

FUNDACIÓN ENLAZA

Evaluation Report

Independent review of the  
Community outreach and engagement  
Programme in Colombia

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## 1. Enlaza Foundation Presentation

Fundación Enlaza boasts a rich 14-year legacy, during which we have honed our expertise in crafting, implementing, systematizing, and evaluating impactful programs and policies centered around rural entrepreneurship, rural development, and gender equity. Our commitment extends to supporting companies, organizations, and governments by meticulously developing assessments that discern the results, impacts, and learned lessons gleaned from their initiatives. Our overarching goal is to foster economic prosperity, enhance human well-being, and strengthen environmental resilience.

At the heart of Enlaza's methodology lies a commitment to facilitating positive transformations in the social and environmental contexts where programs and purpose-led businesses are embedded. Our approach, refined through years of experience, has been successfully applied to diverse programs and projects championed by international cooperation organizations across Colombia and several Latin American countries.

Within our Corporate Social Responsibility portfolio, Enlaza takes a proactive role in guiding organizations and business sectors towards seamlessly integrating sustainability and ESG standards into their management systems. Notably, our consultancy team has played a pivotal role in supporting companies within the palm sector as they prepare for compliance with the RSPO voluntary sustainability standard (VSS). Enlaza conducts rigorous social and environmental impact assessments to achieve this, incorporating identification and dialogue exercises with grassroots stakeholders such as small-scale producers, employees, communities, and local authorities. We have experience implementing this hands-on approach in rural areas of Colombia and Honduras.

Fundación Enlaza is built on the fundamental understanding of the diversity inherent in various contexts. Thus, our work is grounded in constructive and transparent dialogues with communities, institutions, entrepreneurs, and civil society organizations. This collaborative effort is essential in developing methodologies tailored to the unique nuances of each context. Central to our ethos is identifying lessons learned and a commitment to critical reflection, ensuring that the experiences contribute meaningfully to sustainable development and, crucially, to human rights fulfillment and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals.

## 2. Consultancy Rationale

The RSPO Theory of Change (ToC) follows the principles of relevancy and trust to create an industry-wide ecosystem that supports and accelerates the production and consumption of sustainable palm oil. The principles and criteria are held under a philosophy of continuous improvement towards innovation, credibility, and inclusiveness around a VSS scheme that monitors adequate production practices, quality control guidelines, and fair working conditions. Thus, at its core, the RSPO seeks to generate a positive impact balanced across three pillars:

- People: improve the sustainability of rural livelihoods by creating a fair network of shared benefits among small-scale farmers and farm employees, aiming at reducing poverty and guaranteeing the respect of human rights.
- Planet: improve the productive resilience of the oil palm industry by investing efforts and resources to mitigate environmental impacts and to protect, enhance and conserve the natural ecosystems in which the value chain is embedded.
- Prosperity: achieve a competitive, resilient, and sustainable sector that brings economic prosperity to the stakeholders involved in the oil palm industry.

Despite the pursuit of transforming the oil palm industry under these three pillars, the RSPO acknowledges many challenges to successfully engage with the plethora of stakeholders that are directly and indirectly impacted by the palm oil development. Smallholders, workers, and landowners still find it hard to have a voice in RSPO due to a lack of resources, knowledge, and capacity. Furthermore, linguistic, and educational barriers among workers, women, and local and indigenous communities weaken the level of engagement held by the palm oil system. All these barriers hinder the final goal of the RSPO ToC to achieve resilient and healthy landscapes, green communities, and inclusive growth along the palm oil value chain.

Palm Oil production in Latin America grew by about 1.9% in 2019, reaching a total volume of 4,993,000 tons which establishes the region as the second-largest palm oil-producing region after Asia (MPOC, 2021). Production is mainly led by Colombia (circa 1,600,000 tons by 2019) which accounts for almost one-third of the production of the region. Colombia reports one of

the most prominent growths in certified hectares of the last few years (95,312 in 2020 accounting for 19% of the country's planted area of 158,043 hectares for that year). This metric makes the country a world leader in terms of stakeholder engagement within the RSPO sustainability framework. The total certified sustainable palm oil (CSPO) planted in Colombia lies at 32% indicating significant advances, yet there is still work to be done to achieve full adoption of the sustainability criteria.

Given these challenges, the RSPO Board of Governors has recognized the need for more stakeholder engagement efforts in a growing production region such as Latin America, and specifically, Colombia as the total RSPO leader. Thus, in 2019 the RSPO Secretariat launched the Community Outreach Program in the country to address the necessity of further improving the engagement of communities in RSPO at all levels. The RSPO programme entitled "Enhancing the Position of Local Communities, Smallholders and Labourers Through Capacity Building for IMOs in Accessing and Using the RSPO System" was implemented from June 2019 to February 2023 by the Intermediary Organization (IMO) Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (INDEPAZ). The program aimed specifically aimed to:

1. Enable local communities' access and engagement with the RSPO System more easily and effectively.
2. Provide IMOs with enough knowledge to use the RSPO System in facilitating local communities' needs, priorities, and rights.
3. Enhance RSPO's ability to engage and facilitate local communities to support their needs and rights.

### 3. Evaluation approach

Our team at Enlaza Foundation aims to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the implementation of the Community Outreach Programme in Colombia by INDEPAZ to draw lessons learned and make recommendations for the improvement of the program. Following the terms of reference, we aim to evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the activities and achievements of the program. Additionally, we consider the

relevance and impact that this programme has to achieve the RSPO's vision and ToC. The following evaluation matrix summarizes our approach to address the program actions and results:

**Table 1. Evaluation matrix divided by objective.**

Project expected outcomes	R1. Enable local communities' access and engagement with the RSPO System more easily and effectively.  From the perspective of the People towards RSPO	R2. Provide IMO's with enough knowledge to use the RSPO System in facilitating local communities' needs, priorities, and rights.  From the perspective of Indepaz to communities	R3. Enhance RSPO's ability to engage and facilitate local communities to support their needs and rights.  From the perspective of RSPO towards people
Stakeholders involved	Implementation RSPO representatives in Colombia INDEPAZ programme coordination team  Local Communities Big producers Median/Smallholders Workers Local media Unions	Implementation RSPO representatives in Colombia INDEPAZ programme coordination team	Implementation RSPO representatives in Colombia INDEPAZ programme coordination team  Local Communities Big producers Median/Smallholders Workers Local media Unions
Evaluation categories employed for assessment questions			
Efficiency: use of time, human and financial	Analysis of the resources and strategies employed, concerning the results achieved. - Human Resources - Quality of Engagement Activities		

resources to achieve deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resource Allocation</li> <li>- Time</li> </ul>		
Effectiveness: to what extent the purposes/objectives and the desired changes have been achieved and identify key factors that have promoted or impeded these achievements	<p>How effective were the proposed activities in improving the community's engagement with the RSPO system?</p> <p>We focus the analysis of outcomes on the following key topics linked to the RSPO ToC strategies.</p>	<p>How effective were the proposed activities to guarantee RSPO awareness in the INDEPAZ implementation?</p> <p>We focus the analysis of outcomes on the following key topics linked to the RSPO ToC strategies and the Intermediary Outreach and Engagement in Producing Countries, Status Assessment and Outreach Plan</p>	<p>How effective were the proposed activities to enhance RSPO's ability to engage in the system?</p> <p>We focus the analysis of outcomes in the following key topics following the Intermediary Outreach and Engagement in Producing Countries, Status Assessment and Outreach Plan</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community Participation</li> <li>- Knowledge RSPO Standards</li> <li>- Conflict Resolution Mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational tools to improve knowledge transmission</li> <li>- Approach to local communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stakeholder engagement</li> <li>- RSPO's capacity to reach local communities</li> </ul>

Impact and ToC Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Has the smallholder participation in the RSPO system increased due to the project activities?</li> <li>2) Has the project raised awareness around RSPO mechanisms to solve conflicts around land use?</li> <li>3) Has the project contributed to mobilizing growers and local communities to follow RSPO principles and Criteria?</li> <li>4) Has the project contributed to the expansion of self-managed initiatives within the RSPO system?</li> <li>5) Does the program contribute to the three impact pillars of the RSPO (people, planet, and prosperity)?</li> </ol>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which strategies did INDEPAZ implement to achieve the sustainability of the results?</li> <li>- What are the main risks identified by the IMO that threaten the outcomes achieved in the future?</li> <li>- Have the local communities acquired knowledge, capacity and resources to maintain engagement with the RSPO system?</li> </ul>
Lessons Learned & Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify lessons learned from the implementation of the Programme and make recommendations for the improvement of the Programme framework.</li> </ul>

## 4. Methodology

The development of the evaluation was developed in three phases. The first phase allowed the consulting team to dive into the project and get to know it in depth. This included the selection and analysis of the most relevant documents to understand the scope, results and impacts of the project. The second phase included the completion of the secondary information analysis,



a semi structured interview with the operational team of Indepaz, and the selection of a group of stakeholders to be questioned about the project implementation. The third phase included the development of 6 semi structured virtual interviews with beneficiaries of the project. These beneficiaries participated in one or more activities of the project and provided meaningful insights about the outcomes and impacts generated by the project.

The primary and secondary data analyzed belonged to the four-palm oil production areas: (Antioquia and the Caribbean), central (Santander), southwest (Nariño), and east (Meta and Casanare). The proposed methodology allowed us to identify results for each of the proposed outcomes and the overall value of the program in the different regions where palm oil is produced. The documents analyzed and the beneficiaries invited to participate in the evaluation process were carefully selected by the consultant team with previous approval of the RSPO/Indepaz team.

## 4.1. Data description

### 4.1.1 Secondary Data

- **Progress reports:** The Indepaz team produced a series of progress reports that documented the advances of the project at different stages of the implementation. These progress reports reflected the main accomplishments as well as the strategies used by the operational team to adapt to emerging circumstances and needs.
- **Stakeholder map methodology:** The Indepaz team developed different methodological techniques to engage with the beneficiaries of the program. These included guides and data collection techniques among others. This material provided meaningful insights on the effectiveness of the activities developed by the team.
- **Educational/capacity building materials:** This material was employed by Indepaz to lead the interactive sessions with the different stakeholders. It reflects insights about the

quality of the information about the RSPO certification, the principles and criteria and the grievance mechanisms, and the approach designed to interact with the beneficiaries.

- **Financial Reports:** These reports provided meaningful information to understand the efficacy of the operational team to implement the program.
- **Communication pieces:** Indepaz produced a series of communication pieces that were disseminated through Youtube and local media platforms in the different productive regions.

#### 4.1.2 Primary Data

The objective of the primary data collection was to gather information based on the perceptions of the actors involved in the project, concerning the analytical categories described in the analysis matrix defined above. We also sought to contrast the different visions that may exist about each of the components of the project. In table 2 we display the beneficiaries that participated in a group semi-structured interview for the project evaluation. It is relevant to note the evaluation team faced a challenging environment to schedule the conversations with stakeholders. The database provided by the RSPO in the progress reports was outdated since some of the participants invited were no longer connected to the organizations that attended the training sessions held by Indepaz. A total of eight (8) participants were involved in the interviewing process, and four (4) of them were women. The women participated in the interviews with Cordeagropaz and Fundacion Bosque Tropical Seco. Below we include the detail of organizations and groups contacted:

Table 2. Beneficiaries to be interviewed.

Actor	Criterio	Region	Department	# of participants
Cordeagropaz	SmallHolders	Southwest	Tumaco	2

Organización Sindical SINTRAIMAGRA, sector palmero, empresa Aceites Manuelit	Unions	East	Meta	1
Equipo de Comunicación Rural OPDS de Montes de María- Bolívar	Communication	Southwest	Tumaco	1
Palmicultores del Norte S.A. - Extractora Palnorte	Median and small producers	Central	Santander/Catatumbo	1
Fundación Bosque Tropical Seco	Opposing actor	North	Sucre/Bolivar	2
Poligrow Colombia S.A.S.	Median and small producers	North	Sucre/Bolivar	1

## 5. Summary of Findings and Results

### 5.1 Efficiency

#### 5.1.1 Appraisal of implementation design

The community outreach program was designed with a maximum duration of three years between mid-2019 and mid-2022. The program included a face-to-face research approach to familiarize the RSPO representatives with the main tensions and conflicts in the different productive regions. The outcomes of this strategy were presented in the form a stakeholder map differentiated by area. Additionally, the program included a formation and capacity building component aimed at increasing awareness around the RSPO standard and conflict resolution mechanisms among productive communities, local communication media, and groups that oppose the production of palm oil.

Unfortunately for the project, the international locked down caused by the COVID-19 spread

limited the organization of face-to-face activities. The IMO selected by RSPO (Indepaz) developed an alternative strategy to meet the time requirements of the project. Indepaz showed adaptability to the COVID emergency developing a strategy to implement the activities (presentations) with the communities through virtual channels. Interviews, focus groups, and workshops were conducted in each of the regions with smallholder producers, opposing sectors, and industrial companies. The team reported that the online strategy allow them to reach the outcomes set in the initial face-to-face strategy, given that more participants could log in to the online activities. Indepaz reports that in average they reached out to more stakeholders than expected, because they conducted many of these workshops through livestream events on Youtube. The meetings and capacity building sessions are still available in their youtube channel and they have in average 200 to 400 views.

Indepaz acknowledged the importance of conducting activities to close the gap between the RSPO and the communities. Thus, the implementation team, once the lockdown was uplifted in the country, decided adjusted the project to accommodate stakeholders' meetings in the different regions. Many of the participants of the online encounters requested extra face-to-face meetings regarding palm cultivation. In the last semester of 2021, Indepaz organized visits to the eastern zone (Meta – Casanare) to respond to these concerns. The visits facilitated the updating and cross-referencing of collected data, expanding information for the mapping document of actors, conflicts, and opportunities.

Given the success of these additional extended face-to-face activities, Indepaz decided to ask for a time extension to conduct visits in other productive areas. RSPO granted an extension of 6 months for this purpose. In the end, the programme finalized at the end of 2022 and the extension did not incur in any increase in the total value of the implementation. For the new visits, priority was given to visits in the southern zone (Tumaco) and the north and middle zone (Magdalena Medio, Cesar, and Santander). Overall, all the visits enabled dialogue with various stakeholders interested in engaging with the RSPO office for Latin America, fostering trust and commitment in resolving differences among involved parties.

The structure of the project followed the experiences developed in other countries where the RSPO influences the palm oil sector such as Nigeria, Indonesia, and Malasia. Colombia was the

first Latin American country selected for the implementation given its importance in the region as the biggest producer of palm oil. Nevertheless, the RSPO reports the project was not adapted to the local Latin American context, therefore the implementation structure followed the same approach as in previous experiences. The project could have benefited from the adaptation of methodologies and educational tools to better respond to the specific conditions of the context.

Nonetheless, the optimization of efficiency in the project was notably heightened by integrating a diverse array of inputs, including videos, presentations, audio recordings, and other multimedia content onto YouTube. Therefore, all the material is easily accessible for all the community to consult whenever they deem it useful. These versatile resources metamorphose into invaluable assets, easily accessible to all interested parties, thereby streamlining the process of reproducing and disseminating the information conveyed during virtual sessions.

### 5.1.2 Appraisal of cost allocation

According to table 3, the budgeting was appropriate and sufficient to develop the totality of activities. Note that the efficiency in the implementation of the activities allowed to increase the outreach output since Indepaz developed virtual and face to face training and sensibilization activities. Additionally, for all the activities, Indepaz employed less resources than the total budgeted. This shows a positive outlook for the management of the project resources.

Table 3. Summary of cost allocation per activities and difference between budget and execution 2022

Activity	Total Budget (USD)	Execution (USD)	Percentage of completion by 2022
The identification and mapping of local community, smallholder and labours including women groups actively advocating	27,318.94	26,442.29	100%

against palm oil companies.			
The enhanced capacity of local community, smallholder and labours including women groups	189,580.58	<b>187,039.48</b>	<b>100%</b>
The utilisation of RSPO mechanism by local community, smallholder and Labors including women groups	30,458.17	<b>30,458.00</b>	<b>100%</b>
Training on mediation procedures to resolve disputes and Meetings with journalists, communities, workers, NGOs, and state entities	30,733.70	<b>30,447.00</b>	<b>100%</b>
Responsiveness of RSPO mechanism in accommodating the participation of local community, smallholder, and labor	4,447.26	<b>4,458.00</b>	<b>100%</b>
Established communication between RSPO and stakeholders	6,353.24	<b>6,353.24</b>	<b>100%</b>
Developing information documentation system on the industry of palm oil plantations in Colombia	79,167.76	<b>79,013.78</b>	<b>100%</b>
Human Resources	30,000.00	30,000.00	<b>100%</b>
Office Costs	<b>18,106.73</b>	17,618.00	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>416,166.38</b>	<b>411,829.29</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 5.2 Effectiveness, sustainability and Impact

### 5.2.1 Enable local communities' access and engagement with the RSPO System more easily and effectively.

Table 4. Key findings by analytical categories – R1

Category	Sub Activity	Finding
<b>Effectiveness:</b>	<p>2.1 Workshops for strengthen the capacity building of local community, stakeholders and labours including women groups actively advocating against palm oil companies. (2 workshops in every zone).</p> <p>2.2 Meetings with local media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities demystify the RSPO standard at the community level.</li> <li>• Initially some actors wrongly interpreted that the project aimed to increase the sanctions around ongoing conflicts in the regions.</li> <li>• Producers access information to navigate the auditing process for certification grant.</li> <li>• Sensibilization on mechanisms to increase participation and conflict resolution (RSPO membership, FPIC, complaints, Remediation).</li> <li>• Activities are insufficient for organizations to fully integrate the RSPO mechanisms.</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>3. Communicative pieces (video and radio) for handling the resolution of disputes through the RSPO mechanisms including dispute settlement facility (DSF)</p> <p>5.1 Elaboration of a guide for handling complaints using the RSPO mechanism</p> <p>5.2 Elaboration of a guide for dispute settlement facility (DSF)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The communicative pieces have a greater outreach within the communities and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Communities hold documents, guidelines, and tools to journey along the RSPO standard.</li> <li>• The presence of illicit crops and the persistence of illegal operations by armed actors increases conflictivity.</li> <li>• Activities proposed contribute to shed light on points of tension, but they do not tackle the issues directly.</li> </ul>

<b>Impact and ToC Relevance</b>	4.1 Training on mediation procedures to resolve disputes and meetings with journalists, communities, labours, NGO, and state entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity with RSPO representatives was highly valued by the communities that participated in those dialogue scenarios.</li> <li>• Bringing opposing communities together to prevent exclusion and conflict.</li> <li>• Initial efforts of strategic use by communities of the RSPO Mechanisms</li> </ul>

#### a) Effectiveness

Indepaz developed a series of workshops for strengthen the capacity building of local communities. This includes stakeholders as diverse as smallholder producers, industrial managers, labours, women groups, and organizations actively advocating against palm oil companies. A total of 2 workshops were developed for each of the 5 zones (10 in total). These encounters were coupled with the development of communicative pieces (video and radio) disseminated through local communication media. These journalists were engaged by the implementation team of Indepaz.

In the workshops, Indepaz collected key concerns, questions, and beliefs around the RSPO. Many of the stakeholders highlighted that the certification functioned as a regulatory police instrument that generates international penalties. Therefore, some producers perceived the RSPO as means to increase sanctions or even block their production endeavours, putting at risk



their livelihoods. For some of the organizations advocating against palm oil, the RSPO was in some cases a mean to protect questionable activities of certain producers.

The sessions allowed the stakeholders to challenge these common misconceptions about the RSPO among the different stakeholders. Thus, the participation in the programme allowed communities demystify the RSPO standard at the community level. Indepaz highlights that the principles and criteria of the RSPO were mostly known at the administrative level of medium and big producers. According to the stakeholders, the RSPO system details were unknown for many participants of the training sessions. As such, the programme contributes to the overall knowledge about the system and its participatory mechanisms.

In the southwest region, smallholder organizations representatives argued the programme sparked their efforts to introduce associates to meet the RSPO requirements. They commented during the duration of the project they launched a strategy to support smallholders with environmental requirements and labour management in the workplace. They provided small producers with knowledge and tools to survey of conservation areas, and to implement occupational health safety management structure in their productive units.

Nevertheless, some of the participants interviewed manifested they could not attend many of the virtual and face-to-face sessions held by Indepaz in their regions due to time conflicts. Some of them reported the events were mostly done during working hours, and their eventual participation was not considered as a valid justification at their workplaces. This was the case for some of the labours interviewed who commented their management team were not pleased with their attendance to the educational meetings led by Indepaz. In short, some of the participants felt discouraged to participate in some sessions by the employers.

On the other hand, a representant of an environmental NGOs argued the project design had a massive potential benefit. Additionally, according to Indepaz representatives, some organizations have developed advances to fill out enquiries following the RSPO conflict mechanisms. Nevertheless, stakeholders still manifest challenges to fully integrate the conflict management mechanisms at the management level. Though informative and useful to

structure their complaints, the sessions were too few for them to acquire the capabilities to journey across the RSPO.

The project activities contribute to clarify how to navigate processes of auditing for adjusting to the certification requirements for companies, smallholders, and organizations. This includes the importance of following the FPIC guidelines (Free, Prior, Informed Consent) to legally reach lease agreements with local landowners to conduct the extension of production areas. For smallholders, the program socialized the existence of the RSSF (Smallholder Support Fund) that provides financial support for oil palm producers to help to improve their livelihoods and their capacity to produce sustainably. Nevertheless, even though some beneficiaries value the activities, they argue the program design and results are limited by the context they face.

#### b) Sustainability

Due to the programme, communities possess a range of documents, guidelines, and tools designed to facilitate their adherence to the (RSPO) standard. These resources serve as invaluable assets in guiding communities through the journey of implementing sustainable practices within the palm oil industry. Among these resources are comprehensive manuals detailing the requirements and procedures outlined by the RSPO standard. These manuals provide step-by-step instructions on various aspects of sustainable palm oil production, including land use management, biodiversity conservation, and social responsibility.

Additionally, communities have access to guidelines specifically tailored to their unique circumstances, such as those addressing smallholder or indigenous community participation in sustainable palm oil initiatives. These guidelines offer practical recommendations and best practices for effectively navigating the complexities of sustainable palm oil production while respecting community rights and traditions. By leveraging these documents, guidelines, and tools, communities can actively engage in the RSPO standard implementation process, contributing to the promotion of sustainable palm oil practices and the protection of

environmental and social well-being.

The project plays a vital role in raising awareness about mechanisms aimed at enhancing participation and resolving conflicts within the palm oil industry, such as RSPO membership, complaints procedures, and remediation processes. Through various sensibilization efforts, participants reported they felt empowered and motivated to understand and utilize these mechanisms. Therefore, one significant outcome of the project is the increased perception among communities that their voices are being heard. They view the project as a valuable platform for communicating issues that directly impact them, facilitated through the Grievance Mechanism or Dispute Settlement Facility (DSF). This was highlighted by the union representatives interviewed who were motivated to engage with the RSPO mechanisms to manifest discomfort with their working conditions. This structured pathway serves to reduce uncertainty surrounding the principles and criteria of the RSPO, ultimately aiming to safeguard land and human rights within the palm oil sector.

By fostering dialogue and engagement between stakeholders, including community members, palm oil companies, and relevant authorities, the project facilitates a collaborative approach to conflict resolution and decision-making. Through participation in RSPO processes, communities gain a stronger voice in shaping the sustainable development of the palm oil industry and advocating for their rights and interests. The Indepaz progress report highlights the case of AfroWilches organization in Magdalena medio, which has become a benchmark in this region to conduct grievance processes related to the RSPO certification. On the other hand, afro descendant communities in the south west region (Tumaco) started to recognize in RSPO standards a mechanism with the potential to rebuild relations and trace a path to dispute resolution. This is important, given that the RSPO presence in Tumaco was very limited. Overall, the project's efforts contribute to building trust, promoting transparency, and ensuring accountability within the palm oil supply chain. By empowering communities and facilitating constructive dialogue, it paves the way for more inclusive and sustainable palm oil practices that respect both people and the planet.

However, the coexistence of illicit crops and ongoing illegal activities perpetrated by armed

factions significantly heightens the potential for conflict. Firstly, they directly impact the prevalence of illicit crops, the presence of small-scale producer associations, and their intricate connections with big producers. Concurrently, these efforts are influenced by geographical nuances, particularly the region's border location, which exacerbates the proliferation of illicit crops and the presence of diverse illegal armed groups. This situation is more acute in Tumaco and Catatumbo.

The stakeholders identify a symbiotic relationship between the palm industry and illicit crop cultivation in most of the production zones. The expansion of palm cultivation often serves as an alternative avenue for those transitioning away from illegal crops, thus perpetuating the cycle of illicit economies within the area. Furthermore, the sustainability of labor practices within the industry is a pressing concern. Unlike elsewhere, the absence of unionization processes among workers regions such as Catatumbo and Tumaco poses significant risks to their long-term welfare and stability. These context-based issues may limit the sustainability of the outcomes achieved in the project.

### c) Impact and ToC Relevance

Bringing opposing communities together within the oil palm value chain was defined as crucial impact by the beneficiaries for preventing exclusion and conflict. In the context of the oil palm industry, conflicts often arise due to competing interests over land use, environmental conservation, labor rights, and economic development. By facilitating dialogue and negotiation between these opposing groups, the project created opportunities to find common ground, address concerns, and develop mutually beneficial solutions.

Persistent tensions among various actors in the palm oil production chain highlight the importance of considering trust and confidentiality in any future actions taken by the RSPO. It's crucial to ensure that discussions and information exchange occur within an atmosphere of trust, where stakeholders feel confident that their concerns will be heard, and their data will be handled with confidentiality. This impact is relevant for principle 4 and 6 of the RSPO, aimed at improving respect for local communities, human rights, and labour conditions.

Some beneficiaries report that they have started to strategically utilize RSPO mechanisms to address their concerns and advocate for their rights within the palm oil production chain. These mechanisms offer platforms for communities to engage with stakeholders, raise grievances, and seek resolution. By leveraging RSPO mechanisms, communities can effectively voice their perspectives, access information, and influence decision-making processes to promote sustainable practices and safeguard their interests. Despite the limitations of these efforts, they are valuable for the principle 4 and 6 of the RSPO, aimed at improving respect for local communities, human rights, and labour conditions.

Proximity with RSPO representatives was highly valued by the communities that participated in those dialogue scenarios. The communities found it valuable to have close contact or interaction with representatives from the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). This suggests that the RSPO's presence and engagement were seen as beneficial or important in the dialogue scenarios involving those communities. Overall, the project increases awareness around RSPO which contributes to the smallholder inclusion strategy and the advocacy to achieve a transparent and ethical behaviour by the producing sector (Principle 1 and 5)

## 5.2.2 Provide IMO's with enough knowledge to use the RSPO System in facilitating local communities' needs, priorities, and rights.

Table 5. Key findings by analytical categories – R2

Category	Sub Activity	Finding
Effectiveness:	1.2 Meetings to present the project, identify and map the local community, stakeholders and labours including women groups actively advocating against palm oil companies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indepaz has an extended experience accompanying local communities in the interrelationship they have with the companies in the palm oil sector (Mapiripan – Poligrow).</li> </ul>

	2.3 Participation in the RSPO Latin American conference in Campeche - México 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indepaz adapted to the challenges faced in the implementation process including reporting and knowledge about the RSPO system.</li> <li>• Indepaz holds methodological rigurocity for data collection (interviews, workshops among communities, surveys).</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>	2.1 Workshops for strengthen the capacity building of local community, stakeholders and labours including women groups actively advocating against palm oil companies. (2 workshops in every zone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indepaz accompaniment will continue beyond of the project boundaries therefore the interested stakeholders can connect with Indepaz if they require assistance/training to navigate along the RSPO grievance mechanisms (smallholder associations, environmental organizations, unions).</li> <li>• The overall strategy creates a good environment to improve RSPO awareness, but it lacks depth to improve stakeholders' capacity.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact and ToC Relevance</b>	<p>7.2 Publication in local media – local stations (8 departments)</p> <p>7.3 Carry out a campaign promoting the use of RSPO mechanism.</p> <p>7.4 Publication and dissemination of documents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indepaz consolidates as an IMO to go regarding emerging knowledge about the RSPO standard including its principles and criteria and its conflict resolution mechanisms.</li> <li>• Indepaz collects contextual information to provide recommendations for establishing future relationships with groups of interest, along with potential lines of action to ensure the continuity of the process, tailored to the specific needs of each region.</li> <li>• The communicative pieces constitute an achievement that can disseminate when</li> </ul>

		is needed relevant elements around the RSPO.
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#### a) Effectiveness

Indepaz has an extended experience accompanying local communities in the interrelationship they have with the companies in the palm oil sector. This experience involves providing support, advocacy, and guidance to communities as they address various challenges and concerns related to palm oil production. Through this accompaniment, Indepaz has worked to empower communities, promote dialogue, and advocate for their rights, ultimately aiming to achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes within the palm oil sector. Thus, it was adequate to select this organization given its national presence and trajectory mediating dialogues among stakeholders whose interests differ in the context that the RSPO is embedded in Colombia.

The RSPO coordination team highlighted Indepaz's challenges included the progress report quality and the capacity to correctly adapt the complexity of the RSPO P&C to the outreach activities. In the early stages of the project, Indepaz worked closely with the project's coordinators to improve the quality of the project's outcome reporting. Indepaz managed to successfully integrate the feedback provided, showing a valuable capacity to adapt to the client's needs. Additionally, the coordination manifested concern for the quality of the educational techniques designed by Indepaz based on the RSPO guidelines to journey across the certification process and grievance mechanisms. Once again, Indepaz adapted successfully and introduced in the outreach strategy (workshops, communicative pieces, among others), the RSPO coordination suggestions.

On the other hand, Indepaz demonstrated methodological rigor in its data collection processes, employing techniques such as interviews, workshops among communities, and surveys. This approach ensures that information gathered is thorough, accurate, and representative of diverse perspectives within the palm oil sector. Additionally, Indepaz exhibits a strong analytical

capacity, effectively organizing, processing, and presenting stakeholder outputs in coherent and nuanced reports. This analytical prowess enabled Indepaz to consolidate a robust database of valuable insights around the palm oil stakeholders and the sources of conflict among them.

## b) Sustainability

Indepaz's accompaniment will extend beyond the project's boundaries, ensuring ongoing support for interested stakeholders seeking assistance or training to navigate the RSPO grievance mechanisms. This commitment to continued support underscores Indepaz's dedication to promoting transparency, accountability, and community empowerment within the palm oil sector. Stakeholders such as smallholder associations, environmental organizations, and unions can connect with Indepaz for guidance on effectively engaging with RSPO grievance mechanisms. Nevertheless, as expressed in the previous section, the project activities lacked depth to develop capacity at the organizational level.

Indepaz reports that they offer training sessions, provide resources, and offer personalized assistance to help stakeholders understand their rights, navigate the grievance process, and advocate for their interests. Currently, they are already supporting processes of grievance with some communities that are interested in engaging actively in the RSPO system. By offering ongoing accompaniment, Indepaz aims to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, hold producers accountable when is fair to do so, and contribute to more sustainable and equitable palm oil production practices. Nevertheless, the support of the RSPO is fundamental to sustain these outcomes.

Overall, the project design creates a good environment for RSPO awareness among stakeholders. Nevertheless, as the conversations held with participants of the sessions show the remembrance of the activities is limited, particularly for opposing groups, labours, and smallholders. The process of getting in contact with participants also showed the oil palm sector in Colombia is constantly changing. The agendas and interests of the stakeholders are complex



and dynamic, and the initial outcomes generated by this program may not last if the RSPO fails to adapt.

### c) Impact and ToC Relevance

Indepaz solidifies its position as a go-to Information Management Organization (IMO) for emerging knowledge about the RSPO standard, including its principles, criteria, and conflict resolution mechanisms. As an IMO, Indepaz serves as a trusted source of information, providing comprehensive resources, analysis, and guidance on RSPO-related topics to stakeholders within the palm oil sector. Through its expertise and dedication, Indepaz ensures that stakeholders have access to up-to-date information and insights to navigate the complexities of the RSPO standard effectively. This includes understanding the principles and criteria for sustainable palm oil production, as well as the mechanisms available for addressing conflicts and grievances within the industry. Overall, Indepaz commitment contributes to the smallholder inclusion strategy and the advocacy to achieve a transparent and ethical behaviour by the producing sector (Principle 1 and 5)

By consolidating as an IMO, Indepaz can play a crucial role in promoting transparency, accountability, and responsible practices within the palm oil sector (Principle 4 and 6). Its efforts contribute to enhancing awareness, facilitating dialogue, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, ultimately driving positive change towards more sustainable palm oil production. Indepaz adopts a comprehensive approach by gathering contextual information from various sources, including local communities, stakeholders, and relevant data, to gain a thorough understanding of the dynamics and challenges within each region. Drawing upon this wealth of information, Indepaz then formulates recommendations for establishing future relationships with key groups of interest, such as smallholder associations, environmental organizations, and labor unions.

These recommendations are not only based on identifying the needs and concerns of different stakeholders but also on analyzing the specific context and characteristics of each region. Indepaz considers factors such as socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and

environmental considerations to tailor its recommendations accordingly. Moreover, Indepaz doesn't stop at providing recommendations but also offers potential lines of action to ensure the continuity of the process. This involves suggesting practical steps, strategies, and initiatives that can be implemented to address identified issues, foster collaboration, and drive positive change within the palm oil sector. By taking a nuanced and context-sensitive approach, Indepaz strives to facilitate meaningful engagement, promote sustainable practices, and support the long-term well-being of local communities and ecosystems across different regions.

The communicative pieces serve as an archive that can be disseminated whenever relevant elements about the RSPO are needed since they are available on YouTube. This archive contains valuable information, insights, and resources related to the RSPO's principles, criteria, standards, and best practices in sustainable palm oil production. Whether it's raising awareness among stakeholders, educating the public, or providing guidance to palm oil companies, the communicative pieces offer a comprehensive repository of knowledge that can be accessed and shared as needed. They serve as a tool for promoting transparency, accountability, and responsible practices within the palm oil sector.

Additionally, the archive of communicative pieces can be regularly updated and expanded to reflect new developments, emerging issues, and evolving best practices within the industry. This ensures that stakeholders have access to the most up-to-date information and resources to support their efforts in promoting sustainable palm oil production and environmental conservation. Overall, the communicative pieces play a vital role in facilitating dialogue, fostering collaboration, and driving positive change towards a more sustainable and socially responsible palm oil industry.

### 5.2.3. Enhance RSPO's ability to engage and facilitate local communities to support their needs and rights.

Table 6. Key findings by analytical categories – R3

Category	Sub Activity	Finding
<b>Effectiveness:</b>	1.1 Identification and mapping of local community, stakeholders and labours including women groups actively advocating against palm oil companies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The stakeholder map leaves for the RSPO a grounded outlook of the diversity of actors that influence the palm oil value chain in the country at the local and regional level.</li> <li>• The visits from the representatives contributed to close the gap between the management sphere of the palm oil certification and the grounded conflicts that communities face.</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>	1.3 Analysis of the result of the identification and mapping of local community, stakeholders and labours including women groups actively advocating against palm oil companies. 7.1 Database of contacts of key actors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The stakeholder map is a powerful decision-making tool because it sheds light over the sources of conflict in the different producing regions and the power relations that facilitated/hinder the dissemination of the RSPO principles and criteria.</li> <li>• The RSPO now holds a database of contacts across the productive regions that can be used to strengthen ties especially with smallholders and opposing groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact and ToC Relevance</b>	6.1 Develop communication mechanism between RSPO and stakeholders. (6.1.1 and 6.1.2 RSPO meeting with journalists and stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project provides a greater understanding of the regions which can positively influence future approaches. Tumaco (land tenure and armed conflict), Madgalena medio (labour conditions), Catatumo (Environmental conflicts), Meta (Remediation).</li> <li>• Greater outreach with the communities because of the national tour of</li> </ul>

		<p>representatives. These encounters open the possibilities to increase proximity among the RSPO and the multiplicity of stakeholders in the different producing regions.</p>
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### a) Effectiveness

The stakeholder map provides the RSPO with a comprehensive overview of the diverse array of actors that influence the palm oil value chain at both the local and regional levels within the country. This grounded outlook helps the RSPO understand the intricate network of stakeholders involved in palm oil production, including smallholder farmers, plantation owners, government agencies, NGOs, local communities, consumer groups, and more. By visualizing this diversity of stakeholders, the project provided the RSPO with insights into the various interests, concerns, and dynamics shaping the palm oil sector. Overall, Indepaz commitment contributes to the smallholder inclusion strategy and the advocacy to achieve a transparent and ethical behaviour by the producing sector (Principle 1 and 5)

This understanding is essential for developing inclusive and effective strategies that address the needs and priorities of different stakeholders while promoting sustainable practices and responsible production methods. Furthermore, the stakeholder map serves as a valuable tool for fostering collaboration, facilitating dialogue, and building partnerships across different sectors of the palm oil industry. By engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, the RSPO can work towards consensus-based solutions that benefit all parties involved and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the palm oil value chain.

The visits from representatives contributed significantly to bridging the gap between the management sphere of palm oil certification and the real, grounded conflicts that communities face. By physically engaging with the affected communities, representatives gained firsthand

insights into the challenges, concerns, and aspirations of those directly impacted by palm oil production. The coordination team, however, acknowledges they could have put more efforts to improve the quality of the educational material used in the sessions by Indepaz to provide a higher technical rigurocity.

This direct interaction allowed representatives to better understand the context in which certification processes operate and the complexities of implementing sustainable practices on the ground. It provided an opportunity to listen to the voices of local communities, acknowledge their grievances, and work collaboratively towards finding viable solutions. Overall, the visits from representatives played a crucial role in building bridges between different stakeholders, facilitating dialogue, and advancing the shared goal of achieving sustainable palm oil production that benefits both communities and the environment.

## b) Sustainability

The stakeholder map served as a powerful decision-making tool because it sheds light on the sources of conflict in various producing regions and reveals the intricate power dynamics that influence the dissemination of RSPO principles and criteria. The map provides valuable insights into the underlying causes of conflict and the factors that shape the adoption and implementation of sustainability standards. Understanding the sources of conflict allows decision-makers to address root causes and develop targeted strategies for conflict resolution and mitigation. RSPO can discern which stakeholders wield significant influence over the adoption and dissemination of the principles and criteria. This knowledge enables them to engage key actors effectively, build alliances, and leverage influence to promote broader adoption of sustainable practices.

The RSPO's database of contacts across productive regions represents a valuable resource that can be leveraged to strengthen ties, particularly with smallholders and opposing groups within the palm oil industry. By tapping into this extensive network of contacts, the RSPO can foster

dialogue, build trust, and promote collaboration among stakeholders with diverse interests and perspectives. Also, the coordination team reports that this contacted allow them to map the types of requirements that some of the stakeholders presented to the producers. The team commented that some of them did not align with the RSPO guidelines which sheds light over the main weaknesses the communities face in the different producing regions of the country.

Similarly, the database enables the RSPO to engage with opposing groups, such as environmental organizations or community activists, in constructive dialogue. By initiating open and transparent communication, the RSPO can address concerns, identify common ground, and work towards mutually beneficial solutions that balance economic development with environmental and social considerations. The communication channels with these stakeholders are of outmost importance since they accumulate the main complaints against the sector.

Moreover, the database facilitates the dissemination of information about RSPO principles, criteria, and certification processes to a wider audience. This helps raise awareness, build capacity, and promote understanding among stakeholders about the benefits of sustainable palm oil production. Nevertheless, it is important to constantly update the details of the organizations to keep active communication channels. Overall, the RSPO's stakeholder map and database of contacts serves as a valuable tool for building relationships, fostering collaboration, and driving positive change within the palm oil industry towards greater sustainability and social responsibility. These outcomes help them navigate challenges, identify opportunities for collaboration, and drive meaningful change towards a more sustainable and responsible palm oil value chain.

### c) Impact and ToC Relevance

The project provides the RSPO with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse array of actors influencing the palm oil value chain at both local and regional levels within the country. This grounded outlook allows the RSPO to recognize and appreciate the complexity of the palm

oil industry in Colombia, encompassing various stakeholders such as smallholder farmers, plantation owners, government agencies, NGOs, local communities, consumer groups, and more.

The mention of Tumaco brings attention to the complexities surrounding land tenure and the lingering effects of armed conflict in the region. In Tumaco, the palm oil industry intersects with issues of land ownership, displacement, and the legacy of violence, requiring sensitive and nuanced approaches to address the underlying tensions and promote sustainable development. Despite the limitations that these structural conditions uphold, they are valuable for the principle 4 and 6 of the RSPO, aimed at improving respect for local communities, human rights, and labour conditions.

Moving to Magdalena Medio, the focus shifts to labor conditions within the palm oil sector. Here, ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for labor rights are paramount. Addressing issues such as exploitation, discrimination, and unsafe working environments is essential for promoting social justice and equitable development in the region. Overall, the RSPO commitment contributes to the smallholder inclusion strategy and the advocacy to achieve a transparent and ethical behaviour by the producing sector (Principle 1 and 5).

In Catatumbo, environmental conflicts come to the forefront. The expansion of palm oil plantations may exacerbate deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water pollution, leading to conflicts with local communities and environmental activists. Balancing economic interests with environmental conservation efforts is crucial for mitigating conflicts and promoting sustainable palm oil production practices. Principle 1, 5 and 7 are included within this outcome since it shows advancements in acknowledging communities' reports around the ethics of producer's behaviour related to the conservation of ecosystems and the environment.

Lastly, in Meta, the emphasis is on remediation efforts. Extended conflicts over the use and ownership of land in areas inhabited by ethnic communities are deeply rooted in historical injustices, social inequalities, and competing interests over natural resources in this area. These conflicts often arise due to overlapping land claims, inadequate legal protections for indigenous and ethnic minority rights, and the encroachment of external factors such as palm oil

companies. This region may have experienced environmental degradation due to past palm oil activities or other industrial practices.

Implementing remediation measures, restoring ecosystems, and addressing environmental damage are essential steps towards fostering ecological resilience and promoting sustainable land use practices in Meta. Once again, Principle 1, 5 and 7 come to the front. Addressing these conflicts requires a holistic approach that prioritizes the recognition of indigenous and ethnic minority land rights, meaningful consultation, and participation of affected communities in decision-making processes, and the implementation of sustainable land use practices. The FPIC, highly explored in the training sessions of this project, is key to achieve this and the RSPO should keep disseminating its importance.

The national tour of representatives has led to greater outreach with communities, opening possibilities to enhance proximity between the RSPO and a diverse range of stakeholders across various producing regions. The representatives' visits fostered trust, transparency, and accountability within the certification process. Communities felt heard and validated, knowing that their perspectives were being considered in decision-making processes. At the same time, representatives gained a deeper appreciation for the realities faced by communities, which informed their approach to addressing conflicts and promoting sustainable palm oil practices.



## 6. Lessons learned and Recommendations.

In table 4, we present a summary of the lessons learned and recommendations of the Programme Outreach. We divide them by each of the results to delineate possible future actions the RSPO coordination team could follow based on the considerations of the interviewed stakeholders and the overall analysis developed by the evaluation team. Below, we detail the context and the rational for each lesson and recommendation.

**Table 4. Summary of lessons learned and recommendations by project result.**

Result	Lessons Learned	Recommendations
R1. Enable local communities' access and engagement with the RSPO System more easily and effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Despite increasing awareness resulting from the project, communities still lack direct communication mechanisms with RSPO representatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct and permanent dialogue channels with RSPO representatives are fundamental to improve the commitment of actors and communities with the procedures, principles, and criteria of the certification.</li> </ul>
R2. Provide IMO's with enough knowledge to use the RSPO System in facilitating local communities' needs, priorities, and rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The outcomes of the project were significative. Nevertheless, IMO's performance could be improved defining a more rigorous selection and training process. Future iterations of community outreach processes can benefit of these guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a mechanism/guide to reiterate community outreach projects based on alliances with IMO's.</li> </ul>
R3. Enhance RSPO's ability to engage and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, all the stakeholders consider the project has a great</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a follow up project that integrates the stakeholders'</li> </ul>

facilitate local communities to support their needs and rights.	<p>potential to improve RSPO presence in the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project provides a strategic outlook of communities' needs, shortages, and strengths.</li> </ul>	<p>suggestions and regional differences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the technical load for the training sessions.</li> <li>Indepaz recommends a follow up phase to monitor the communities' journey using the grievance mechanisms.</li> </ul>
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## R1. Enable local communities' access and engagement with the RSPO System more easily and effectively.

- Despite increasing awareness resulting from the project, communities still lack direct communication mechanisms with RSPO representatives.

Stakeholders value the projects efforts for increasing awareness around the RSPO and its grievance mechanisms. Nevertheless, they argue the continuity of future outcomes depend on a grounded approach from the RSPO to increase capacity among the communities to file and present complaints that make sense in the light of the principles and criteria. The evaluation team considers:

- A direct and permanent dialogue channels with RSPO representatives is fundamental to improve the commitment of actors and communities with the procedures, principles, and criteria of the certification.

The teams recommends that RSPO should assign dedicated Community Liaison Officers (CLO) to serve as the primary point of contact between the communities and RSPO. The CLOs should be local representatives with extended experience working in the sector in the different producing regions. Its role would be to facilitate effective communication and understanding of the RSPO P&C, especially for smallholders, unions, labours, women's groups and opposing organizations. The CLOs could include mobile outreach units: to travel to remote communities to provide information, answer questions, and collect feedback on RSPO-related matters. These units can include trained staff equipped with educational materials, visual aids, and

communication tools that the project already produced to engage with community members effectively.

On the other hand, RSPO should strengthen formal feedback mechanisms to enable community members to raise concerns, provide feedback, and seek assistance directly from RSPO. RSPO could improve or implement toll-free hotlines, email addresses, or online portals specifically for community inquiries. This should be coupled with the organization of regular community meetings or forums where RSPO representatives can directly interact with community members, listen to their concerns, and provide updates on RSPO initiatives and certification processes. These meetings should be held at convenient times and locations for community members to attend.

RSPO should advocate to conform Community Advisory Boards (CAB) comprising representatives from local communities, NGOs, RSPO, and other stakeholders. These boards can serve as platforms for ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and consultation on RSPO-related issues, ensuring that community voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes. Through the CAB, the RSPO can maintain transparency in communication by providing clear and accurate information about RSPO initiatives, certification processes, and outcomes. Address community concerns openly and honestly and provide regular updates on the status of inquiries or requests raised by community members.

Finally, RSPO should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of communication mechanisms and engagement activities in bridging the gap between communities and RSPO representatives. Require feedback from both CABs and CLOs to identify areas for improvement and refine strategies for better communication and engagement is key for this monitoring.

**R2. Provide IMO's with enough knowledge to use the RSPO System in facilitating local communities' needs, priorities, and rights.**

- **The outcomes of the project were significant. Nevertheless, IMO's performance could be improved defining a more rigorous selection and training process. Future iterations of community outreach processes can benefit of these guidelines.**

Indepaz performance was notable given its previous experience representing the interests of grassroots organizations. Indepaz capacity and reputation allowed a greater opportunity to communicate with sectors that are located far away from the RSPO's influence. Nevertheless, RSPO should advocate for establishing a could benefit to define a methodology to select and train IMO's that could implement similar projects in Colombia and other countries. The evaluation team considers:

- **RSPO could benefit from developing a mechanism/guide to reiterate community outreach projects based on alliances with IMOs.**

Developing a mechanism or guide to reiterate community outreach projects based on alliances with Intermediary Non-Governmental Organizations (IMOs) can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of RSPO's engagement with communities. Below we draft a plan to create such a mechanism. Key performance indicator may be extracted from this plan to structure a strategy:

- 1) **Identify the adequate partner NGO:** Look for NGOs that are actively involved in environmental conservation, sustainable agriculture, human rights advocacy, or community development, and have experience working within palm oil-producing communities. Technical background related to the RSPO and other certification mechanisms. RSPO should keep developing the selection of these NGOs through merits contest to advocate for transparency.
- 2) **Co-create Outreach objectives:** Based on the good practices identified in this evaluation, RSPO should with partner with NGOs capable to develop outreach objectives focused on promoting RSPO certification among diverse stakeholders. These objectives should emphasize the benefits of sustainable practices and help overcome barriers to certification. Additionally, they should encourage other stakeholders to seek guidance to the RSPO system whenever they deem it necessary to file a complaint. RSPO should tap into the networks and expertise of partner NGOs to reach a broader audience within palm

oil-producing regions. Leverage their connections with local governments, cooperatives, and community-based organizations to facilitate outreach activities.

- 3) **Provide Training and Capacity Building:** Offer training sessions, workshops, and educational materials to build the capacity of farmers and plantation workers on RSPO standards, certification requirements, and best practices for sustainable palm oil production. Additionally, reiterate the use of guidelines to increase the use of DSF mechanisms. The RSPO should implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the uptake of RSPO certification and DSF mechanisms among target communities. Track key indicators such as the number of certified farms, adoption of sustainable practices, # of correct complaints under DSF guidelines, and improvements in livelihoods and environmental conservation.
- 4) **Adapt and Iterate:** Continuously adapt outreach strategies based on feedback from stakeholders and the evolving needs of palm oil-producing communities. Adjust programs and messaging to address emerging challenges and opportunities. This should also recognize and celebrate achievements such as increased adoption of RSPO certification and improvements in sustainability outcomes and DSF mechanisms. Share success stories, case studies, and lessons learned with the wider palm oil industry to inspire further action and replication of best practices.

### R3. Enhance RSPO's ability to engage and facilitate local communities to support their needs and rights.

- **The project provides a strategic outlook of communities' needs, shortages, and strengths.**

The RSPO programme outreach captures the main communities' needs, shortages, and strengths differentiated by producing region. There is a risk of wasting these advancements when they could be the root of future synergies with supporting and opposing sectors in the country. Therefore, the evaluation team emphasizes the importance of a follow-up program/strategy that builds upon what was achieved. The evaluation team considers:

- **The RSPO should increase the technical aspect of the training sessions.**

Stakeholders manifested the strategy, and the training sessions should be strengthened in a following iteration. The evaluation team recommends the development of hands-on practical sessions to enhance learning outcomes. To increase knowledge about the technical aspects, provide participants with opportunities to apply technical knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios, such as field demonstrations, crop management simulations, and hands-on exercises using tools and equipment.

On the other hand, RSPO might document the success of palm oil producers who have effectively implemented technical solutions to enhance productivity, minimize environmental impact, and achieve RSPO certification. Highlight practical examples of sustainable cultivation techniques, precision agriculture technologies, and innovative approaches to pest and disease management. Additionally, organize expert-led workshops, seminars, and webinars focused on specific technical topics of interest to stakeholders. Invite leading experts, researchers, and industry practitioners to share their knowledge, insights, and experiences on relevant technical subjects, such as integrated pest management, soil conservation, or precision farming techniques.

- **Indepaz recommends a follow up phase to monitor the communities' journey using the grievance mechanisms.**

IMO Indepaz recommend that a one-year follow-up phase should be included for projects of this kind due to its participatory character. The evaluation team considers that for an eventual follow-up phase, the RSPO should sponsor worktables with the IMO that implements the project to explore previous cases in which they were correctly used by other stakeholders. These case studies and best showcase successful submissions to the RSPO system, advocating for a responsible use of the grievance mechanisms. This is relevant to improve the efficiency of the system and additionally increase the trust and transparency within the sector and with other stakeholders.

Additionally, a follow-up protocol outlining the procedures and timelines for monitoring the status and outcomes of grievances submitted by communities should be included to note the impacts achieved. Establish clear roles and responsibilities for RSPO staff and IMOs, should be

involved in the follow-up process. This ensures transparency and accountability in the handling of grievances by providing regular updates to communities on the status of their complaints, including any actions taken, decisions made, or remedial measures implemented. Publish annual reports or dashboards summarizing key grievance-related data and outcomes can also improve the education and transparency.

RSPO should also provide training and capacity-building support to palm oil companies on how to effectively manage and respond to community grievances in accordance with RSPO standards and best practices. Equip company representatives with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to engage with communities respectfully, address grievances promptly, and prevent conflicts from escalating.

Finally, RSPO should continuously evaluate the effectiveness of grievance mechanisms and follow-up processes through stakeholder consultations, feedback surveys, and performance reviews. Use lessons learned to refine and improve the design, implementation, and monitoring of grievance mechanisms, ensuring that they remain responsive to the evolving needs and expectations of communities.