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# Guidance Document on the Simplified High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach for Smallholders in the RSPO

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Introduction Document  
(Phases 1 and 2)

Document Title : Guidance Document on the Simplified High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach for Smallholders in the RSPO - Introduction Document (Phases 1 and 2)

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## Preamble

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This document is applicable for:

- Independent smallholders (ISHs) wishing to be certified through the 2019<sup>1</sup> RSPO Independent Smallholder Standard (RISS)
- Groups of smallholders applying the requirements of the 2021 RSPO New Planting Procedure (NPP)

This simplified High Conservation Value (HCV) approach is to be implemented by group managers, with safeguards for extra checks by independent parties in certain situations.

Smallholders in the context of this document refer to farmers growing oil palm, sometimes along with subsistence production of other crops, where the family provides the majority of labour and the farm provides the principal source of income, and where the planted area of oil palm is usually below 50 ha in size.

## Glossary

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<b>Scheme Smallholders</b>	Farmers, landowners or their delegates that do not have the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enforceable decision-making power on the operation of the land and production practices; and/or</li><li>• Freedom to choose how they utilise their lands, type of crops to plant, and how they manage them (whether and how they organise, manage and finance the land).</li></ul>
<b>Independent Smallholders</b>	All smallholder farmers that are not considered to be scheme smallholders [see definition for Scheme Smallholders] are considered independent smallholder farmers.

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<sup>1</sup> The HCV app was previously developed to assist ISH groups in carrying out the HCV assessment for compliance towards the 2013 Principles & Criteria (P&C) HCV requirements. With the adoption of the 2019 RSPO Independent Smallholder Standard (RISS), the HCV app is currently being used as part of the interim measure while the simplified combined HCV-HCS approach is being developed as per the requirements in the 2019 RISS.

## Section 1: Introduction

The RSPO recognises that smallholders face challenges in complying with the Principles and Criteria (P&C) of the RSPO standard, including the RSPO requirements to maintain High Conservation Values (HCVs).

### Box 1: What are HCVs?

The RSPO requires growers to identify, maintain and enhance HCVs in their operations. An HCV is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance.

There are six (6) HCV categories: HCVs 1-3 are biological HCVs focused on biodiversity, species, ecosystems and landscapes (often globally important species and sites). HCVs 4-6 are social HCVs focused on environmental services, natural resources use by communities and cultural values. The latter are most often important at a local level (i.e. critical for livelihoods).

The presence of HCVs 1-3 can be inferred through the presence of good quality, relatively large areas of natural habitats, whilst HCVs 4-6 are identified through participative methods with local communities. For more information about HCVs, see Annex 3 for the 'Introduction to HCVs' visual guide.

Therefore, a **simplified HCV approach** has been developed to help farmers implement these requirements. This approach is also applicable to groups of smallholders applying the requirements of the 2021 RSPO New Planting Procedure (NPP).

The approach recognises that the probabilities of HCVs being present, and impacted on, differ between existing plantings and new plantings.

In existing plantations, natural vegetation has already been cleared for oil palm. Traditional forest use has ceased, and most originally present plants and animals are no longer there. Consequently, the risk of damaging HCVs in established plantings is considered low.

HCVs are more likely to occur in natural habitats, therefore, where such lands are cleared for new plantings of oil palm, risks to HCVs are higher. For new plantings, the risk of damaging HCVs depends on the:

- **Probability of HCV presence:** The more likely that HCVs are present, the higher the risk of negative impacts from planting oil palm on that site. While biological HCVs (1-3) depend on the type, size and quality of natural habitats (e.g. forest) and on the species present at a site, HCVs 4-6 relate to the dependence of local communities on the site for subsistence or cultural identity.
- **Size/scale of expansion:** Large scale oil palm development is likely to have more impact on HCVs than small scale expansion – greater reductions of natural habitat/ecosystems increase the risk of habitat destruction and fragmentation. The rapid loss of natural areas negatively affects the HCVs present<sup>2</sup>

These factors determine which HCV procedure is required for new plantings (explained in more detail in the Phase 3 procedures document).

<sup>2</sup> Intensity is also normally considered in risk assessments but is not explicitly included here because it is assumed that the vast majority of oil palm plantations are uniform, high 'intensity' monoculture plantations.

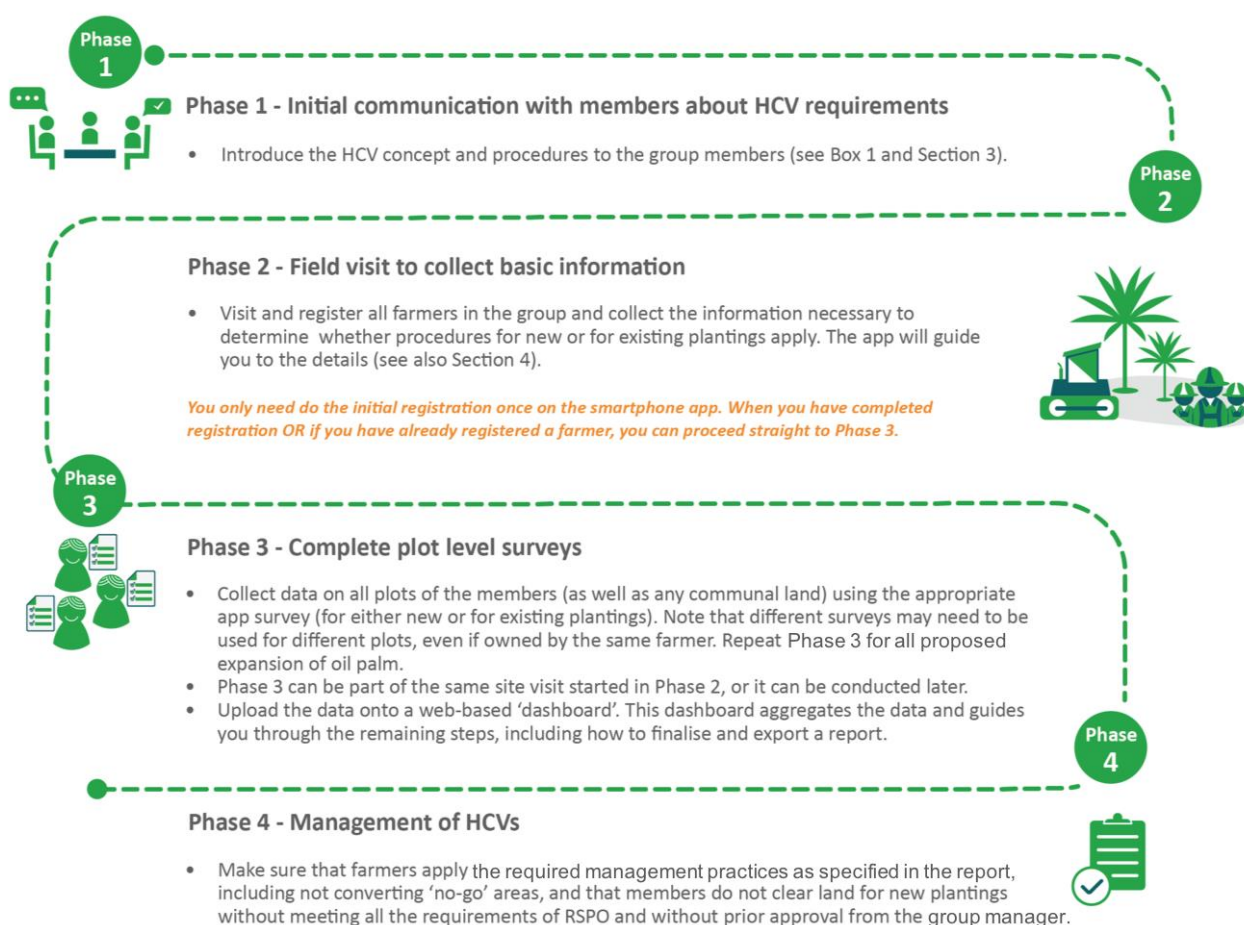
## Section 2: Overview

This document introduces the simplified HCV approach and explains the procedures for new and existing plantings. The approach:

- Uses a specialised HCV for smallholders smartphone app, with web dashboard, to collect and aggregate data on farmer group members and their plots, for both existing plantations and proposed new plantings.
- Is designed to be implemented by the group manager as far as possible, but with the need for mandatory independent review in medium-risk situations, and assessment by an Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS)-licensed assessor in high-risk situations.
- Provides guidance on how to manage and maintain HCVs, and in medium-risk situations, identifies precautionary 'no-go' areas that cannot be developed.
- Serves as a one-stop shop guidance for group managers on how to address the RSPO requirements for HCVs of their group members.

Group managers may delegate specific tasks and responsibilities to lead farmers or other designated representatives, but the group manager (referred to as 'you' in this document) always has overall responsibility. Please note that data collection during Phases 2 and 3 must be carried out by someone other than the farmer whose land is being assessed.

The overall process for smallholders eligible to use the simplified HCV approach consists of four (4) phases:



## Section 3: Where do I start?

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There are four (4) scenarios for when to start the process:

1. You are starting the process of certification as a new group of independent smallholders and this simplified HCV approach is new for all members. In that case, you start with Phase 1.
2. You have new members in a group of independent smallholders. You need to start at Phase 1 for the new members. It is not necessary to repeat this Phase 1 for existing members that have already completed it.
3. You have already completed the HCV approach for all independent smallholder members with existing plantations and they are in the process of getting certified or are already certified. You are conducting the HCV approach only for those farmers of the group who have indicated that they now want to expand with new plantations → start the process at Phase 3, as presented in Figure 1.
4. Groups of smallholders applying the requirements of the 2021 RSPO New Planting Procedure (NPP). You need to start with Phase 1 for new scheme smallholder members.

Figure 1 presents a schematic overview of the four (4) phases and the various steps that form part of the simplified HCV approach. [see next page]



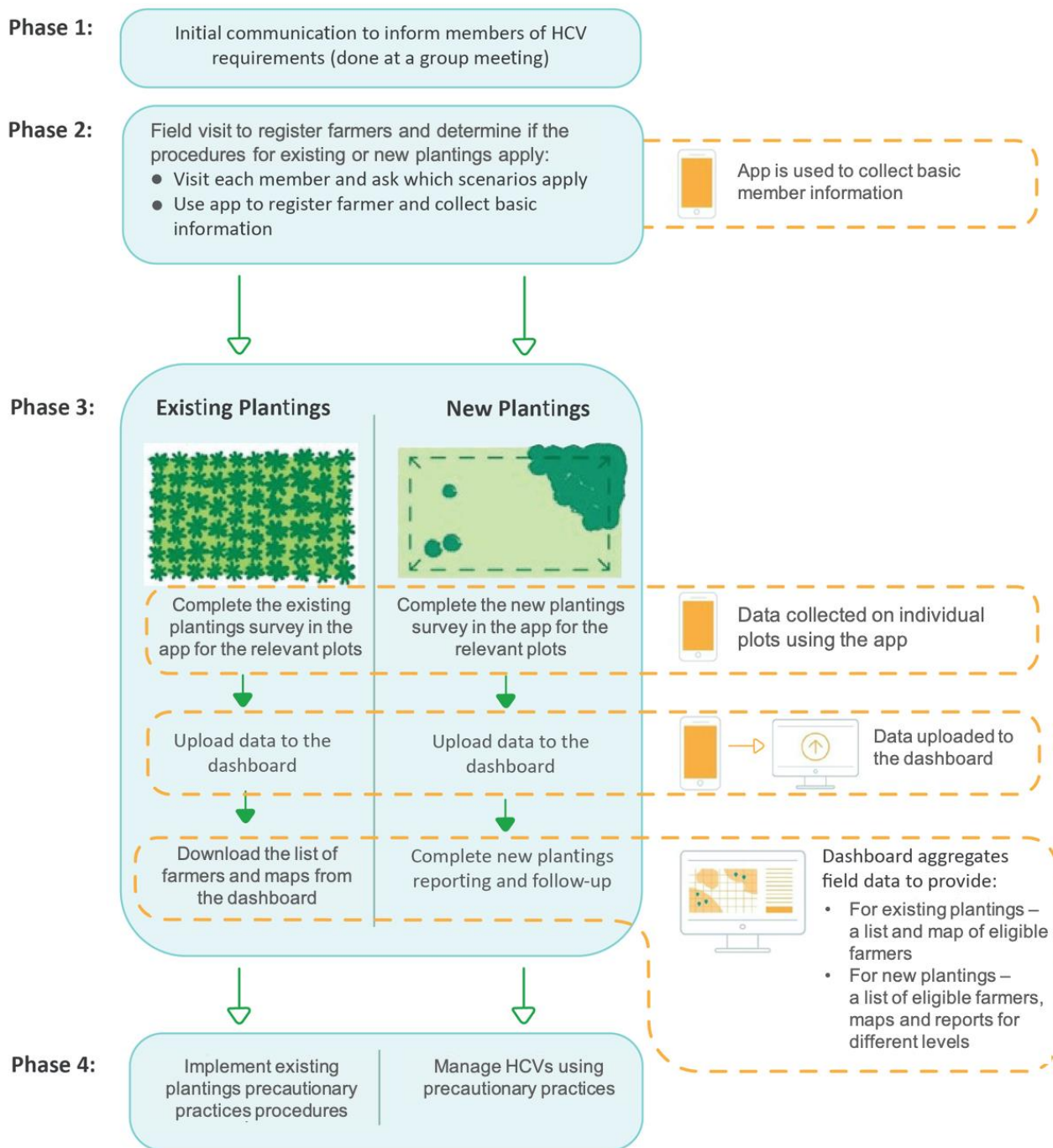


Figure 1 Overview of the structure of the simplified HCV approach and the phases and steps involved

Sections 4 and 5 below provide further guidance on Phases 1 and 2. You can find further guidance on the procedures for Phase 3 in the respective procedure documents for farmers with existing plantations or for farmers that are expanding with new plantings. An overview of the different guidance document is found in Annex 1.

## Section 4: Phase 1 – Initial communication on HCVs

All members of the group need to have a basic understanding of HCVs. The group manager is expected to inform the members of their obligations, and what they need to do to meet the RSPO requirements on HCVs.

The first step is to schedule and invite members to a meeting. The objective is that, after the meeting, group members are:

- aware of what HCVs are, why they are important and how they link to ecosystem services like pollination, clean water and prevention of erosion and landslides. Use visual materials where available (see Annex 3).
- willing to collaborate and provide relevant information on their farms and plots to the group manager and auditors. In particular, members must be aware that:
  - Photos of plots may need to be taken.
  - Any extension of their lands or acquisition of new plots must be declared to you as group manager.
  - Members must consult with you and get your approval before any clearing for new plantings/expansion of oil palm. This includes plantings on former agricultural land (but not renewal of old oil palms).
  - Group members who fail to comply with any of the above obligations risk being expelled from the group.
- engaged and committed to collaborate on identification and long-term management of HCVs.
- informed enough to explain the importance of HCVs to other relevant stakeholders, like non-farmer community members who can help manage and implement precautionary practices.

Meetings should be limited to 20-30 people to encourage active and interactive participation, so you may need to convene a series of meetings or workshops to cover all members. If there are too many members for you to meet in person, you can train a subset of lead farmers (e.g. one or two from each village), to run meetings with different subgroups. Allow time for questions and discussions, and try to address any concerns from members about HCV assessment and management. Keep records of all conducted meetings or one-to-one conversations, and the names of participants. Explain that there will be other meetings about managing HCVs and about what to do if farmers want to clear land for new plantings of oil palm.



### **Tip – Same Person to Lead Communication and Data Collection**

*If you contact your group members to explain and communicate about HCVs, it is recommended that the person leading this communication is also the one in charge of collecting the field data from the same farmers. This is to ensure continuity.*

*As a group manager, you may consider training a group of 'lead farmers'/data collectors.*

## Section 5: Phase 2 - Field visit to collect basic information

After you have communicated the importance of HCVs to your group members, you must visit each member and collect the information necessary for selecting the right HCV procedures. You can use the app to organise and store this information, as well as to collect further data on individual plots (Phase 3). If you don't have access to a smartphone or tablet, see Box 2 on how to collect information using manual methods.

### Box 2: What if you don't have access to a smartphone or tablet?

The simplified HCV approach is easier to follow if you have access to a smartphone or tablet. However, if this is not possible, you can use the 'offline' paper templates, as follows:

- For Phase 2 field visits and farmer registration, use the table provided in Annex 2 of this document.
- For Phases 3 and 4 for new plantings, use the table provided in Annex 2 of the Phase 3-4 manual.

### Preparation for site visits – download the app

To set up the app:

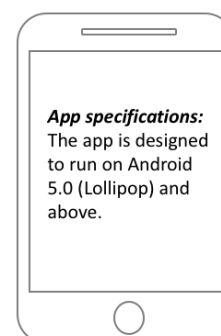
1. Request a username and password from the RSPO by email at [smallholder@rspo.org](mailto:smallholder@rspo.org).
2. Use them to log in to the dashboard at <https://hcv-sh-apps.rspo.org/dashboard/login>.
3. Generate a group code by clicking on the 'Manage Data Collectors' tab, followed by 'Generate Group Code'.
4. Add all intended data collectors (you and any other designated representatives) by either typing your and their email addresses into the "Insert Email" section, or by uploading a list of email addresses in an excel file using 'Template', which is available for download on the page.
5. Notify data collectors that they have been registered, and send them the 'Group Code', which they will need to log in to the app.

Then download the app:

1. Make sure the phone/tablet is connected to the internet, or with mobile data access.
2. Use the device to go to Google Play Store, search for 'RSPO HCV', and download the app.



**Caution:** Downloading and using the app via mobile data might incur charges or use up your data allowance.



All data collectors also need to download an HCV 1-3 probability map for the location of their members by following these steps:

1. Open the app and log in using your email address and the group code, then click on 'Manage Maps'.
2. Move the map to the area where your members are located. Make sure the area shown on your phone/tablet includes all smallholder group members - zoom in or out as required.
3. Once you have captured the right area on your screen, click 'Download Area' and give the map a name that will allow you to identify it. You will see a notification indicating the size of the download – if you do not have enough space, you can zoom in to a smaller area or delete files from your

device. It may take up to 30 minutes to download the map, depending on the connection. The map is fully installed when the orange bar is complete.

4. Verify that the map is downloaded by clicking on 'Downloaded Area', and check that the map is listed there. If not, try to download the map again.
5. You are now ready to proceed with the site visits.

### Conducting site visits

The main purpose is to collect basic information and determine which procedures apply for the farmers' plot(s). The steps can be completed using the app, as follows:

1. **Register the farmer and collect basic information:** Open the app and select 'Start Survey', then 'Create Farmer Profile'. This leads to a short survey where you can enter the member's name, farmer's ID and address. Complete the survey for each farmer that you visited.
2. **Determine which procedures apply:**
  - Show group members the four (4) possible scenarios presented in Figure 2 (or use the figure in the app under 'Need help to know which survey to fill up?'). Find out which scenario is most relevant to the situation of each member. Different procedures apply depending on whether the areas/plots consist of existing oil palm plantations, or whether they are planned or proposed for expansion of new oil palms.
  - Remind group members currently meeting Scenario 4 (refer to Figure 2) that anyone who wants to clear new areas for planting oil palm must report to you, get your permission and have the new plantings survey completed before doing so. Note that, while it is the responsibility of each group member to inform you if they want to expand, you should also check regularly and proactively with group members to see if their plans have changed.

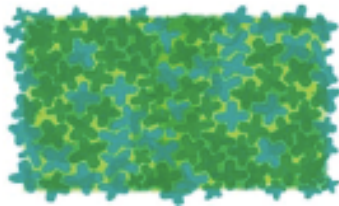
You should now understand the situation of each member and be able to proceed to Phase 3, by applying the different procedures that are relevant to each member and plot. You may do this either as part of this first field visit, or return to do so at a later date – but remember that the new plantings survey must be completed.



- *For guidance on Phases 3 and 4 for existing plantings, please proceed to the RSPO Guidance Document for Smallholders on Managing HCVs in Established Oil Palm Plantation (Phases 3 and 4)*
- *For guidance on Phases 3 and 4 for new plantings, please proceed to the HCV procedures for new plantations (refer to Guidance Document on Simplified Tool for Smallholders in RSPO (Phases 3 and 4))*

### Scenario 1

All of the group member's land is covered with existing palms.



**Existing plantings procedures apply.**  
Proceed to the existing plantings survey and precautionary practices.

### Scenario 2

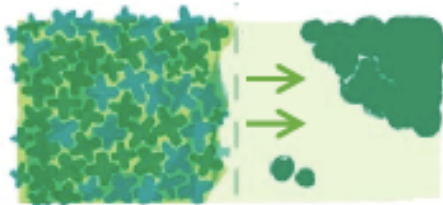
None of the group member's land is covered with palms, but the member plans to expand new plantings.



**New plantings procedures apply.**  
Proceed to the new plantings survey.

### Scenario 3

Group member's land includes some existing palms and other land that they wish to expand new plantings.



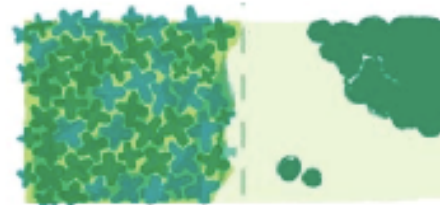
**Existing plantings procedures apply.**  
Proceed to the existing plantings survey and precautionary practices.



**New plantings procedures apply.**  
Proceed to the new plantings survey.

### Scenario 4

Group member's land includes some existing palms and other land, but there are no current plans to expand new plantings.



**Existing plantings procedures apply.**  
Proceed to the existing plantings survey and precautionary practices.



**Remember to tell the member that if they decide, at any point, to expand new plantings, they must first tell the group manager because they will need to follow the new plantings process and survey.**

**Note: For replanting of existing palms, the existing plantings survey and precautionary practices approach apply.**

Figure 2 Possible scenarios for group members

## Annex 1 – Glossary of all the documents and procedures under the simplified HCV approach

Glossary of all the documents and procedures under the simplified HCV approach.

Name	Content	Weblink
<b>Guidance Document on the Simplified High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach for Smallholders in the RSPO - Introduction Document (Phases 1 and 2) [this document]</b>	Communication on HCV with group members (Phase 1 Step 1)  Site visit and determining whether the existing or new plantings procedures apply	Document: <a href="https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder">https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder</a>  Web dashboard: <a href="https://hcv-sh-apps.rspo.org/dashboard/login">https://hcv-sh-apps.rspo.org/dashboard/login</a>  Mobile app: Google Play Store - 'RSPO HCV'
<b>Guidance Document for Smallholders on Managing High Conservation Value (HCVs) in Established Oil Palm Plantations – Existing Plantings (Phases 3 and 4)</b>	Phases 3 and 4 – HCV for existing plantation guidance	<a href="https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder">https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder</a>
<b>Guidance Document on the Simplified High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach for Smallholders in the RSPO – HCV Procedures for New Plantings (Phases 3 and 4)</b>	Phases 3 and 4 for new plantings: New plantings procedures	<a href="https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder">https://rspo.org/resources/?category=simplified-hcv-approach-for-smallholder</a>
<b>HCV offline analysis and reporting template – offline/paper version</b>	Phases 3 and 4 for new plantings: Offline analysis and reporting template for new plantings. <i>Version for group managers without access to smartphone or tablet.</i>	Email the completed offline template to: <a href="mailto:smallholder@rspo.org">smallholder@rspo.org</a>
<b>Guidance Document for Smallholders on Managing HCVs in Established OP Plantation (Phases 3 and 4 - HCV app)</b>	Management and monitoring AFTER plantation expansion/establishment:  Precautionary practices approach Phase 4 - Existing HCV for existing plantation guidance	See brief guidance in the new plantings Phase 3 procedures and refer to the existing plantings precautionary practices document: <a href="https://rspo.org/resources/?category=smallholders-key-documents">https://rspo.org/resources/?category=smallholders-key-documents</a>
<b>HCV 1-3 Probability Maps: Methodology and Consultation</b>	Group managers do not need to refer to this document.  Technical details about the methods followed to develop the HCV 1-3 probability maps.	

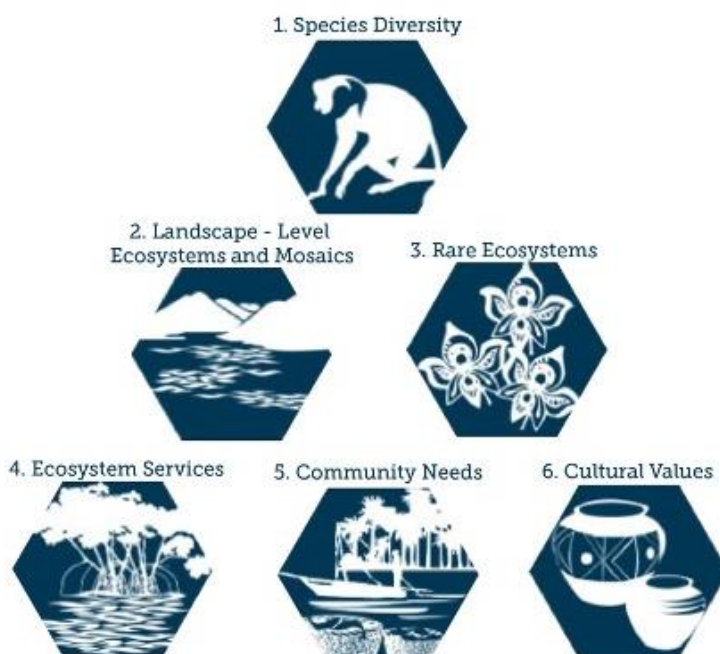
## Annex 2 – Offline / paper template for farmer registration

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Offline/paper template for farmer registration – complete one row per farmer. Only for group managers not using the smartphone/tablet app.

<b>Is it communal land or individual/family land?</b>	<b>If communal land: how many farmers use the land?</b>	<b>Farmer name (first name and last name)</b>	<b>Farmer ID number</b>	<b>Farmer address (where they live; not necessarily where their farm plots are located)</b>

## THE 6 HIGH CONSERVATION VALUES (HCV)



### HCV 1 SPECIES DIVERSITY

Plants or animals that are either rare naturally or because of human activities

- Endemic species only found in a small area
- Protected areas and connected habitats that support them
- Areas supporting animals at certain times of year for nesting, breeding or feeding

#### Key Terms

- Rare
- Protected areas and connected habitats that support them
- Endemic
- Global, regional or nationally significant concentrations

#### Indicators

- IUCN Red List species or national protected species list
- Maps of species distribution
- Priority conservation or biodiversity areas
- Natural habitats of the species







## HCV 2

### LANDSCAPE-LEVEL ECOSYSTEMS AND MOSAICS

Any large and mostly intact areas of natural vegetation with little human activity

#### Key Terms

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- Area needed to maintain viable populations: >10,000 or 50,000 ha
- Viable populations of majority of species
- Natural patterns of distribution and abundance

#### Indicators

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- Intact Forest Landscapes
- Conservation landscape/priority areas
- Large areas far from human settlement, roads or other access
- Smaller areas that provide key landscape functions such as connectivity and buffering (e.g. protected area buffer zone or a corridor linking protected areas or high quality habitat together).



## HCV 3

### ECOSYSTEMS AND HABITATS

Habitats and ecosystems that are rare either naturally or because of human activities

#### Key Terms

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- Ecosystem
- Habitat
- Refugia



#### Indicators

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- Remaining natural ecosystems in areas with little natural habitat remaining
- Rare soil types of geology
- Ecosystem or vegetation measurements
- IUCN Red List of ecosystems





## HCV 4 ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Natural habitats that protect:

- Water quality and control water flow
- Against erosion
- Against the spread of wild fires

### Key Terms

- Critical situations
- Protection of water catchments
- Control or erosion of vulnerable soils/slopes

### Indicators

- Rural/ remote areas where people are reliant on natural resources
- Upstream of important wetlands/ rivers
- Important water supply catchments
- Steep or hilly areas
- Areas of low soil fertility



## HCV 5 COMMUNITY NEEDS

Natural habitats that communities use to obtain essential basic resources

- Food, fuel, building materials, water or medicine

### Key Terms

- Fundamental for satisfying basic needs
- Resources must not be abruptly restricted without transition to suitable alternatives
- Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) process
- Identity through engagement with communities

### Indicators

- Remote/isolated with limited infrastructure
- Subsistence lifestyles
- Identify through engagement with communities
  - Consultation
  - Socio-economic studies
  - Participatory mapping





## HCV 6 CULTURAL VALUES

Areas or sites of important cultural or religious significance to local communities

### Key Terms

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- Values of global or national significance
- Values critical for local people



### Indicators

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- Consultation with communities and social experts
- UNESCO World Heritage sites
- National directives concerning archaeological sites and resources



The RSPO is an international non-profit organisation formed in 2004 with the objective to promote the growth and use of sustainable oil palm products through credible global standards and engagement of stakeholders.

[www.rspo.org](http://www.rspo.org)



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