

Regional Dialogue on Oil Palm Development in West Africa

Corina Hotel, Tubman Boulevard, Monrovia – Liberia

November 27 & 28, 2019

Conference Declaration

We, the delegates, from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and our partners from UK attending the Regional Dialogue on Oil Palm Development in West Africa from November 27th and 28th 2019, engaged in experience sharing on community rights, and the role of stakeholders in the context of oil palm plantation development and came to the following conclusions:

1. Some countries in the region are initiating reforms aimed at increasing financial flow through investments, and addressing poor governance and management of natural resources including land and forests;
2. Despite these national efforts aimed at reforms, the acquisition of land by oil palm companies is often characterized by lack of respect for the rights of local communities;
3. Although there has been progress in some countries over the last decade in enacting laws that support community rights, implementation of these laws remain a challenge;
4. Other factors hindering progress in the sector include: inadequate legal framework, limited awareness within communities about their rights and weak law enforcement by national institutions;
5. Although the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil may not be the complete solution for the protection of human rights and the environment, it has been useful tool for some communities in countries where governance is weak;
6. The rights and interests of women and other marginalized people are not fully recognized, respected and protected in land dealings between communities and oil palm companies, and their representation and participation in community decision-making processes are treated poorly;
7. There is high risk to the security and safety of human rights defenders, CSO actors and local community activists, and they operate at the risk of being targeted by company and state securities during the course of their work;
8. Progressive community leaders and local government officials are often victims of reprisals including arbitrary and sometimes unlawful dismissals; and
9. The increasing amount of land being allocated to large-scale mono-culture contribute to climate change, threatens food security, community livelihood, and ecological wellbeing.

We, the delegates, attending this dialogue commit ourselves to act collectively to foster community rights in the region. In this regard the delegates at the conference commit to the following:

1. To establish a sub-regional platform that brings civil society actors from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia under the umbrella of the Mano River Union Platform on Community Rights and Oil Palm Plantation Development that will come together once every year to share experiences and develop joint actions to promote, protect and advance community rights in the sector;
2. Engage with the Africa Community Rights Network to strengthen collaboration among CSOs in the region;
3. To establish channels of communication including emails, WhatsApp and Messenger, for information sharing in real-time and strengthening solidarity,
4. Support community driven smallholder oil palm development that respects community rights, deliver inclusive and sustainable benefits, and maintains ecological integrity; and
5. Civil society organizations should be vigilant in their advocacy for community rights and the environment.

The delegates at the conference call on states, governments and the RSPO to take the following actions:

1. That Community rights should be at the center of natural resource governance and management, especially those related to land lease agreements;
2. Discourage further expansion of large scale mono-culture;
3. Ensure that existing oil palm companies respect the collective rights of customary land owners and users and operate in a way that enables communities to secure benefits from their land resource;
4. Ensure access to information through robust monitoring and reporting of oil palm companies' compliance to national laws and international standards such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil;
5. Ensure that women and other marginalized people have their rights respected including access and equal participation in natural resource management with specific focus on land;