

Case study: communal approach to forest conservation

Golden Agri-Resources is engaging the community to commit to forest conservation

Conservation planning and management is a key priority for Golden Agri-Resources (GAR) since establishing the first Forest Conservation Policy in the palm oil sector in 2011, which outlined how GAR intended to decouple palm oil production from deforestation. GAR subsequently identified and is managing 72,000 hectares of high carbon stock (HCS) forests and high conservation value (HCV) areas for conservation within our concessions.

Implementing zero deforestation commitments and achieving long-term conservation is as much a human matter as it is an operational one. Companies manage concession leases temporarily assigned to them by governments, ideally granted with the agreement of local communities. While these leases can run for decades, government reserves the right to reclaim concession areas not fully developed.

Meanwhile, local communities have their own needs to meet within their customary village boundaries – e.g., food security or income generation – and will not automatically protect land earmarked for conservation. Companies must undergo intensive negotiation with them while mediating with local governments on acceptable land use, on land whose boundaries and customary rights are often poorly defined and overlapping.

Halting encroachment or the degradation of conservation land requires community buy-in to the concept of long-term conservation. For GAR, this depends on an extensive and intensive investment in a Participatory Conservation Planning (PCP) process. 'Production-protection partnerships' describes how companies, communities and governments must jointly cooperate to achieve food security, livelihood improvements and conservation within a landscape.

GAR worked with four villages in West Kalimantan, Indonesia to conserve HCS areas. The villages rejected our conservation proposal outright, unaware of its importance while of

What does Participatory Conservation Planning (PCP) involve?



1 GAR visits the area to understand more about the landscape and village(s) living in the area



2 Participatory Mapping – GAR works with villages to map critical areas for food security



3 Joint discussion with local community to identify areas for conservation according to GAR's Social & Environmental Policy



4 A core element of PCP involves designing Alternative Livelihood programmes such as organic vegetable farming using spare communal land, allowing communities to earn additional income without disturbing forests



5 Where communities reject the idea of conservation altogether and clear HCS land for farming, GAR's stand is not to buy from them



6 Final map combining areas for conservation, development and food security, together with management plan is presented to key stakeholders

the belief they would not be allowed to use alternative land for their subsistence.

Intensive engagement educated the community on the significance of HCS forests and the long-term benefits of conservation. GAR also demonstrated controlled ways to utilise the forest for their subsistence while still maintaining its integrity. Convinced, this community accepted the proposal and issued village regulations to manage their forest, formalising the agreement at a public consultation event held in August.

Next, GAR will facilitate the launching of village regulation as a legal basis for communities to manage forests that are agreed upon by them to be protected sustainably. These villages will also start to run an Alternative Livelihood programme with GAR support, reducing pressure on their HCS forest area.

Results and achievements

To date, we have rolled out Participatory Mapping (PM) in 67 villages across 13 concessions and carried out PCP in 10 villages across West Kalimantan, securing community agreement to set aside over 7,000 hectares of HCS forests for conservation. Keeping in mind

the timeframe and resource requirements for the entire process, GAR is committing to engage another 10 villages for PM in 2017. Furthermore, we are using this model of community partnership to rehabilitate 2,600 hectares of peat land in West Kalimantan, and halt future encroachment into peat areas through implementation of Alternative Livelihood programmes. Scaled up, this protection-production model helps ensure economic growth in tandem with forest conservation as we launch similar partnerships across our concessions. The model goes well beyond economic growth to support UN SDGs such as ending poverty; good health and wellbeing; quality education; and reducing inequalities.

Palm oil companies can play an important role in securing the future of the forests in our own concessions, but have little control on the land outside of them. Effecting conservation at the level of the landscape will require firm commitments – including financing – from government, civil society and the global private sector. ■

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