

Dear followers

OPAL has entered the final year of its 6-year project. We have planned many activities for this last year, but most of them are currently being suspended because of the lockdown.

What we can do from our homes though is look back at what we have achieved as a project. What has changed, what have been our great successes, but also where did we encounter our biggest challenges.

In the coming months, we will gather from each individual OPAL partner their views on the above questions. This will enable us to see the big picture of OPAL's contributions to a more sustainable oil palm. And then communicate about it.

In the coming weeks you will also see a newly revamped project website, where we will keep updating you with the latest project news, publications and video releases.

Stay healthy and safe!

The OPAL Team

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Indonesia: sustainability and the complexity of certification

The Indonesia OPAL team held a workshop on sustainable palm oil for smallholders on 11 and 12 March 2020 in East Kalimantan. Participating stakeholders were :

- provincial and district government officials across East Kalimantan,
- coordinating Minister for Economic,
- certification bodies RSPO and ISPO, and
- development partners.

OPAL shared its contribution to sustainable palm oil for smallholders and the plantation sector's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through adaptive landscapes (e.g. HCVs), and key primary findings from PhD research (Fakhrizal Nashr).

During the workshop, participants also played the ISPO ComMod game. This helped them understand the complexities around smallholder palm oil certification and to promote dialogue among stakeholders. The Head of East Kalimantan provincial plantation offices appreciated the usefulness of the approach and most participants were happy with how the game brought them through a virtual world and to tensions and frank conversations – reflecting the realities and challenges facing smallholders toward adopting sustainable practices.



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Outreach in Switzerland

EPFL publication attracts media attention

« Turning an abandoned pasture into a palm tree plantation can be carbon neutral ». OPAL PhD student Juan Carlos Quezada published in *Science Advances* his findings from the [study](#) in Colombia. The media coverage was broad and the reactions (from the public) sometimes quite critical.

Quezada, J.C., Etter, A., Ghazoul, J., Buttler, A., and Guillaume, T. Carbon neutral expansion of oil palm plantations in the Neotropics. *Science Advances*, Vol. 5, no. 11, <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/11/eaaw4418>

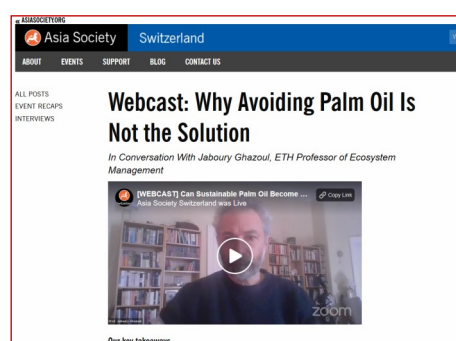
To answer questions from the public, Science Advances organized a **Facebook live** in presence of the first and last authors. The recording is available [on this link](#). (November 2019)

Juan's research was also highlighted in *Nature Climate Change*.



Honorary lecture Alexandre Buttler (EPFL, 27 novembre 2019)

Alexandre Buttler, co-PI of the OPAL project, retired in summer 2019. Oil palm was one of four research highlights that he presented during his [honorary lecture](#). He brought us to Colombia where he presented the findings of the above-mentioned publication by his doctoral student Juan Carlos Quezada. After the presentation, the audience could even taste palm oil (see photo below)! The presentation (in French) has been recorded and is available [on this link](#).



Can Sustainable Palm Oil Become Widely Available? (19 March 2020)

The Asia Society Switzerland hosted Jaboury Ghazoul for a talk on palm oil. Because of confinement measures, the library talk in Zurich turned into a live webcast and was also streamed on Facebook. The recording of the talk as well as a summary of the event is available [on this link](#).

Happy moments in December 2019 when our colleague Nur Hasanah successfully defended her PhD. Even the Indonesian Ambassador was there to congratulate her!

Read her published article:

Hasanah, N., Komarudin, H., Dray, A., and Ghazoul, J. (2019) Beyond palm oil: perceptions of local communities of environmental change. *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*, Volume 2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/ffgc.2019.00041>



Ongoing work in Cameroon

Socio-economic impacts from different management practices of oil palm plantations

Prof. Mesmin Tchindjang and his team from the University of Yaoundé 1 have been conducting surveys in the Ngwéi sub-division. In this region, oil palm exploitation constitute the main source of income for households and with the increased number of smallholders, multiple and profound environmental changes can be observed. For example the continuous conversion of forests into oil palm plantations. The surveys aim at an exhaustive quantification of the socio-economic impacts linked to the management practices of palm plantation.”

It is worth mentioning that 96% of the oil palm plantations belong to small producers. That is why a systematic inventory of smallholders involved in intercropping practices is required. This survey is also necessary to assess the impacts of intercropping on household incomes and local economy.”

First results seem to show that intercropping is a spatial, environmental and economic compromise between palm oil and others crops. In addition to the number of farmers, the criteria used for the survey and the results obtained on the intercropping practices are interpreted below. In terms of the area 96% of plantations are village-based for 20% of area. In contrast, the 4% of elitist plantations represent 70-80% of the area planted. In terms of age, 25% of the plantations are over 30 years old. The plant material consists mainly of the tenera variety. Fertilization is mainly applied at the young planting stage for around 44% of the planters surveyed. Finally, 68% of planters practice intercropping for 79% of plantations respecting a gap of 9 m.



Example of intercropping with plantain banana. Intercropping also happens with cocoyam, yam, papaw and maize (Photo Mesmin Tchindjang)

Finalized Studies

- The impacts of Crude Palm Oil importation on domestic production in Cameroon.
- The legal and institutional review of the palm oil sector - Updated version. This will help in the RSPO national interpretation in Cameroon.
- Cameroon has officially launched the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) national interpretation. The RSPO National Interpretation process would leverage sustainable palm oil production in Cameroon and support companies such as SOCAPALM and SAFACAM, both subsidiaries of SOCFIN Group committed to producing Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO) by 2021. - <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/28233/fr.html/lhuile-de-palme-latable-normes>.

New Videos by WWF Cameroon

- [OPAL project](#). It presents the evolution of the OPAL project and the work done by WWF.
- [The ComMod game](#). A movie on the participatory approach of OPAL and its results for the stakeholders

Both videos will be used as advocacy tools for the promotion of sustainable palm oil production in Cameroon.



Enabling talks on sustainable water use

In August 2019, Government representatives, citizens, NGOs and producers of the eastern plains in Colombia were using our game to face the challenges of Cravo Sur river. Watch the [video](#) by WWF Colombia to see how the session promoted a better dialogue and understanding among the actors who are making the key decisions to conserve the landscape.



How effective are role playing games? A Master Thesis by Eliane Steiner

One common concern about the use of role-playing games (RPG) in resource management is the difficulties to assess their effectiveness. In her master's thesis, Eliane Steiner (ETH Zurich) addressed this problem using the framework of 10 principles of a landscape approach (Sayer et al. 2013) to evaluate the effect of participating in a workshop of the RPG Upstream on participants. She collected survey data from various workshops in two different palm oil production areas in Colombia between August and September 2019: in Yopal during a workshop organized by WWF Colombia (see movie above), and in Aracataca during a workshop organized by the research team of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. All workshops focused on the water management and governance in their local river basin.

The results of the thesis show that participating in a workshop has an effect on participant, but the effect depends on the local context and varies across the different principles that were assessed. For example, she found that the Upstream workshops fostered a constructive negotiation environment. One participant in Yopal even said: "I have never attended such a calm reunion about how to conserve the basin. I think this is key in such reunions, that we all have the opportunity to talk calmly and to listen". On the other hand, the results indicate that a single RPG workshop is not enough to define clear rights and responsibilities regarding the water management.



Participants filling questionnaires before and after the game session.

The results highlight that it is important for researchers using RPGs to be aware, that first, not all aspects of landscape management might be addressed through a RPG workshop. Second, they should adjust their expectations of the results of a workshop according to the local processes the participants are involved in. Like this, researchers can capitalize from the use of RPG by facilitating tailored debriefing discussions and organizing effective



Participants playing the game.

follow up workshops.

References

Sayer, J., Sunderland, T., Ghazoul, J., Pfund, J. L., Sheil, D., Meijaard, E., ... & Van Oosten, C. (2013). Ten principles for a landscape approach to reconciling agriculture, conservation, and other competing land uses. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 110(21), 8349-8356.

Dialogues for sustainable palm oil production

In July 2019, NES Naturaleza played the oil palm game with RSPO, Cenipalma and also a representative from the local government. Attendees reinforced their knowledge about the importance of sustainability not only within their own palm plantations, but also throughout the supply chain. In addition, they realized how the individual actions can affect the collective directly or indirectly, for example, in the use and collection of water, among. A [movie](#) of the session has just been released.



Towards sustainable oil palm in Indonesia

Involvement in policy making processes (Jakarta, 24 January 2020)

OPAL Indonesia Team and Strengthening Palm Oil Sustainability (SPOS)-IPB University Team started to deeper involve in the Policy Making Processes of international oil palm policy dialogues between Indonesia and European Union. Both teams member were invited to the central government of Indonesia in Jakarta on 24th January 2020 for a meeting with the Deputy of the Governor of the National Resilience Institute of the Republic of Indonesia (Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional). This institution has a direct link to the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

In this meeting they discussed international oil palm political economic issues with regard to the recent international political tension between Indonesia and the European Union. They also discussed the benefit and risks of the implementation of sustainability standard (ISPO) in Indonesia.

Through this involvement, OPAL has the opportunity to insert our ideas of oil palm sustainability principles into the Indonesian policy.

Workshop on scientific cooperation and new public governance to strengthen and transform the Indonesian palm oil sector (Bogor, 12-13 February 2020)

The OPAL team at IPB is teaming up with Wageningen University & Research to address issues of sustainability governance of the Indonesian palm oil sector.

One project is entitled “Policy Dialogue on Palm Oil Sustainability Governance to Increase the Credibility and Acceptance of Indonesian Palm Oil in International Markets”. It is part of the SPOS program (Strengthening Sustainable Palm Oil Management Program in Indonesia). OPAL Indonesia supports this project through the Companion Modelling method and the results of its own field findings. (Timeline Nov 2019 – Oct 2020)

The other project is “Identifying Small Wins Towards Transformational Change of the Indonesian Palm Oil Sector”. The project is supported through the ANGIN Anticipation Grants from the Royal Netherlands Academy for Science (KNAW), which aims at stimulating Indonesian-Dutch scientific cooperation. (Timeline Jan-Aug 2020)

The workshop held in Bogor was to coordinate the engagement of all the projects with stakeholders and to create synergy between them. While all projects have their own and specific character and objectives, they thematically overlap, addressing issues in the field of sustainability governance of Indonesian palm oil. Also, some of the resource persons for data collection may be the same for the different projects.

For OPAL, the SPOS project is an alternative way to contribute to policy engagement related to sustainable palm oil in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the ANGIN project became one of the media to introduce ISPO to the international world, especially through the ComMod game, which after the workshop was asked to be played at the Wageningen University and Research.



Happy moments at Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) in Indonesia too, where in January 2020 Dyah Ita Mardiyansih received her certificate for the completion of her PhD degree in the field of rural sociology.

Her thesis was titled "Livelihood strategies and socio-ecological change of four Dayak-Tribe communities in East Kalimantan due to External Pressures (including Oil Palm Plantation Expansion).

Palm oil activity in primary school

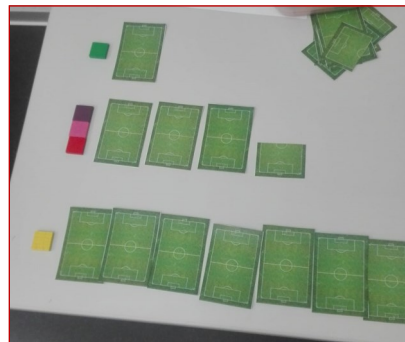
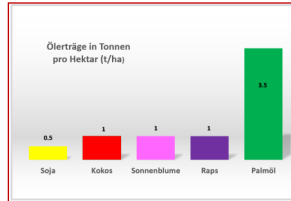
Already at age 9, Swiss kids know about palm oil and think it is bad. With a presentation and various fun activities, primary school kids of Baden (a town near Zurich) learned that the oil palm topic is a bit more complex than what they thought. Especially they found out that it takes much less “football fields” to produce palm oil compared to other vegetable oils. And also that cattle ranching and soy are responsible for much more deforestation than palm oil.



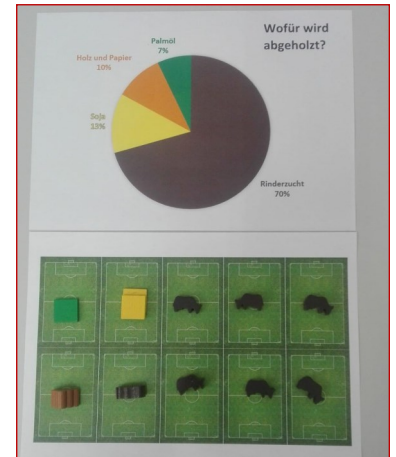
Activity 1: Which products contain palm oil?



Activity 2: Can you match the seeds with the oil and the photo of the crop?



Activity 3: How many football fields are needed for the same quantity of palm/soy/sunflower/rapeseed oil?



Activity 4: What are the main drivers of deforestation?

Photos Anne Dray, Ariane Hangartner

New publications

Quezada, J.C., Etter, A., Ghazoul, J., Buttler, A., and Guillaume, T. Carbon neutral expansion of oil palm plantations in the Neotropics. *Science Advances*, <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/11/eaaw4418>

Palm oil: an industry worth billions, *Swissquote Magazine*, Switzerland, December 2019

Ansätze für eine nachhaltige Palmölproduktion (Knowledge 4 Development, Switzerland, November 2019 (German only))

Team information (departures, graduations, new arrivals)

Nur Hasanah (ETH Zurich) successfully defended in December 2019 her PhD titled: Beyond oil palm development: perceptions and land-use decisions of local communities

Dyah Ita Mardiyarningsih (IPB) received her doctoral certificate in January 2020 for her dissertation on livelihood strategies and socio-ecological change of four Dayak-Tribe communities in East Kalimantan due to external pressures (including oil palm plantation expansion).

Michael Alen Brady has been the successor of Pablo Pacheco at CIFOR Indonesia. He is involved in the communication strategy of the project.

Fideline Mboringong (WWF Cameroon) and **Fakhri Nashr** (IPB Indonesia) made a stay at ETH during the fall semester 2019. Besides exchanging with the OPAL team in Zurich, they also followed the course « Foundation of Ecosystem Management », where both of them - within their teams - took part in the development of a ComMod game.