

## Good News

### OPAL gets successfully extended until 2021!

The OPAL team was invited by the SNF r4d programme on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017 to the evaluation of its project in Bern, Switzerland. A scientific report had already been provided in July 2017, together with the application for extension. During the evaluation, OPAL Project leader Jaboury Ghazoul gave a presentation, stressing progress and pathways to impact. Following the presentation, the whole team was invited to answer questions from the review panel.

The review panel recommended the extension of our project and on 7th November the Presiding Board of the Swiss National Research Council officially approved the prolongation of the OPAL project for another 3 years. Phase 2 will go from March 2018 until February 2021.

The slides presented during the evaluation are available [here](#).



Picture taken right after the evaluation meeting.

*From left to right, Claude Garcia, Daniel Castillo Brieva, Natalia Ocampo-Peñuela, Arya Hadi Dharmawan, Anne Dray, Patrice Levang, Alejandra Rueda, Simone Fatichi, Micresse Gaingne Kamto, Ariane Hangartner, Durrel Nzene Halleon, Andres Etter, Jaboury Ghazoul, Alexandre Buttler, John Garcia Ulloa, Camila Cammaert and Pablo Pacheco. Photo Claude Garcia.*

### OPAL Project Workshop

Before the r4d evaluation in Bern, the OPAL team gathered for a 5-day workshop in Switzerland. The first day was dedicated to country presentations with updates about the research and work done, the successes and challenges. Teams also presented their plans for phase 2. On the next day, people worked on specific issues such as the integration of outcomes across disciplines, documenting and capturing impacts, data management or communication strategy.

On the last days, team members worked in groups on different outputs, especially on papers and blogs. For example, the blog on biofuels by Alejandra Rueda and Jaboury Ghazoul, written during the workshop and titled « [Banning palm oil blocks good practices](#) », was soon after published on the ETH Zukunftsblog.

A workshop of this size had not been organized since the beginning of the project, and given the productive outcomes, fruitful interactions among team members and the increased team spirit, we all recognized that time and funds should be made available in the next few years to repeat those workshops. Personal contact never replaces (completely) e-mails and Skype calls.

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## OPAL Engagement at policy level

### European Palm Oil Conference (23 Nov. 2017, Brussels, Belgium)

OPAL partner Alejandra Rueda from NES Naturaleza (Colombia) participated in the European Palm Oil Conference 2017 by EPOA (European Palm Oil Alliance). She was an invited speaker and talked about Latin American (Latam) Smallholders Sustainable Perspectives. She also provided examples on synergies between work in Latin-America and in the European Union. This was a good opportunity for OPAL since one of its main objectives is to facilitate dialogues and to create awareness on sustainability aspects among the Colombian smallholders through the ComMod Method. Organizations such as [SMART](#) were very interested in our work.

The ISCC (International Sustainability and Carbon Certification) also approached Alejandra. They read her and Jaboury Ghazoul's blog on biofuels published in October 2017 and want to get in touch with OPAL.

### RT 15 by RSPO (27-30 Nov. 2017, Bali, Indonesia)

At the 15th Annual Roundtable Conference on Sustainable Palm Oil (RT15), Alejandra Rueda had a meeting with RSPO smallholders leaders and RSPO Latam representative about OPAL and the possibilities to do some work together in the 3 countries. They were very interested and asked for the possibility to join a game session in each of the 3 countries to see the possibilities of collaboration or leverage efforts.

### National Action Plan for sustainable palm oil in Indonesia

Drawing from the work and experience from OPAL research in East Kalimantan, CIFOR has contributed to the development of a National Action Plan for sustainable palm oil, which has been facilitated through a national multi-stakeholder forum called Indonesian Palm Oil Platform (InPOP), run by the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture with the support from UNDP. This five-year (2018-2023) national action plan plays an important role in supporting and coordinating the ongoing programs and initiatives focusing on developing a more sustainable palm oil sector in Indonesia. Parallel to this, CIFOR, IPB and WWF Indonesia are jointly contributing to the efforts by the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs to strengthen the standards of the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) system.

At the province and district levels, OPAL Indonesia is currently disseminating findings from the various PhD researches, engaging stakeholders in the implementation of the Companion Modelling games (see page 3), which are currently being developed and refined ; and contributing to the development and revision of local policies governing sustainable plantations and partnership mechanisms for oil palm between companies and local communities.

### Tropical Forest Alliance Meeting (12-13 Oct. 2017, Libreville, Gabon)

WWF as a partner in the Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 (Africa Palm Oil Initiative) attended the Africa Palm Oil Initiative Regional Meeting that took place in Gabon. This meeting brought together representatives from the ten countries that are part of the initiative, partner organisations (technical and financial), civil society organizations, private sector, and others. The meeting gave the OPAL Cameroon team an opportunity to follow up on other initiatives in the region regarding the elimination of deforestation from commodity supply chains.

Some of the key resolutions included: (1) the necessity of multi-stakeholder partnerships to effectively push for the elimination of deforestation from palm oil supply chains in Africa, (2) the need to integrate the views of local communities in designing policies on deforestation, and (3) the importance of reliable data in informing decision making process.

### French Foundation for Biodiversity Research (27 Nov. 2017, Paris, France)

OPAL co-leader Claude Garcia was in Paris to talk to the Foundation for Biodiversity Research (FRB) and to the association Companies for the environment (EpE). They are considering using some of our games for a workshop with the CEOs of some of the larger companies in France. Claude Garcia will run a game demonstration in the next couple of months. And hopefully convince them!

### Running the Indonesian game with local policy makers

Facilitated by CIFOR, the Indonesian Companion modeling game (ComMoDo) developed by Nur Hasanah, PhD student of ETH Zurich, was run with policy makers in October 2017. Four district officials from the Kutai Kartanegara District Plantation Agency participated in the game session. The officials came from different units responsible for plantation business, management, planting and seeding, and development of land and smallholders. While the game was intended to understand local people's strategy for livelihood amid the expansion of oil palm plantations, the officials found the game useful to better understand what was happening on the ground.



Photo: Game session at the District Plantation Agency Office in Tenggarong, East Kalimantan. Photo by Heru Komarudin

Through the game, the officials and researchers interacted and discussed various issues local people are facing and how prevailing policies are effectively implemented. The officials pointed out common issues that have hampered their efforts to realize sustainable and equitable development of plantations, particularly oil palm. They cited lack of tenure or oil palm plantations over forestlands and a tension between companies and local people over a scheme partnership as the most pressing issue. They provided inputs on the game and suggested to include some sorts of rules governing environmental and social aspects such as forest zonation, protection of peat and riparian areas along the river and a better scheme for partnership between local people and oil palm companies. They also learned why local people encroached and grew palms on the forestlands, and interestingly they reflected themselves on the need to increase local people's

awareness of those different zones, which can or cannot be legally planted. With the enactment of the Presidential Regulation No 88/2017 on resolving conflict over forestlands, they were hoping that most of the conflicts that had been registered in the last two years would be resolved. This kind of game would be one of the useful instruments helping different stakeholders to share knowledge, exchange ideas and eventually find common solutions.

The next step is to involve other key players in the oil palm sector, namely private companies and smallholder oil palm associations, and to refine another game on land use changes associated with oil palm development. The game is being developed and refined by Bayu Eka Yulian, PhD student of IPB. The next session is scheduled to take place in December 2017, which will be followed by a stakeholders' workshop to discuss major issues regarding the oil palm sector in the district, particularly the livelihood and environmental impacts of oil palm and how different stakeholders perceive the wicked problems and how to resolve them.

### Role playing game with local communities, East Kalimantan

Nur Hasanah also brought her game to the local communities to understand how palm oil development influences local communities to make certain decisions on their lands, and how these decisions affect ecosystem services. Between August and October 2017, Nur and her team have been running 12 game sessions in 5 different villages in Kutai Kartanegara, East Kalimantan, involving total 65 villagers. The game processes have all been carefully documented through field notes, pre- and post-game questionnaires, pictures, voice and video recorders. The team also conducted evaluations before and after the game implementation. The results of the 12 game sessions are currently still being compiled.

The game revealed how local communities behave for their living. Nur observed that the best strategy for survival was diversification in livelihood, as long as however, the ecosystem services (fishes) were sufficient in providing food for the local communities, which themselves depended on the number of forests available on the landscape (or here on the game board). During the game, local communities kept growing oil palm plantation for cash, while simultaneously allocating their tokens to fulfil their need for food, through fishing, hunting and cultivating rice.

Local communities gave really positive feedback, mentioning that the game is describing their reality, is useful and a good tool to invite them to think the best strategies for living. The local communities asked Nur to spread the game to all local communities in the areas.

A 5-minute video about Nur's work and game sessions is available [here](#).

# Measuring impact in Cameroon

## Outcome analysis of game sessions in Cameroon

To measure the impact of game sessions with stakeholders, it is necessary to re-interview the participants months after the game. This is now being done by the OPAL Team in Cameroon, and for three out of six CoPalCam game sessions the debriefings were already carried out.

In total, 21 stakeholders (producers, agroindustry, and administrators) that participated in the game sessions in Eseka (2015), Yaoundé (2016), and Douala (2017) were interviewed. The participants shed light on the impact of the game sessions on their life, their point of view on the game and the reality, and the game's potential in solving the oil palm value chain's problems in Cameroon.

In Douala for example, the CoPalCam game session had direct impacts:

- the farmers of Dibombari decided to group themselves together and are planning to successively renew their plantations with better plant material.
- The same famers have been invited to discussions two times by the agroindustry, who is now better understanding the farmers and thinking about a new agreement with them.

The understanding of each other's view point and the advantage of cooperatives have also been remarked in other localities. Also when played at the highest level, the game has helped members of the ministry experience the reality in the field, particularly the life of smallholders. Participants in general thought that the game was realistic and that it was a promising approach that should be continued. They proposed to think about the extension of the game.



Photo 1: Mieresse Gaingne Kamto and Alen Salihovic interviewing a smallholder in Bomonoba-Didjou village.

## Master's internship

OPAL Cameroon received a new intern from ETH Zurich in Switzerland. Alen Salihovic is currently doing a Master's degree in Environmental Science with a specialization in environmental systems and policy.

Alen knows palm oil for its controversies in Switzerland. It is often seen as an omnipresent ingredient that is reluctantly tolerated, but that will be replaced sooner or later for the sake of forests. Coming to Cameroon and seeing that palm oil here is considered as such a positive resource and that people are working to make its production more sustainable is very enriching.

His internship consists mainly of assisting the CoPalCam team with the ComMod game. He is assisting with the debriefing of past game sessions (Eseka 2015, Yaounde 2016 and Douala 2017) and with the organization of the next future game sessions (Buea, Limbe, Dibombarie).



Photo 2: Artisanal mill in Dibombarie



Photo 3: Heating up the Fresh Fruit Bunches (FFB) - extracts

Photos by Mieresse Gaingne Kamto and Alen Salihovic

## Other news from OPAL in Switzerland

### Training on Facilitation and Debriefing (6-7 September 2017, ETH Zurich)

Right after the r4d evaluation, the OPAL members engaged in running workshops and role-playing games were invited to a training on facilitation and debriefing. Specific attention was given to skills, attitudes, techniques, tips and tricks. It was very much “hands-on” with lots of exercises so that participants could immerse themselves into situations and get direct feedback on their facilitation/debriefing skills in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. They are now better equipped to engage with stakeholders, deal with power games and conflicts at stake, as well as maintain interest in the group.

The training was provided by Dr. Yorck von Korff, a certified professional facilitator and a mediator and Dr. David Crookall, a professor at the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis (France), specialized in providing training in cross-cultural communication, leadership and teamwork.

### Master thesis in the hydrology group

On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, a student at the ETH-Hydro group, Sandra Deferne, presented her Master thesis project titled "Pan-tropical variability of water and carbon fluxes of oil palm plantations". The project investigated spatial patterns of oil palm evapotranspiration (ET), gross primary production (GPP) and potential yield across the tropics, to understand how different soil properties and climate characteristics influence productivity and water use in rainfed plantations. Model simulations suggest that precipitation related variables, particularly mean annual precipitation and its seasonality, are the main drivers of ET, GPP and yield. Also, a significant difference in potential yield is found between the three continents (America, Africa and Asia), with highest productivity of available land in Asia and lowest in Africa.

### Rizka Amalia at ETH for 3 months

Rizka, a PhD student on the OPAL project from IPB, Indonesia, is currently at ETH Zurich as an academic guest in the group of Jaboury Ghazoul until mid-December 2017. Besides taking classes in ecosystem management, Rizka is developing a role playing game to measure how smallholders respond to oil palm certification and how certification impacts oil palm expansion. She is also writing a proposal about sustainability standard, land cover change, and social change in Kutai Kartanegara, East Kalimantan.

### Playing the OPAL game in secondary schools

Manuel Stamm, Bachelor student of Environmental Science at ETH Zurich, further developed the CoPalCam game for educational purposes for secondary schools in Zurich. Within the scope of his Bachelor's thesis he created a German version of the game, which so far was played eight times in different classes.

For his thesis, the rules and structure of the game were slightly adapted and written in German. In a second step the game materials were redesigned. Thirdly, the new game version was performed with five different secondary school classes in the area of Zurich with a total of 83 students. Finally, the game sessions were evaluated based on observations during the game sessions and on questionnaires, filled out by both students and teachers.



Photos by Manuel Stamm

The evaluation showed that the new game version is well suited for educational purpose and raising awareness on the secondary school levels in Zurich for students aged 12 to 15. All teachers were motivated to use the role-playing game again in class. The students enjoyed playing the game and were active during the actual gaming phase. The students' engagement during the debriefing was rather low and needs to be improved. Nevertheless due to exceedingly positive feedback, the adapted game will be further used within the scope of “[Edible Research](#)” Project.

The thesis is available [here](#).

### Field research

After an extensive field campaign in Colombia in 2016, the EPFL team decided to complete in 2017 the data set. Juan Quezada went back to Colombia from mid-October to mid-November to continue the sampling of the 56 years long chronosequence of oil palm cultivation identified last year. This data set will be highly interesting since it can show the impacts on soil fertility and carbon stock of two rotation cycles of oil palm cultivation on initial pasture land.

Nonetheless, we are very keen to take advantage of the various local situations of oil palm plantations offered within the large OPAL partnership. Therefore, in close collaboration with Patrice Levang, Emmanuel Ngom, Mesmin Tchindjang and our WWF partners, we will launch a piece of research in Cameroon. The focus will be on the impact of oil palm intercropping on income, productivity and soil fertility. Mesmin Tchindjang of Yaoundé's University will be our main academic partner. We are already well advanced in our work plan and will start the field campaign on 8th of January 2018 for a period of two months.

Beyond this field campaign, Mesmin Tchindjang and his students plan long-term monitoring of the selected sites. Intercropping oil palm with food crop as the potential to reduce pressure on natural habitat and soil degradation, increase food security and smallholders' income, and strengthen social links between farmers and elites. If you are interested in this topic, let us know. There is room to adapt the research design.



Photo : The hard work of collecting soil samples. Photos taken in Colombia by the OPAL EPFL team.

### Recently published

- [Banning palm oil blocks good practices](#), by Alejandra Rueda and Jaboury Ghazoul (ETH Zukunftsblog, October 2017)
- [The long and winding road to sustainable palm oil](#), by Pablo Pacheco (CIFOR Forests News, August 2017)
- [Implementing commitments to the Indonesian palm oil sector](#), by Pablo Pacheco and Heru Komarudin (ETFERN News 58, Section 5.3, June 2017)
- [Role-playing games as an educational tool. Adapting and evaluating the CoPalCam role-playing game on the issue of palm oil with secondary school students](#), Bachelor Thesis, by Manuel Stamm, ETH Zurich, Switzerland (August 2017). Appendix upon request.
- [Companion Modelling in Indonesia \(ComMoDo\)](#), video by Nur Hasanah, (September 2017) length 4:45 minutes