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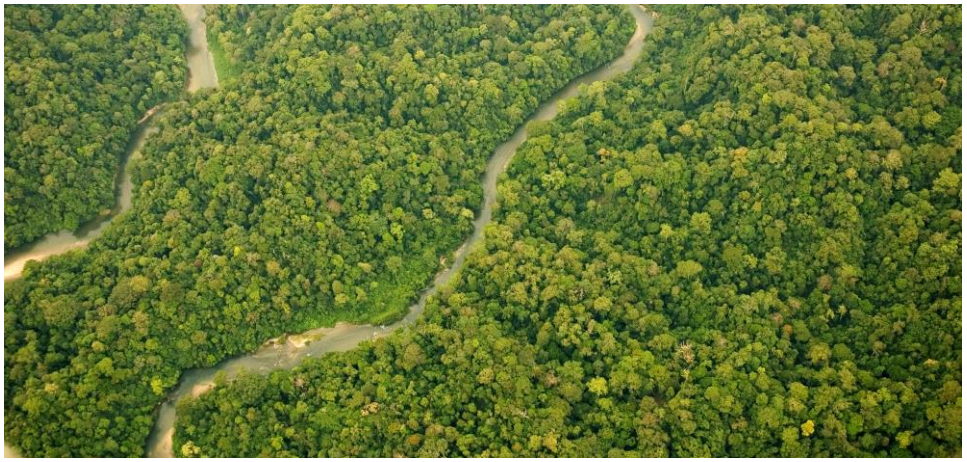
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION IN TANINTHARYI, MYANMAR



Sundaic Lowland Forest, Indonesia. Credit: FFI.

Achieving a win-win for biodiversity conservation and agriculture

Agricultural production in the 21st century must meet multiple goals, including local and national development, livelihood gains, health benefits and biodiversity conservation. Rapid expansion of agriculture can threaten the environmental services on which agriculture depends. This can decrease water quality, increase vulnerability to pests, diseases and natural hazards (such as floods and droughts), and impact water and soil nutrient cycling and soil formation. Habitat loss and fragmentation can also create risks for threatened wildlife species.

Trade-offs between conservation goals and human needs are often necessary, however taking a 'landscape approach' that takes the human and geographical characteristics of a landscape into account and better integrates management of land, water and forests can help meet the multiple goals. Taking a systematic, integrated approach to land-use planning is a good starting point that identifies areas important for conservation management and areas for agricultural conversion. Including a wide range of stakeholders and diverse sectors in decision-making for planning and management will also help define better, more enduring solutions.

The Myanmar context

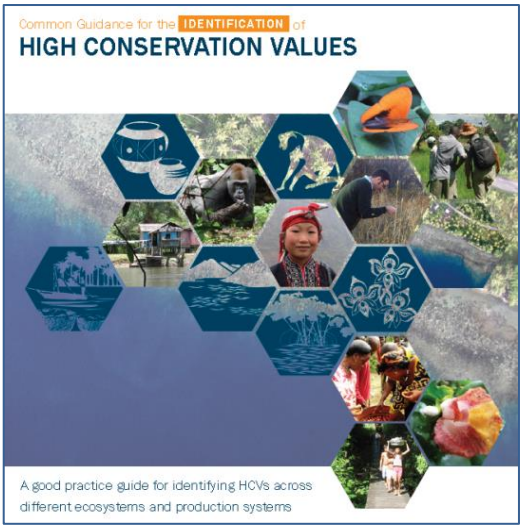
Myanmar is rich in natural resources, strategically located to access markets and now is becoming a stable investment option which is drawing international interest. The country has high agricultural potential that will play a major role in the country's economic development. Through a recent foreign investment law and other policy reforms, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is attracting foreign direct investment to stimulate the agricultural sector, particularly for rice, pulses, sugar, oil palm and natural rubber.

At this point of rapid change there is potential for environmental degradation and social problems to unfold. However, there is also a fantastic opportunity to develop the agricultural sector's sustainably drawing on a wealth of international information and experience and applying this to the Myanmar context.

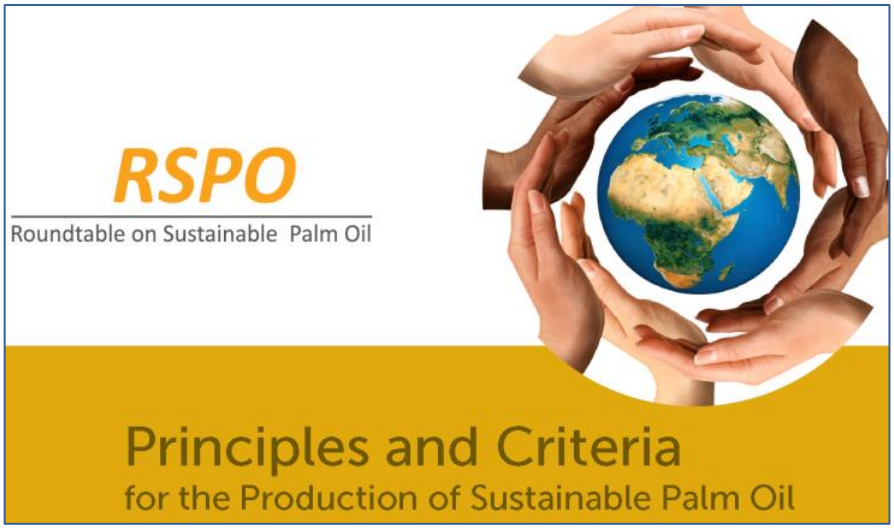
Sustainable plantation development and conservation in Tanintharyi Region

Tanintharyi Region, in southern Myanmar, is the only area with suitable soil and climate conditions for growing oil palm. It is the focus of Myanmar's growing oil palm industry as well as rubber. To date, over 140,000 hectares of oil palm have been planted and 400,000 hectares allocated to 30-40 local and three international companies. The main driver is to meet Myanmar's demand for cooking oil and reduce the high cost of palm oil imports; in 2012 this was USD 375 million.

Tanintharyi Region is also home to 2.5 million hectares of largely intact Sundaic lowland forests, the largest extent remaining in the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot. The vegetation and fauna here is unique, lying in a transitional zone between lowland wet evergreen forest on the Malay Peninsula and the monsoon forests to the north. It features species found nowhere else in the world such as the endangered Gurney's pitta, as well as endangered large mammals including tigers, elephants, tapir, and Malayan sun bear. Most of the area features large intact forests, however heavily logged-over forests and secondary forests on previously farmed land do exist which may hold more potential for conversion.



Best practice guidance from the HCV Resource Network



RSPO's guiding Principles and Criteria for sustainable production

Two key approaches in Tanintharyi Region

From January 2014 Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has funding for a ridge-to-reef programme to secure long-term protection of internationally important areas for biodiversity in the Sundaic region of Myanmar. Ensuring that agriculture is appropriately planned and managed is an important part of the programme. Improving information, capacity-building, and engaging diverse stakeholders will help enable this and lay foundations for sustainability in Tanintharyi Region.

1. Landscape-level land-use planning using a High Conservation Value approach

A High Conservation Value (HCV) is **a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance.** The HCV approach has proven useful for identifying environmental and social values in production landscapes. It can be used for a specific management unit or a whole landscape to guide management.

HCV is widely used for conservation planning, resource use and also well used by commodity certification schemes (see below. Six HCVs include, for example, areas with internationally important threatened species, ecosystems or habitats, areas needed for protecting water catchments and controlling erosion, to sacred sites valued by a community.

In Tanintharyi Region, FFI is raising knowledge and capacity to use HCV for mapping and planning. Appropriate land management then includes a mosaic of protected areas, community forestry, sustainable plantations and settlements.

2. Commodity sustainability standards to inform policy and practice

There are efforts globally to make the production of major agricultural commodities sustainable, driven by industry and interested parties through various commodity initiatives. These include the Better **Sugar** Cane Initiative, **Forest** Stewardship Council, Round Table for Responsible **Soy** and the Roundtable on Sustainable **Palm Oil** (RSPO).

The commodity standards have broadly similar principles of sustainability, but differ in detail. These include economic, legal, environmental and social aspects and are relevant to both smallholder farmers and large plantation owners. The HCV approach is recognised by all of them, mainly to limit deforestation.

The standards provide guidance for on-farm management but they need to be applied in the context of a landscape-level planning process that has already defined the go and no-go areas for production. Governments can help enable sustainable development by setting policies and promoting approaches required by these standards. In the future, it may also help companies in Myanmar access new markets and finance if they decide to be certified sustainable.

In Tanintharyi Region, FFI is raising awareness of the RSPO among private sector and government actors to inform policy and practice and move towards establishing a sustainable plantations working group for Myanmar appropriate standards.

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If you have any questions or would like further information please contact

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