

“New models of production are needed and possible”

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► Do you think that commitments to zero deforestation are good for smallholders?

Yes, if some fundamental underlying issues are brought into the open and dealt with, transparently. First is the lack of connection between the history of deforestation and these new initiatives. The term “zero new deforestation” could be added to the expanding lexicon, with a disclaimer admitting that most previously produced palm oil, soy and beef from large corporations working in tropical countries comes from large-scale deforestation. Otherwise, the public perception — that consumers can now feel good about “sustainable” products — looks like “greenwashing.”

The second assumption is that industrial-scale production is acceptable, and for improvements, multi-national actors simply need to improve their practices. The fact that the vertically-integrated production models that drive deforestation are unsustainable in themselves is not questioned, and the possibility of commodities produced primarily by smallholders and not on large estates is not considered. We must refocus zero deforestation solutions on community-level models, supported by tenure reform, good governance and incentives that will lead to a transformed rural economy.

Currently, zero deforestation pledges tend to legitimize powerful market players, and there is a mismatch between the ideal of maintaining forested landscapes and the concept of a single commodity value chain – an industrial agricultural model. Rather than making existing vertical value chains deforestation-free, incentives are needed for new multi-product value chains from diversified small-scale agro-ecological production systems that mimic forests, and that provide a range of products, spread risks and increase local economic benefits — another key determinant in reducing deforestation. New models of production are needed, and are possible if consumers not only demand deforestation-free products, but that they come from alternative smallholder production models.

► What challenges reduce the benefits to smallholders, and how can these be most effectively overcome?

Zero deforestation and smallholder inclusion are very different goals. In general, big companies do not live with the consequences of their decisions, but smallholders do, and in the environment affected by these decisions – so they have stronger motivation for sustainability. Also important is the nature of the relationship, especially tenure arrangements. Companies may have to contest local land rights if they are not to expand into forests, and smallholders must have the support they need to defend their tenure, to organize and to increase their bargaining power, value addition and marketing

opportunities. In highly deforested landscapes where people have been displaced or forced towards monoculture production tied to big companies, the key is to ensure that FPIC principles are applied throughout, including more equitable outgrower schemes, options to sell to other buyers, and technical packages. Also, allowing traditional forest management systems that maintain a forest mosaic in the landscape must be considered within forest and deforestation definitions.

► **What can smallholders do to better engage with companies making commitments to zero deforestation?**

Organize! To gain secure tenure and access to land and resources; to have a seat at decision-making and policy-making tables; to get information on the range of options, smallholders must demonstrate that they can more efficiently produce deforestation-free commodities and ensure high returns and benefits to their communities and members. They should thereby claim this branding opportunity for themselves as a vast and under-recognized proportion of the private sector in order to negotiate for fair deals for outgrower schemes, find alternative markets, and bargain for the inclusion of multi-product value chains.



► **What advice would you give the private sector to better take on board smallholder perspectives and interests?**

Recognize the prior rights of smallholders to the land, and as legitimate private-sector actors in their own rights. Help them to organize at the producer level and also in their own associations to better meet market demand. Consider support to small- and medium-scale processing enterprises to strengthen the rural economy. Work with smallholder associations to understand the co-benefits of zero deforestation and forest restoration that come from working with forest and farm producers at the landscape scale.

► **What is the future for zero deforestation?**

Zero deforestation efforts must address the fundamental problems of prior deforestation, be willing to challenge current assumptions about the scale and effectiveness of large monoculture industrial models, firmly promote tenure reforms, and address redistribution of current concessions to smallholder producers and their organizations. Companies must also take a more holistic approach towards landscape-scale mosaics and complex agroforestry production systems. Ultimately, a transformation is needed, and that is about much more than being deforestation-free.