

The Village Support Programme

A holistic approach to sustainable development at village level in Indonesia Linking palm oil supply chains to nature positive and inclusive village development

The past years have seen the development of coalitions of companies, with the purpose of setting up landscape programmes and to collaborate to achieve inclusive palm oil supply chains and to work beyond individual supply chains to support rural livelihoods and forest positive outcomes. In Indonesia, CORE's experience shows that working at a village level is an effective pathway for action in landscape programmes, where supply chains are connected to the wider community which can collectively implement sustainable land use. To support this CORE is implementing the Village Support Programme.

This report describes the Village Support Programme as an approach to building capacity and empowering

communities to tackle the interconnected and complex issues related to sustainable production and community development. It is based on CORE's landscape expertise from the Siak Pelalawan Landscape Programme (SPLP) and the Sungai Linau Programme, and describes what has been learned to date. The principles of the approach can be adapted to other contexts and commodities.

The Village Support Programme – about the approach

The two major intended outcomes of the approach are 1) Enhancing natural ecosystem conservation and restoration at landscape level and 2) improving community livelihoods. The specificity of the approach lies in the level of implementation, at the intersect of the palm oil supply chain and the villages within a landscape. It builds on the intention of international palm oil supply chain companies to achieve their commitments to sustainable palm oil, but has the additional benefit of significantly contributing to wider sustainable development goals at a village level.

In many contexts in Indonesia, the palm oil supply chain can be used as an entry point to the communities. Indeed, in many villages in Sumatra and Kalimantan, oil palm is the dominant income source and communities' livelihoods and land use management is closely linked to the production of oil palm. However, there is a multitude of factors contributing to community development, such as official land allocation, laws, or external commercial interest.

Therefore, the VSP does not only target oil palm smallholders to achieve sustainable production practices. Rather, it aims to involve all types of village stakeholders such as farmers, landowners, village government, social village leaders and other inhabitants, to gain an exhaustive understanding of the context and to collectively plan and work to become nature positive and socially inclusive.

It is believed that through this approach community livelihoods become more resilient, e.g. to economic or climate crises; it supports communities in mutually agreeing and achieving their development potential.



Figure 1 Farmers receiving training on Good Agricultural Practices for oil palm production in Mengkapan village in Siak. Photo credit: Maharani Ara, SPLP village facilitator

The two key outcomes are:

- 1. Enhancing natural ecosystem conservation and restoration:**
Working with farmers and communities to understand the use of and dependence on natural resources and ecosystems, to identify opportunities to strengthen local conservation or restoration initiatives, and improve knowledge and skills on conservation, restoration and sustainable production practices.
- 2. Improving livelihoods:**
Engaging with farmers and communities to understand the sources of income to improve sustainable agricultural practices, ultimately resulting in increased yields, and to develop alternative or additional sources of income to create more resilient local economies.

Impact at scale

By involving village stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in oil palm cultivation, the VSP brings more positive impact to communities and potential to reach scale. In return it contributes to improved sustainability of the palm oil supply chain helping to future proof supply against deforestation and land conflicts. Ultimately, the VSP can either provide a bottom up starting point towards scaling up towards landscape-wide efforts, as in the case of Sungai Linau, or be a strategy for operationalising jurisdictional-wide commitments for nature positive and inclusive development, as in the case of SPLP.

A participatory and bottom-up approach

The VSP takes a participatory and bottom-up approach, consisting of four generic phases, which are implemented based on the needs and interest of the communities.



Phase 1 – Initial village engagement

The starting point of village engagement is a wide consultation by dedicated village facilitators. The goal is to understand community members' interest and willingness to develop an VSP, to start developing buy-in as well as to begin understanding the socio-economic and environmental conditions in the village.

This not only helps to shape the scope of activities, it also allows the community itself to gain a good understanding of the village situation and potential opportunities for improvements. In this phase, the community is supported to conduct land use mapping as well as environmental and social baseline assessments.

This identifies opportunities for increasing sustainable agricultural production, protection or regeneration of forest and peatlands, diversification of income sources and to address human rights issues such as land tenure and conflict resolution.

What are village facilitators and what is their role?

Village facilitators are local experts who are intensively trained on community development. They are based permanently in the villages to support the community in a range of aspects related to livelihood improvement and forest conservation. The village facilitators are the eyes and ears on the ground and together they create a network to encourage knowledge exchange between villages.

Phase 2 – Commitment and institutionalisation

This is crucial to ensure long term implementation. Institutionalisation is a form of commitment that village stakeholders, such as farmers and the village government, make to show their willingness to change. Institutionalisation can take many forms, but most important is that the approach is agreed and developed with and supported by the community. Forms of commitments can be the development and adoption of village development plans or adoption of village regulations. It can also be a (verbal) commitment of a farmer group to collectively pursue sustainable agricultural practices.

Phase 3 – Capacity building and implementation

The situation in the village and the interest of the community determines the focus areas of the implementation, some of which may be able to be implemented immediately, but other newer activities may require capacity building of relevant community members. Training can be provided to specific audience groups such as existing farmer groups, women, village champions, or future trainers. Building on the training provided, community members are then further supported and strengthened to implement their new knowledge and skills and where appropriate they are rewarded for efforts that contribute to positive change. This can include supporting the community or farmers with:

- Implementation of land use plans
- Support farmers in obtaining certification
- Strengthening oil palm farmer groups to increase their market position
- Upscaling business models beyond oil palm, possibly through village enterprise (BUMDes)
- Supporting communities in implementing conservation plans, forest monitoring or firefighting.

Phase 4 – Monitoring and response

An integrated monitoring system is developed that serves both internal and external monitoring purposes. Internal monitoring refers to monitoring for the use or benefit of the community, such as setting up patrolling systems for fire, conservation or monitoring of peatland water tables. Externally, it serves the goal of impact monitoring and how the village programme contributes to goals on improved livelihoods, reduced deforestation etc, so demonstrating progress to funders (companies or donors). External monitoring can feed into social monitoring frameworks, forest monitoring frameworks or the NDPE Implementation Reporting Framework (IRF).

CASE STUDY: Siak Pelalawan Landscape Programme

The Siak Pelalawan Landscape Programme (SPLP) aims to enrol the Village Support Programme in 50 high priority villages in Siak and Pelalawan districts in Riau, Indonesia by 2025. Villages are selected based on risk for deforestation or peatland development, the readiness of the village to be actively involved in sustainable land use, and the presence of government programmes or other initiatives to build upon. Villages are also selected based on the location to create clusters of villages in the landscape, this facilitates learning and exchange between neighbouring villages.

All villages involved in the VSP were supported in participatory land mapping and the development of a village profile. This helps village governments and communities to make decisions for village development. Village facilitators are supporting the village governments in developing local regulations, for example on peatland management or forest management. These regulations are one example of commitment of the villages for community development. Several villages have received training, such as Good Agricultural Practices training for oil palm farmers, trainings on Nature Positive Farming which also targeted oil palm, rubber, horticulture or sago farmers. In one village a demonstration plot for sustainable agriculture on peatland was developed.

The table below shows the number of villages which are targeted annually and are progressing through the Village Support Programme phases 1-4. As of May 2022, 15 villages have reached phases 2-3 and 13 villages entered phase 1.

VSP Phase	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1-2	7	8	13	12	10
2-3	-	-	15	28	20
3-4	-	-			20