Activities

Presentation to district officials in Indonesia
Kutai Kartanegara District, East Kalimantan Province, Indonesia
(9 July 2015)

The OPAL project was first presented to highest level district officials in Indonesia. The short presentation of the objectives and scope was made on the margin of a workshop organized to present another related CIFOR project on “Aligning plantations and smallholders with best management practices to reduce GHG emissions from oil palm development in East Kalimantan”, funded by CCAFS.

Romain Pirard, Senior Scientist at Forest and Governance Portfolio, CIFOR highlighted the linkages between both projects that deal with sustainable oil palm development in the region.

Attendance to this event included local government officials from District Plantation and Forest Offices, Land National Agency, Regional Planning and Development Agency, District Licensing Agency and CIFOR partners in the other CCAFS project.

OPAL Workshop
Zurich, Switzerland (9-11 November 2015)

The workshop brought together project partners from Indonesia, Colombia, Cameroon and Switzerland. Members of WWF Switzerland and WWF Indonesia, as well as Birka Wicke from Utrecht University joined as well.

The objective of the workshop was to consolidate the thinking that emerged from the inception workshop (Bogor, March 2015), and develop a clear plan for the next two years. Patrice Levang and Eglantine Fauvelle also demonstrated the Companion Modelling game, developed to understand supply chain processes in Cameroon. The game is the first Companion Modelling output generated by OPAL, and proved very useful in conveying not only knowledge about supply chain constraints, but also in demonstrating the approach to our partners from Indonesia and Colombia.

“Oil Palm: Beyond Controversies” - Public Panel Discussion
Zurich, Switzerland (10 November 2015)

The OPAL Team organized a public event on debunking myths about palm oil at ETH Zurich. Around 220 people packed the lecture hall. The panel comprised experts in particular aspects of oil palm production and supply chain management. These included Rob McWilliam from The Forest Trust (tft), Putra Agung (WWF Indonesia), Kathrin Rutishauser (MIGROS) and Patrice Levang (IRD).

Each panellist presented a short discussion on their field of experience, ranging from production, to supply chain management, to sourcing policy and certification. A range of interesting questions were received from the public, confirming the considerable public interest in this topic.

To do list

- Report OPAL outputs on this list.
- Introduce new team members via Basecamp.
- Share your photos (new instructions will follow).
- Send your news and stories with photos to Ariane for input in the OPAL website and newsletter.
- Keep track of all your expenses for the second OPAL year.

OPAL online

Our OPAL website went live in August 2015 and receives hundreds of visitors a week.

www.opal-project.org

To keep our audience interested, let’s keep it up-to-date and alive!

⇒ Again, please send your news with photos to Ariane.

Oil Palm Adaptive Landscapes — www.opal-project.org
People’s news

Visit of Andres Etter to ETH Zurich

From early November to December 2015, Andres Etter, our OPAL partner from Universidad Javariana, spent a month as a visiting scholar at the Ecosystem Management Group at ETH Zurich. During this time Andres and John Garcia drafted a first proposal of the future work in Colombia on the biodiversity component of the project. Andres also liaised with Alexander Buttler and Simone Fatichi about possible synergies between their research ideas for the Colombian case.

Visit of Natalia Ocampo-Peñuela to ETH Zurich

Natalia Ocampo-Peñuela, a PhD student at Duke University (North Carolina, USA), visited the Ecosystem Management Group for a week in November 2015. She participated in the OPAL project workshop, after which she worked with Jaboury, John and Andres to develop a postdoctoral project proposal that she intends to submit shortly for funding. We hope that she will be able to join the team in mid-2016.

Appointment as a Luc Hoffmann Institute Fellow

Congratulations to John Garcia who has been formally accepted as a Luc Hoffmann Institute Fellow. Fellows are selected based on their skills, their interdisciplinarity, and action-oriented research. This is a prestigious position that further strengthens the collaboration between ETH Zurich and the Luc Hoffmann Institute through the OPAL project.

Honorary Appointment

In July 2015, Jaboury Ghazoul was appointed to the Prince Bernhard Chair of International Nature Conservation at Utrecht University. In this capacity, he has been able to interact with several people working on oil palm, including Harko Koster (WWF Netherlands) and Birka Wicke (Utrecht University and CIFOR). Birka attended the November workshop, although her institution is not officially part of the OPAL project.

New team members

The OPAL team welcomes Thomas Guillaume as a new postdoc joining Alexandre Buttler’s group in Lausanne. Thomas, who is jointly funded by WSL and EPFL, starts on 1 March 2016, and will be developing the research on nutrient cycling and soil fertility in the context of oil palm management.

We also welcome Juan Quezada-Rivera, a new PhD student also joining Alexandre Buttler’s group in April 2016. Juan will be working alongside Thomas and again addressing issues relating to nutrient cycling and soil fertility.

Nur Hasanah was appointed as a new PhD student in the Ecosystem Management group at ETH Zurich in September 2015. She will be working closely with our Indonesian partners, both at the University of Bogor and CIFOR. Her research will seek to identify and evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of oil palm development in Riau (Tesso Nilo NP and Giam Siak Biosphere Reserve).

Nora Zoller, who is currently doing her Masters in Environmental Natural Science at ETH Zurich, has joined the OPAL project. Nora is investigating how stakeholders perceive the use and sustainability of palm oil in food. She will conduct qualitative interviews with members of different stakeholder groups in Switzerland.

Finally, Maria Fernanda Pereira recently joined the Colombian team at Universidad Javariana. She will help support the ComMod activities under the guidance of Daniel Castillo. Maria Fernanda did her undergrad studies in Ecology and just finished an MSc in Geography. She has been working with rural communities using participatory methodologies, and has already used ComMod in projects with Daniel Castillo.

Bookmarks

News about oil palm in just one click

Here’s a selection of pages that you can save to your favourites on your internet browser:

- Mongabay Series: Global Palm Oil (around 4 articles published per month)
- CIFOR’s news and articles about oil palm and palm oil
- The Guardian’s repository of articles on palm oil
- WWF International’s page on palm oil
- RSPO’s news’ page

And the Luc Hoffman Institute also dedicates a page to our project. Well done!
Other project news

WWF Indonesia
We have been exploring with WWF Indonesia and the Luc Hoffmann Institute (LHI) opportunities and possibilities to include WWF Indonesia as an official partner in the OPAL project. Malika Virah Sawmy (LHI), together with Irwan Gunawan and Putra Agung (WWF Indonesia) have been putting together ideas for a project titled Policy integration of oil palm smallholders delivering livelihood, legality, and sustainability. This project would be supported by the Luc Hoffmann Institute, and would be undertaken within the frame of the OPAL project.

Swiss Ministerial Delegation to IPB to Learn About OPAL
The Swiss Embassy in Jakarta has expressed interest in OPAL. Representatives of the Swiss Ministry of Research and Technology will be visiting IPB on 15 March 2016. Arya Hadi Dharmawan will be presenting OPAL at the expert meeting between the Swiss delegates and IPB’s Rector. It is anticipated that an MOU on wider research and academic collaboration is to be signed by ETH Zurich and IPB on 15th March 2016.

Development of the Indonesian workplan
CIFOR and CARDS IPB have established a work-plan/activities for the year 2016. Among these plans, is the fieldwork of PhD student supported by OPAL. The fieldwork or main research activities of Mr. Bayu Eka Yulian (OPAL supported PhD student) will begin his fieldwork in August-September 2016. Bayu will be supported by Mr. Faris Rahmadian, a MSc student, and Mrs. Mira Elfina, another PhD student. These students will be working under the supervision of Arya Hadi Dharmawan. The research of all three students falls under the theme of Oil Palm Expansion and Landscape Change in District of Kutai Kartanegara of the East Kalimantan Province. The ComMod approach will be central to their research activities. Expected titles for their individual research are:

Bayu Eka Yulian: "Livelihood and Agrarian Change of Oil Palm Expansion".
Faris Rahmadian: "Land Use Policy Processes and Political Economy of Oil Palm".
Mira Elfina: "Oil Palm Institutional Arrangement between Smallholders and Large Scale Estate".

OPAL at the Association of Tropical Biology and Conservation Conference in Montpellier (June 2016)
Jaboury Ghazoul and Claude Garcia are organizing a symposium at the ATBC annual meeting, this year in Montpellier. The symposium, titled Europe’s role in driving the future of tropical forested landscapes, is not about OPAL specifically. It does, however, draw on some ideas that have emerged from OPAL about the links between European consumer perceptions and market behavior and opportunities and pathways for promoting the sustainable production of oil palm. Additionally, Emmanuel Ngom from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Cameroon, and one of our OPAL project partners, will be presenting a talk titled Reconciling Conservation and Development: The case of oil palm in Cameroon. The symposium will provide an excellent platform to exchange and build upon ideas related to OPAL among a wider group of people.

OPAL workshop, ETH Zurich, November 2015
Game sessions with palm oil supply chain stakeholders

In August 2015, Patrice Levang, agro-economist at IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement), and Eglantine Fauvelle, our consultant in agronomy, organized 3 role-playing game sessions with palm oil supply chain stakeholders in the South-West and Central regions of Cameroon.

In total, 28 oil palm smallholders, 3 extension officers and 5 representatives of PAMOL and CDC (Cameroon Development Corporation), which are two of the five companies processing fresh fruit bunches (FFB) into crude palm oil (CPO) in Cameroon, played CoPalCam, the game designed for Cameroon as part of the OPAL project.

These one-day workshops aimed at refining the model’s calibration and at stabilizing its rules. They also allowed collecting inputs from the participants in order for the game to better represent the key issues and realities faced by the stakeholders. In a nutshell, players agreed that the game accurately represents their main economic, logistic and organisational concerns, among which weak investment capacities, limited transportation facilities and other major constraints limiting FFB delivery to industrial mills during the peak season.

Besides the social validation of the model, these sessions facilitated discussions about the main challenges along the supply chain. In particular, most participants stated that they developed an increased understanding of the links between the level of CPO importations at the national level and the fluctuations of CPO price on the local domestic market. During collective debriefings, participants even suggested different avenues for solutions.

For the next step, a game session will be scheduled by Emmanuel Ngom (MINADER) and Durrel Halleson (WWF Yaoundé) with the Palm Oil Supply Chain Regulation Committee. This Cameroonian body, which involves representatives of the ministries of Finance, Trade and Agriculture, refiners and soap-industries, agro-industries and the main smallholders’ association (UNEXPALM), appears to be the ideal platform to explore various alternative solutions with a broader range of stakeholders. It is also a remarkable opportunity to up-scale the outputs and expected impacts of our CoPalCam model namely (i) to raise awareness of the impacts of individual decisions along the supply chain (ii) to generate thoughts about new behaviours, rules or alliances that could strengthen the performances and the resilience of the Cameroonian palm oil supply chain.

Find more photos with captions on the OPAL website.