

Challenges of OP Development in Colombia

Colombia is the world's fourth producer of palm oil and the leading producer in the American continent. Colombia faces social, environmental, institutional, and organizational issues different to the ones presented by the main oil palm Asian producers. In fact, some of the Colombian realities are the following: the oil palm industry is based on small and medium oil palm growers; palm plantations are set up without having to cut down high conservation areas, native forests, and protected areas; oil palm is grown within the agricultural frontier in areas that once were used for farming and ranching, and oil palm agro industry generates formal and stable employment, generating more than 133,000 jobs.

Colombia has carried out programs and projects around social and environmental issues, some of them are: Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Palm Cropping in Colombia with an Ecosystem Approach, partly financed by The Global Environment Facility (GEF); CDM Umbrella Project, that seeks to capture methane generated in the productive process of the extraction plants; Inclusive businesses in the oil palm industry; and the implementation of the National Biodiesel Program.

The national oil palm agro industry has been working on accessing to the RSPO certification. The National Interpretation of the Principles and Criteria of Colombia was approved in November 2010; Colombia has one company certified and 5 more are in pre audit process; and at the present moment there are 4 certification bodies and 5 private companies that support and guide all the RSPO certification processes.

Even though the Colombian oil palm sector has been tracing a path in order to be more environmentally and socially sustainable and achieve the RSPO certification, there are some challenges that the sector is facing, such as: Identification and management of High Conservation Value areas – toolkit for Colombia; better planning and zoning tools for the new frontier for oil palm expansion; 3.8% of the total cropping palm areas are facing some litigation issues; language barriers due to the fact that the RSPO official documents are in English and the organizational structure, offices and capacities of the RSPO are located in South East Asia, which is very far and has different conditions than the oil palm sector in Latin America.