



# RSPO GUIDANCE FOR INDEPENDENT SMALLHOLDERS ON MANAGING High Conservation Values (HCVs) IN ESTABLISHED OIL PALM PLANTATION (Criteria 5.2)

## Guidance for Group Managers

Version 2.4, 09 December 2015

## Preamble

*This Precautionary Practices guidance outlines a simplified HCV approach for smallholders. It is applicable for already established plantings addressed by RSPO Criterion 5.2, but not applicable for new plantings addressed by RSPO Criterion 7.3.*

*The approach is based on and unifies previous work on HCV methodologies for smallholders by the Conservation International (CI) and the HCV Resource Network (HCVRN) and the SHARP Programme. In February 2015, both the Biodiversity and HCV and Smallholder RSPO working groups endorsed controlled field testing of a unified, simplified HCV approach that merges elements of the CI and HCVRN/CI methodologies. Trials with partners, coordinated by SHARP and the HCVRN, were conducted at four different sites in Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia and Tanzania. RSPO also has conducted field trials based on the HCV methodologies developed by CI, with partners in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Ghana.*

*A Task Force with members from both RSPO working groups was established in March 2015 to oversee the further development process.*

*The results of the testing were discussed with the Task Force during a webinar end of July, and during a follow up physical meeting in the first week of August in Kuala Lumpur. Input has also been solicited through individual consultation with most members of the Task Force.*

*The Task Force recommended separating smallholder HCV procedures for use in established plantings from such designed for situations of new plantings, and suggested fast tracking the finalisation of procedures for established plantings. The final smallholder procedures for meeting RSPO Criterion 5.2 described in this document were endorsed by the BHCV and SH working groups in November 2015.*

*They will be valid from 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2016.*

# RSPO Guidance for Independent Smallholders on Managing HCVs in Established Oil Palm Plantation (Criteria 5.2) - Guidance for Group Managers

Version 2.4, 09 December 2015

## I. Background

Costs and logistics prohibit smallholders and farmers from getting certified as individuals. To overcome these barriers, RSPO has developed specific procedures for certification of smallholders organised in associations, cooperatives or other groups. Groups may consist of independent smallholders, self-organised or grouped together and supported by NGOs or other third parties.

To get certified, growers must comply with the RSPO Principles and Criteria. Meeting requirements related to the maintenance of High Conservation Values (HCVs) has proven to be particularly challenging. The Precautionary Practices approach outlined in this document forms a set of simplified, yet robust procedures for identification, management and monitoring of potentially affected HCVs, designed to allow group-certified independent smallholders to comply with RSPO Criterion 5.2:

*“The status of rare, threatened or endangered species and other High Conservation Value habitats, if any, that exist in the plantation or that could be affected by plantation or mill management, shall be identified and operations managed to best ensure that they are maintained and/or enhanced”.*

Implementation assumes that an organised smallholder group exists, or that a group is being organised in line with the RSPO requirements for group certification of FFB. Group Managers play a key role in the process, requiring:

- Capacity to operate an effective system for management and decision making,
- Skills to reach out and communicate with group members in speech and writing and to organise training where necessary,
- Capacity to visit group members and monitor their compliance with the RSPO standard.

Since HCV Areas will be found unevenly distributed across of the lands of group members, the costs of management (and in particular the avoidance of land clearance) may fall unevenly on members. Group Managers must work with members to develop agreements about how the costs of management and monitoring are to be shared among members. Groups of independent smallholders implementing the Precautionary Practices approach may apply for assistance from the RSPO Smallholder Development Fund.

The Precautionary Practices approach as outlined in this document applies to groups of independent smallholders. Managers of scheme smallholder groups are required to address Criterion 5.2 through ordinary HCV assessments as part of company/mill responsibility.

## II. Overview

The Precautionary Practices approach is designed for use by smallholders in **low risk** contexts, defined here as all established smallholder holdings where there is no new *clearing of natural vegetation for new plantings*<sup>1</sup>. In such contexts, site-bound HCVs were most likely lost already when the lands were originally converted to cultivation. The scale of operations is also small by definition, and compliance with Precautionary Practices as outlined in this document and other provisions in the RSPO Standard helps to mitigate threats to remaining HCVs. Therefore Precautionary Practices are considered to be applicable without further risk assessment<sup>2</sup>.

Much like more formal HCV assessments, application of Precautionary Practices starts with scoping and identification of potentially present and affected HCVs. The difference is that, instead of verifying the presence or absence of through assessments in the field, values are validated through dialogue with group members. Values that are not conclusively absent are assumed to be present in line with the precautionary principle.

The process consists of three steps:

1. **Scoping** where the Group Manager identifies the landscape containing current and potential future group members, and collects information about smallholder production, capacity, and supply links. Scoping also involves pre-identification of relevant basic ecosystem services, potentially present focal species, and likely threats to these values as a basis for meetings with group members.
2. **Dialogue** where the Group Manager invites groups of smallholders to local meetings in order to inform about identification of HCVs and discuss good practices for how to manage and maintain them. The emphasis is on environmental services and potentially present focal species, and the aim for group members to help identify, validate and agree a common set of Precautionary Practices designed to maintain HCVs where they occur.
3. **Verification** where the Group Manager and group members adopt and operate a system for verification and monitoring of members' compliance with the agreed set of Precautionary Practices as part of the overall internal monitoring of group certificate holders.

### 1. Scoping

#### 1.1 Identify the smallholder landscape

Basic RSPOs group certification procedures require that Group Managers identify the geographical area covered by group members, and list the name, location, holding size and projected FFB production of each group member. These data are also essential for planning of group meetings and other outreach activities related to HCVs, as well as for efficient monitoring. Group Managers are also required to document that all members have land titles and/or rights to use the land. Additional

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<sup>1</sup> New plantings established since November 2005 without prior HCV assessment also need to comply with the RSPO requirements on land use change analysis and procedures for remediation and compensation.

<sup>2</sup> Over and beyond what the RSPO group certification procedures required to identify appropriate intensity of auditing – see section 4.2.

scoping useful for implementing Precautionary Practices include identification of communities that may have use rights or claims that overlap with those of group members. Group Managers are also recommended to identify mills in the area, and key entities and organisations with a legitimate stake in the management of HCVs, e.g. local authorities, Forest Service, Protected Area Rangers and NGOs. Group managers should also familiarise themselves with features and properties of the wider landscape that may affect occurrence, management and maintenance of HCVs, such as Protected Areas and remaining larger tracts of forests and other natural ecosystems.

1.2 Identify basic ecosystem services and resources

Prepare background information and materials for discussions with group members about basic ecosystem services and resources (HCV4-6) potentially affected by smallholder activities.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
a) River or lake water important for drinking / washing / fishing?		
b) Presence of un-drained wetlands or peat areas <sup>3</sup> ?		
c) Presence of steep <sup>4</sup> slope(s)?		
d) Permanent or shifting agriculture important for livelihoods?		
e) Products <sup>5</sup> from forests / grasslands / wetlands important for livelihoods?		
f) Sites or resources of cultural or spiritual importance?		

Use the checklist to pre-identify ecosystem services and resources that may be of value to smallholders (and other people living in the landscape). Prepare to discuss:

- Which of these values are important,
- Why they are important,
- What activities may be threats to these values, and
- What smallholders can do to avoid or mitigate such threats.

1.3 Identify Focal Species

Identify nationally protected and other IUCN Red-listed Rare, Threatened or Endangered species (potential HCVs 1 and 3) that are known to occur in the region. Select from these a subset of 10-15 Focal Species (or groups of related species) that:

- May be found in smallholder oil palm plantations or landscapes with mosaics of oil palm and natural vegetation,
- May be negatively impacted by smallholder activities,

<sup>3</sup> Here the emphasis is on the roles of wetlands in regulating water flow and on reducing eutrophication, siltation etc.  
<sup>4</sup> Should be defined so as to reflect the risk of soil erosion and/or mud-or landslides in the absence of stabilising vegetation.  
<sup>5</sup> Game, fish, nuts, medical plants etc.

- Smallholders are familiar with and know how to identify.

Focal species may be iconic, wide-roaming mammals, birds and reptiles that move through or utilise oil palm plantations as part of a larger landscape. They may also be fish or other aquatic animals that are sensitive to siltation of rivers or leakage of pesticides.

Identify the most likely threats to these species, and potential measures to avoid, minimise or mitigate these threats. Prepare pictures of suggested focal species with common names in the local language.

Focal species / group	Threats
a)	
b)	
c)	
d)	
e)...	

## 2. Dialogue

### 2.1 Invite group members to meetings

Schedule and invite group members to meetings. The objective is that, after these meetings, the smallholders will be aware of RTE species and HCVs that may be present in the area, and agree to implement a defined set of Precautionary Practices designed to maintain HCVs where they occur. The number of participants in each meeting should be limited to 20-25 people in order to encourage active participation. Group Managers may need to convene a series of meetings or workshops with sub-groups of smallholders to reach out to all members. In situations where there are too many smallholders for Group Managers to meet with in person, Group Managers may consider training a subset of Lead Farmers, e.g. one or two from each village, to undertake further outreach.

### 2.2 Raise awareness about certification and High Conservation Values<sup>6</sup>

Before discussing HCVs and measures to maintain them, smallholders need to have a basic understanding of RSPO and the concept of certification. Where this knowledge is not in place, e.g. where implementation of Criterion 5.2 is part of the process to organise smallholders and apply for a group certificate, certification should be the first point on the agenda for the meetings with smallholders. As RSPO certification is still unfamiliar in most regions, particularly outside South East Asia, Group Managers should take care to avoid raising unrealistic expectations of market-generated revenue (price-premiums are unlikely, at least not in the short term), and rather focus on the benefits arising from good practices to the smallholders themselves and to the local environment that they depend on. RSPO has some information materials and presentations that may be of help.

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<sup>6</sup> More information about the HCV concept is available on the HCVRN website <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/>.

Group Managers may need to simplify these materials and adapt them to suit the local context, as well as translate them to the relevant language.

The RSPO Criterion 5.2 requires that oil palm growers maintain any HCVs that may be present on their lands and that they help to maintain these values also in the surrounding landscape. To do so, smallholders need to understand the benefits arising from these values. The content is more important than the packaging, and there is no need to be formalistic or to insist on ‘proper’ terminology. In practise, HCVs for smallholders can be boiled down to:

- Rare and vulnerable animals and plants and their habitats (HCV1,3);
- Clean water, protection of top soil and protection against landslides (HCV4);
- Food and other basic resources from forests and other natural ecosystems (HCV5); and
- Sites and resources of cultural or religious significance (HCV6).

2.3 Discuss basic ecosystem services and resources and how to maintain them

Discuss and validate the basic ecosystem services and resources tentatively identified by the Group Manager (section 1.2) and suggest measures to maintain them. The relative importance of HCVs 5 and 6 varies with the context and system of rights and tenure. In principle, smallholders may be expected to maintain such HCVs 5 and 6 that they value and benefit from out of self-interest – where this is the case there should be no need for further rules.

The following Precautionary Practices (PPs) are designed to maintain HCVs 4 where they occur. There is a large overlap with other requirements of the RSPO standard and with good agricultural practices in general. The formulations are generic and group meeting participants should be encouraged to propose changes, and where necessary add PPs, so that the rules make sense in the local context.

PP.1 No use of pesticides or fertilisers <sup>7</sup> close to (less than 20m from) rivers, ponds and lakes.
PP.2 No dumping of waste or sewage into rivers, ponds or lakes.
PP.3 Maintain vegetation cover close to rivers, ponds and lakes at all times (no bare soil).
PP.4 No draining <sup>8</sup> of natural wetlands or peat areas.
PP.5 Maintain vegetation on steep slopes.
PP.6 Respect the traditional use / access rights of others.

The table contain generic PPs in a condensed, shorthand format. Such ‘do not’ formulations are expected to be a final outcome of the discussions with smallholders rather than a recommended starting point – the intentions behind the PPs are to achieve outcomes that are *positive* for people and nature.

<sup>7</sup> Other than mulch / harvest residues.

<sup>8</sup> While RSPO allows for some peat draining, it seems precautionary not to allow any draining by smallholders, as these would often lack the technology and authority to monitor and maintain water tables levels over time.

## 2.4 Discuss potentially present focal species and measures to maintain them

Discuss the list of potentially present focal species identified in section 1.3 and validate presence of each of them in turn. Have the farmers seen these species or noted their presence in other ways? How rare or common are they? When and where were they last seen? Are there other species that should be on the list? Why protect them? What are the main threats? What can smallholders do to minimise these threats?

Group managers should prepare for these discussions with robust arguments for species protection and conservation. Some species perform functions that are (directly or indirectly) beneficial for humans, such as pollination of crops or predation on rats and other competitors – these are the easy ones to argue for. Others, more ‘neutral’ species may perform important ecosystem functions, but this argument is only valid if a clear case can be made. Sweeping generalisations like ‘ecosystems may collapse like a house of cards if a few species are lost’ are simply not true (the fact is that, due to sheer rarity, very uncommon species usually play insignificant roles in the workings of ecosystems). In such cases it may be better to point to legal obligations, importance for tourism economy, or in the absence of such rationales, a general aim to maintain the national biodiversity legacy. Most difficult may be to argue that species causing loss of livestock, or even posing danger to people, also have a right to exist. Such arguments are unlikely to be persuasive unless concrete measures can be taken to minimise or mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.

Ideally, meeting participants will identify threats to species survival and suggest and agree on measures that can be taken to minimise or mitigate these threats. Compare these suggestions with the generic PPs outlined below and amend or complement these as necessary.

PP.7 Do not hunt or kill focal species.
PP.8 Do not buy, handle or eat bush meat of focal species.
PP.9 Do not collect or trap focal species or use poison that may affect them.
PP.10 Use human-wildlife conflict resolution measures as agreed with Group Manager.
PP.11 Do not block access <sup>9</sup> or mobility of wild animals (beyond necessary fencing of livestock).
PP.12 Do not clear for any new plantings without prior agreement of Group Manager <sup>10</sup> .

## 2.5 Agree a final list of Precautionary Practices

Revisit, consolidate and agree outcome of the meetings, including final lists of focal species, ecosystem services, and agreed Precautionary Practices. For these to be robustly implemented (as indeed any other good practice required for certification!) each and every smallholder needs to know *what* to do, *when* and *why*. Discuss and agree systems for self-verification and monitoring to make sure all group members follow the rules (see further below).

<sup>9</sup> Beyond agreed measures to minimise human-wildlife conflicts.

<sup>10</sup> Such clearing is addressed by RSPO Criterion 7.3 and outside the scope of this document. Though redundant in principle, PP.12 is included here to ensure that smallholders are aware of this restriction.



Whilst Group Manager responsibilities are limited to reach out to and support group certificate holders, the purpose of group certification and the agreed set of Precautionary Practices should also be communicated to other, non-member farmers where feasible. This serves to increase awareness and promote better practices at the landscape level and helps to minimise friction between group members and non-members. Wider outreach may also encourage more farmers to join the group.

### 3. Verification and monitoring

Compliance with Precautionary Practices is evaluated through a combination of simple smallholder self-verification, surveillance audits of compliance by Group Managers, and third party certification body audits.

#### 3.1 Smallholder self-verification

The basic verification component is that smallholders themselves regularly (e.g. monthly or quarterly) tick off compliance with each agreed PP on a checklist provided by the Group Manager (the list may be based on pictures or symbols in cases of low literacy). The checklist should also include a simple template for reporting observations of focal species, and for recording threats to focal species and ecosystem services.

#### 3.2 Surveillance by group managers

Group Managers are responsible for validating the accuracy of smallholders' self-documentation through farm visits. This surveillance program should be part of the Internal Control System required for RSPO group certification and include a protocol for auditing farmers' compliance with the Precautionary Practices.

Group Managers shall identify an initial intensity of auditing based on the risk assessment criteria outlined in the RSPO group certification procedures. Indicators of higher risk – prompting more intensive surveillance – include high proportions of new members, high diversity of group members, high proportions on non-group members in the landscape, competition for supply from non-certified mills, and significant remaining areas of natural vegetation in the landscape. Presence of any of these risk indicators should also trigger documentation and monitoring that each smallholder does not deliver more FFB than matches the area and productivity of the farm (so that produce is not channelled from un-authorized expansion or from farmers who are not members of the group).

Group Managers are recommended to initiate auditing as soon as farmers have started to fill in their self-verification protocols, so that non-conformances can be detected and addressed at an early stage. However, change is a process, and new behaviour may not be established overnight. Thus, initial audits may be considered as opportunities to educate and train non-compliant farmers as well as means of control.

The auditing intensity (sampling frequency) and the focus of the surveillance should be adjusted over time to reflect the observed level of compliance. If there are significant non-conformances, follow up group meetings may be necessary to further explain and remind members of their commitments and

the consequences of persistent non-compliance. Where auditing by Group Managers cause friction that compromises other relations or interactions with group members, audits may be delegated to other competent parties as long as the ultimate responsibility remains with the Group Manager.

### 3.3 Evaluate the results of monitoring and take action where necessary

A basic requisite of good surveillance is quality documentation of the results – this is also necessary to demonstrate effective implementation to certification auditors. However, surveillance and monitoring is only meaningful if the results are regularly evaluated and *measures are taken to address problems identified*. A sign of successful adaptive response is that further surveillance and monitoring demonstrate significant improvement.