

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
INDEPENDENT REVIEW
INTERMEDIARY ORGANISATION (IMO) of the RSPO COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAMME
Project Title:
“Strengthening Local Communities, Smallholders and Labours in Guatemala and Honduras through
RSPO Mechanisms”**

1. Background

As a multi-stakeholder initiative that promotes the production and uptake of Certified Sustainable Palm Oil, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) aims to make palm oil sustainable.

The RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) were introduced in 2007 with the latest revision adopted in November 2018 (in reference to the year when the project was implemented). It is the basis for certification and serves as the global guideline for sustainable palm oil production. It consists of a set of environmental, social and economic principles as well as best management practices. Compliance with these requirements enables palm oil producers to claim that their palm oil is sustainably produced. Among the aims of the P&C is ensuring that the fundamental rights of landowners, local communities, plantation workers, small farmers as well as their families are respected and fully considered.

In its pursuit of transforming the oil palm industry to make it more sustainable, RSPO faces many challenges, complaints and disputes with varying circumstances, requiring different approaches. The RSPO Board of Governors recognises the need for more comprehensive outreach efforts through a network of intermediaries identified from the related or affected communities within producing countries to support and assist RSPO, thus paving the way for a more effective engagement process that will play a key role in achieving RSPO’s mission.

Subsequently, RSPO commissioned an assessment of the organisation’s capacity to engage with communities impacted by palm oil development through ‘*intermediary organisations*’ (such as local NGOs), with recommendations regarding how RSPO could enhance such outreach. The conclusions from the assessment were that:

- The RSPO is a multi-stakeholder process which relies on the active engagement of all concerned parties to function effectively and credibly.
- Lack of resources, knowledge and capacity prevent customary landowners, workers and smallholders from finding a voice in RSPO.
- The main barriers to engagement are knowledge of RSPO, lack of resources, linguistic and educational barriers. Another challenge is not being involved in the palm oil sector and/ or being involved in multiple commodity sectors.
- The long-term success of RSPO to provide ‘conflict free’ palm oil to the global market thus depends on improved engagement with these groups.
- Enhancing RSPO’s capacity to reach workers, women, local communities, vulnerable communities and Indigenous peoples is needed through intermediary organisations at national, regional and local levels by improving the capacity of these intermediary groups to engage with the RSPO.

The assessment was carried out by Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) in 21 countries between June and October 2014 through reviews.



2. Context

RSPO entered into a Service Agreement with Oxfam Novib and CNV International to implement a two-year project aimed at strengthening local communities, smallholders, workers, and CSOs in Guatemala and Honduras to actively participate in RSPO mechanisms and human rights protection processes.

The project's purpose is to enable qualified participation of communities and labour groups in the implementation and oversight of RSPO standards and principles, while fostering social dialogue, improving access to grievance systems, and developing a regional Human Rights Observatory for the palm oil sector. The project contributes to RSPO's global outreach objective to ensure effective, inclusive, and rights-based participation in the sustainable palm oil value chain.

The programme entitled **“Strengthening Local Communities, Smallholders and Labours in Guatemala and Honduras through RSPO Mechanisms”** was implemented in 30 months (15 May 2023 until 15 October 2025). The overall objectives of the programme are:

- For social groups, workers, municipal actors, and other relevant stakeholders in the area of palm oil operations to be able to access and use the mechanisms established by the RSPO for their qualified participation and protection, in the function of the rights of the people in palm oil operation areas.
- The creation of a CSO working group/Human Rights Observatory on palm oil in Guatemala and Honduras, which can dialogue with and accompany the RSPO in the observation of its Principles and Criteria, especially in cases of audits and evaluations for certification.
- Identification of best practices and challenges for training, awareness-raising, and knowledge application (participation in and effective use of the RSPO mechanisms), as well as their outcomes. Additionally, identification of elements to strengthen RSPO Standards and policies (P&C 2018) and guarantees for effective implementation.
- Companies and social groups establish pilot dialogues to achieve direct agreements, especially through social dialogue among palm oil companies and workers.

The community outreach programme for Guatemala and Honduras was completed in October 2025. The status and progress of all proposed activities were elaborated in the Final Project Report and have been submitted in June 2025. Therefore, it is critical to conduct an independent review, to understand and assess the effectiveness of the programme's impact on the targeted grassroots stakeholders, and obtain feedback from the ground and how in reality the programme contributes to RSPO's mission of promoting sustainable palm oil.

Objectives

The purpose is to conduct an independent review of the Community Outreach and Engagement Programme for Guatemala and Honduras by the IMO partner, OXFAM-CNV. The review will be undertaken by a contracted, neutral, third-party appointed by the RSPO Secretariat.

The extent of the review covers:

- The evaluation of the Programme management/coordination by the IMO to assess whether the work carried out by the IMO implementation partner is in accordance with their project objectives to secure informed and vigorous engagement of communities in RSPO at all levels, by establishing a strengthened outreach of RSPO through intermediary organisations as stated above.
- The evaluation of the Programme management/coordination by the IMO; to assess whether the work carried out by IMO implementation partner has been able to address the issues outlined in



the Intermediary Outreach and Engagement in Producing Countries, Status Assessment and Outreach Plan (prepared by Forest Peoples Programme, October 2014)

- Evaluation of the entire role, set-up, activities, resource allocation, achievements and impacts of the Programme that have been implemented, including the evaluation of the working plan as presented in the initial stage of the programme, as well as how this programme has contributed to the achievement of the RSPO's mission and vision, and Theory of Change.
- Identification of issues that remain unaddressed, points of contention or conflict, and to assess what were the barriers to effective implementation of the Programme.

The results and recommendations of this evaluation will be used to improve RSPO's IMO for Community Outreach programme and shared with the Board of Governors. The independent reviewer will therefore be expected to provide a clear, evidence-based assessment and propose strategic options to strengthen future outreach and engagement efforts.

3. Scope of work

The reviewer will be expected to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the programme, Intermediary Organisation (IMO) Of Community Outreach and Engagement Programme with title **"Strengthening Local Communities, Smallholders and Labours in Guatemala and Honduras through RSPO Mechanisms"** and provide a conclusion on whether the programme has met the fundamental objectives of RSPO community and engagement plan, as follows:

- Identify individuals, organisations and/or governmental bodies that are influential and well-respected by the communities, to be approached for voluntary involvement in the RSPO network of intermediaries.
- Ensure local stakeholders, i.e. local communities, have adequate channels of communication with the RSPO as well as access to information through these RSPO intermediaries.
- Carry out more communications, training and awareness-raising workshops in local languages directed at civil society in promoting sustainable palm oil
- Communicate more good news and success stories (and enforce the Standard).
- Develop training modules, tool kits and guides that they can use to engage with communities.
- Execute the recommendations from the first phase of the Community Outreach and Engagement programme for Indonesia, which has been completed prior to this programme.

The consultant or evaluation team will:

1. Review project documentation (Service Agreement, Annex 2 ToR, monitoring framework, progress reports, baseline surveys, communication outputs, any other relevant documents).
2. Assess implementation performance in the **six focal regions**:
 - **Guatemala:** Petén–Alta Verapaz, Izabal–Alta Verapaz, Escuintla–Suchitepéquez–San Marcos
 - **Honduras:** Valle del Sula, Valle Lean, Valle del Aguán
3. Evaluate progress against expected project results and KPIs, including:
 - 40 communities + 16 companies with RSPO liaison points.
 - 120 people participating in RSPO-related decision processes.
 - Establishment of grievance mechanisms in at least 40 communities.
 - Functioning digital platform for the **Human Rights Observatory**.
 - Conduct at least two **social-dialogue pilots**.
4. Identify remaining gaps, risks, or contextual barriers affecting effective outreach.
5. Provide actionable recommendations for RSPO's future IMO community outreach programme.

4. Timeframe

The review is expected to take place between February-April 2026.

5. Budget

The budget for this partnership project should not exceed USD 10,000.

6. Deliverables

It is anticipated that the review will have the following deliverables:

A final report which includes:

- i. Results of assessment of the programme management/coordination by the IMO.
- ii. Results of assessment of the entire role, set-up, activities, resource allocation, achievements and impacts of the program that has been implemented (including contribution to RSPO's mission based on the RSPO Theory of Change);
- iii. A summary of issues that remain unaddressed, points of contention or conflict, and assessment of barriers to effective implementation of the community outreach programme; and
- iv. Conclusions and recommendations for future RSPO IMO community outreach programme
- v. Slide deck for presentation

7. Requirements

RSPO seeks the services of an independent organisation with a proven track record in programme evaluation to carry out the review as per the objective above. The applicant is required to meet the following eligibility requirements as detailed below:

- Experience in engaging grassroots stakeholders. Previous experience in review and evaluation of programmes - please submit at least three (3) reports where available.
- Comprehensive knowledge of RSPO and other voluntary sustainability standards.
- Familiarity with the palm oil industry and issues related to land use-based commodities will be an advantage.
- Proficient to excellent writing skills in British English.
- The Applicant must avoid and disclose to RSPO of any real, perceived or potential conflict of interest that they may have with RSPO or any entities in the review. An apparent or actual conflict of interest may exist where an individual or entity has different, and potentially conflicting, duties or relationships with respect to other individuals or entities within the programme and RSPO.
- The Applicant must adhere to the highest standards of professional ethics, impartiality, and confidentiality throughout the evaluation process. All information obtained during the review shall be treated as confidential and used solely for the purposes of the assignment. The Applicant is expected to conduct the evaluation with integrity, transparency, and full respect for the rights and dignity of all stakeholders involved.

8. Submission of an expression of interest

Interested parties are invited to submit a proposal that must include the following information in your expression of interest:

- A brief personal statement addressing your rationale for application based on criteria and skills set required.
- An outline of the proposed approach and comprehensive methodology, including suggestions to do the assessment.



- An overall work plan with a timeframe.
- A breakdown of expenditure and justification.
- Curriculum Vitae.
- Examples of similar or previous projects demonstrating your ability to undertake work of similar nature. All documents submitted in response to this Terms of Reference must be written in British English.

Any inquiries in connection with this Terms of Reference shall be submitted to **Tri Budiono, Senior Manager-Global IMO Programme, RSPO** at the following e-mail address: **Tri.Budiono@rspo.org**.

Programme proposals are to be submitted by or before **28 February 2026**.