of customary land and should be justly compensated for their ongoing stewardship of valuable ecosystems.

HCV-HCS approaches – Required for impact assessments for land use – this ensures potential investors are aware of all social and environmental risk to the land, nature and the people who rely on it.







## **Nigeria**

### **Key milestones and progress through APOI**

Partnerships - In 2018, Edo State, Nigeria became a partner with TFA, making it the only sub-national partner.

Institutional and regulatory reforms – Establishment of EdoGIS, ESOPP a new Forestry Commission and a Forestry Bill to replace the 1968 Forestry law. Commitment to RSPO certification.

Protection of rights – Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) must be given by Indigenous Peoples and local communities before agricultural development.



Produce, Protect, Rehabilitate (PPR): integration of forest management and oil palm development –Companies must integrate smallholder development into operations, protect forest areas within concessions and provide resources to restore degraded forest equivalent to 10 -25% of land holding.

## **Republic of Congo**

### **Key milestones and progress through APOI**

FPIC national guidance – Alongside training government and partners in FPIC, RoC has developed and validated FPIC national guidance, a major achievement and tool for industry.

Savannah, not forests – Ministerial Order signed to orient palm oil plantations towards savannah regions, thus reducing pressure on forests in the Congo Basin.

Getting smarter on climate – Increased investment in schemes by private sector companies to create job opportunities and wealth for smallholder farmers, including training to improve productivity of their farms.

## Sierra Leone

### Key milestones and progress through APOI

**Land acquisition process** – The APOI platform has been involved in the setup of five alternative livelihoods programmes to reduce dependence on the forest for survival, including beekeeping and aquaculture.

**RSPO endorsement** – The country's RSPO National Interpretation was endorsed in November 2021 following public consultation. All oil producing companies working with smallholders will be guided by this.

**Managing carbon sink** - A large company has integrated FPIC, HCV and HCS into their operational management plans as a result of training delivered. This will help to manage ecosystems, increase forest cover and carbon sink, and increase biodiversity within plantations.



## **5.3 Lessons learned**

### **5.3.1 Lessons learned from the APOI process**

#### **LESSON 1: Government leadership and political will is vital to an initiative of this scale**

Political commitment and consistent governmental support is critical to achieving transformational change across industry. However, an overbearing government presence should be avoided. High-level political commitment creates a favourable working environment that reassures stakeholders. This commitment is manifested, for example, by the effective and regular participation of the focal point (who is always an official of the ministry in charge of agriculture or the environment) in platform meetings. However, an invasive or overbearing governmental presence in the decision-making process can be counterproductive. Such a cumbersome presence is likely to frustrate the other stakeholders and prevent them actively participating.

#### **LESSON 2: Creating an enabling environment**

In the design of the APOI, platforms were constituted at the national and regional levels to facilitate growth, provide learning and sharing opportunities, and allow the possibility of creating an effective model to be replicated and scaled up, as is now the vision for ASCI.

Each year, the APOI convened regional meetings to connect its implementing partners in all 10 countries with stakeholders from around the world. These meetings provided a space to forge connections between the TFA community in West and Central Africa, to build and strengthen public-private partnerships for sustainable palm oil production in the region, and to share experiences and lessons learned from the APOI process for multi-stakeholder commodity platforms around the world.

These meetings attracted representatives from international organisations and initiatives such as UNDP, the European Forest Institute (EFI), the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) and the Accountability Framework Initiative (AFi), as well as regional bodies such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

#### **LESSON 3: Tailor the approach to each national context**

The Africa Palm Oil Initiative was started with a broad vision – a sustainable oil palm sector in Africa. Therefore, the approach was to develop a regional accord or com-

pact that addressed common issues using basic principles,, which could be adopted by governments and private sector and provide a basis for civil society engagement. The APOI process has provided an opportunity to learn the elements required to harness the goodwill and momentum from multi-stakeholder initiatives. Each country is different, so national platforms were institutionalised depending on the country context. Recognising the autonomy and peculiarity of situations in each country, and factoring that into the design of the APOI, has resulted in success for the programme across many countries.

In each country, the APOI facilitation team strived to ensure that all stakeholders, including marginalised group representatives, were engaged and given opportunities to shape the process. It required that each country facilitator was considered to be objective and could play the roles of both convener and moderator, with an understanding of the overall context as well as the local conditions. The APOI approach was to support the countries according to their individual contexts and demands, and as such the structure in each country and its institutionalisation status was different. A consistent feature of each platform was that the focal point role is held by a government representative from the focal ministry. This was to ensure that the APOI process was guided by national processes and policies, while facilitating government buy-in. However, the platforms remained independent and self-governing.

#### **LESSON 4: Building on existing platforms**

Each country team engaged with a wide group of stakeholders to actively participate in the process, most notably for the national workshops. Wherever possible, the country team worked with a relevant existing working group, platform or forum to make the process efficient, to build on existing processes and give it legitimacy. In the case of Liberia, for example, the Oil Palm Sector Technical Working Group was already established in 2009, about six years before the first APOI National Workshop was held. The APOI revived the Oil Palm Sector Technical Working Group, which had been defunct for several years, instead of creating a new platform.

In other countries, the APOI teamed up with existing structures or platforms such as the National REDD+ Technical Committee, the RSPO Working Group, a palm oil development association, or a national climate change taskforce. These groups all represented organisations working towards similar goals from different perspectives – the efforts of which could be harnessed. In each instance, it was important that both the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, were represented in this group.



### **LESSON 5: Change is constant – adaptation is key**

Another factor that has contributed to the success of the APOI process is how, through a participatory approach, national teams employed adaptive management to achieve the desired outcomes. Each platform was assisted by the facilitation team to regularly review its processes and evaluate its progress based on the ultimate goal of reducing deforestation. It reviewed progress on the steps outlined to achieve this goal, and the changes that may have occurred to either positively or negatively influence the implementation of the identified actions. They then adapted the process to mitigate against possible negative outcomes.

This process has ensured that divergent views on the purpose of the platform were identified at an early point, conflicts were resolved, and opportunities to advance the shared vision were identified. The governance process of the platforms – built to foster representation, transparency and mutually agreed contributions – has facilitated collaborations within and beyond the platform to achieve the shared vision.

In addition, high-level political leadership and technical engagement by government are essential during elections or political turnover. Where possible and appropriate, government officials played the lead role in negotiations and implementation in the national action plans, to foster a sense of ownership.

### **LESSON 6: Facilitation and effective communication are key to building trust and consensus**

Skilled facilitation plays a crucial role in the success and longevity of multi-stakeholder platforms. As a multi-tiered, multi-stakeholder initiative, the APOI implementers recognised the need for facilitators at the international, regional and national levels who could create space for dialogue, run effective meetings, and mobilise agreed actions.

Organisers planned facilitation at two levels:

- **Global level:** The Meridian Institute supported and collaborated with Proforest as the implementing partner for APOI, convening and moderating meetings at an international and regional level while supporting in-country facilitators to play this role at a national level.

- **Country level:** Proforest, working in conjunction with government, private sector companies and civil society groups, identified competent country facilitator institutions.

### 5.3.2 What is needed to incorporate other commodities with ASCI

Certain governments had recognised that the principles of the Marrakesh Declaration applied across many other commodities, such as the example of the Tree Crops Development Authority in Ghana.

The statements of progress made at the Marrakesh+5 event at COP26 showed there was political will and momentum in implementing principles of sustainable production, which the 10 countries had already committed to and have begun embedding with commodity actors in their countries. Proforest was given a mandate at COP26 from the governments to revise the Marrakesh Declaration to include other commodities. What is needed now is collaboration and partnership from the international community and private sector, for support in land use planning and sustainable production, through technical expertise and capacity building to sustain the progress that each national platform has made, and to continue engagement with other relevant stakeholders. More specifically and urgently, we would need the following;

1. Investments and partnership is needed to make the shared vision a reality, one that brings jobs and wealth to communities, is environmentally and socially sustainable and protects Africa's rich forest.
2. Build on the momentum to scale implementation based on progress made in implementing principles of responsible production on ground, launch new pilots and continue to share lessons between Europe and Africa.
3. A global and collaborative approach is required to address commodity driven forest and ecosystem conversion which requires action by consumer countries in Europe and beyond, as well as investments and partnership to support action within producer countries.
4. Continue to build the enabling environment to safeguard the livelihoods of millions of farmers throughout the continent, strengthen the sustainability of food supplies from Africa to the rest of the world, protect the remaining areas of Africa's large and diverse tropical forests.

## Conclusion

Many actors with APOI realised that beyond palm oil, within the same landscape, there were other commodities dealing with the same issues, actors and geographies. However, active collaboration and wider multistakeholder activity did, generally, not begin outside the palm oil sector until the APOI received the mandate to transition to ASCI.

To avoid siloed working, or of duplicating efforts in different sectors, it made sense to work together so that each sector is adding value in and increased impact in the production landscape. Sharing this insight at COP27 in Glasgow in 2022 led the 10 countries to recommend this as the model for all commodities in the region – leading to the Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative.

What remains is to strengthen these engagements in a spirit of inclusivity. Partnerships can have varying forms, and be shaped according to needs and existing relationships, provided all parties are working towards common goals – strengthening each country's social and environmental protections, including the voices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and improving food security and livelihoods throughout West and Central Africa. The ASCI is an Africa-led initiative, which can offer valuable lessons to the global stage in multi-stakeholder partnerships, whilst channelling crucial investment into Africa through responsible and sustainable commodity growth models.

## Recommendations

1. Ensure government-level engagement from the start of any process – this is important to secure political will
2. Partnerships and engagement are key, and the time and financial resources this takes should not be underestimated. Funding needs to be secured to ensure national platforms can continue to engage with all relevant sectors, in whatever form is best suited to each country.
3. Neutral facilitation is needed in multi-stakeholder initiatives, and this should be considered a vital investment and costed alongside other running costs.
4. The Regional Meetings have been a crucial vehicle for ensuring consistency and coherence across an initiative spanning 10 countries. They have allowed each country to showcase its achievements, learn lessons from others, share challenges and solutions, and share in a sense of solidarity in working towards a common goal. We should prioritise regular meetings, in person where possible, to continue to build on this.



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