

Analyzing the Africa Palm Oil Initiative's Role in Responsible Palm Oil Production *Sustainable Strategies and Lessons for India*

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This policy brief is a knowledge product developed under the Sustainable Palm Oil Coalition for India (I-SPOC). It provides a comprehensive analysis of palm oil-related initiatives in countries under the Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) and identifies best practices and lessons that can support India's journey toward sustainable palm oil production.

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1. Background

Africa boasts a rich heritage with its vast forests and natural resources. As the native home of oil palm trees (*Elaeis guineensis*)¹, the continent has the capacity to pioneer responsible palm oil production². The fact that agriculture is the primary source of employment for more than 60%³ of the population in Africa adds to this capacity. While Africa currently contributes a small fraction to the world's palm oil production, it consumes approximately 15% of the global output⁴. Recognizing this increasing demand for palm oil, several African governments have committed to expanding their palm oil sectors to meet the local needs. One prominent step in the direction of sustainable palm oil production in Africa is the [Africa Palm Oil Initiative \(APOI\)](#)⁵. APOI is a collaborative effort between the [Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 \(TFA 2020\)](#) and [Proforest](#) that aims to ensure that palm oil production in Africa is environmentally and socially sustainable while bringing economic benefits to the region.

The APOI marked the Tropical Forest Alliance's (TFA) first signature initiative with a vision to foster a thriving palm oil industry that creates jobs and wealth for local communities while ensuring environmental and social sustainability, and safeguarding the region's tropical forests. The initiative is a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together national governments, traditional leaders, local communities, indigenous peoples, donors, technical partners, investors, producers, retailers, and traders, amongst others. It aims to accomplish this by establishing and applying national and regional principles for responsible palm oil development. These principles align with the developmental aspirations of African countries, addressing both environmental and social goals. On the environmental front, they aim to reduce deforestation, optimize land use, and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Socially, they focus on land tenure and the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples⁶.

¹ <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/10.1079/cabicompendium.20295>

² https://www.proforest.net/fileadmin/uploads/proforest/Documents/Publications/APOI_Marrakesh_5_Years_Dec_2021.pdf

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=ZG>

⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/how-african-palm-oil-can-boost-livelihoods-and-protects-forests/>

⁵ <https://partnershipsforforests.com/partnerships-projects/africa-palm-oil-initiative/>

⁶ https://partnershipsforforests.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Africa-Oil-Palm-Initiative-_KP.pdf

2. General Structure and Functioning of APOI

APOI encompasses ten countries, collectively representing 75% of Africa’s forests. These nations, including Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Edo State (Nigeria), Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone, are committed to promoting sustainable palm oil development while safeguarding the region’s remaining rainforests⁷.

Map showing APOI countries in Africa



Created with mapchart.net

Each APOI country team consists of a facilitator, a government focal point, and a private sector representative. These teams convene stakeholders to agree on national principles and develop action plans for sustainable palm oil development. The action plan is then executed under the supervision of the APOI national platform, which includes a broad group of appointed stakeholders representing civil society, as well as the private and public sectors⁸.

⁷ https://www.proforest.net/fileadmin/uploads/proforest/Photos/Publications/Africa_Oil_Palm_Initiative-2.pdf#:~:text=The%20Initiative%20brought%20together%20partners%20from%2010,The%20APOI%20was%20a%20collaboration%20between%20African.

⁸ <https://www.tropicalforestalliance.org/assets/Uploads/Tropical-Forest-Alliance-APOI-Briefing-Note-2018.pdf>

I. The Three Phases of Functioning of APOI⁹:

Phase	Execution
Phase 1: Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Forming an Engagement Team: Assembling a team dedicated to engagement activities. » Engaging Stakeholders: Involving government representatives, local civil society, and private sector participants.
Phase 2: Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Forming a Country Team: Establishing a country team consisting of a facilitator, a government focal point, and a private sector representative. » Organizing National Workshops: Conducting national workshops to develop national principles and create a national action plan.
Phase 3: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Forming a National Platform: Creating a national platform that includes the country team and other relevant stakeholders. » Convening Implementation Dialogues: Holding dialogues to identify key stakeholders, aligning existing initiatives with national action plans, and exploring opportunities for targeted support to implement national action plans. » Implementing a National Action Plan: Collaboratively executing the national action plan.

II. Inception of the Marrakesh Declaration

APOI stakeholders collectively agreed upon regional principles for responsible palm oil development, placing sustainability, transparency, good governance, and human rights at the core of Africa’s expanding palm oil industry. As a result, in 2016, seven African governments¹⁰ namely the Governments of the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone publicly committed to these principles by signing the TFA 2020 Marrakesh Declaration¹¹ during the [UN Climate Change Conference in Morocco](#). Since then, the focus of APOI has been on strengthening the collaborative implementation of the Marrakesh Declaration, driven forward at the national level by the APOI country teams.

⁹ https://partnershipsforforests.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Africa-Oil-Palm-Initiative-_KP.pdf

¹⁰ <https://partnershipsforforests.com/2016/11/18/seven-african-governments-sign-tfa-2020-marrakesh-declaration-sustainable-development-oil-palm-sector-africa-2/>

¹¹ https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/marrakesh_decl_e.htm

By signing the Marrakesh Declaration, governments affirmed their commitment to the following principles¹²:

S. No.	Principle	Salient Features
1	Shared Vision	Recognizing the shared vision for a thriving palm oil sector that generates jobs and wealth for local communities while ensuring environmental and social sustainability and protecting Africa's rich tropical forests.
2	Economic Importance	Understanding the critical role of the palm oil sector in economic development and its contribution to alleviating rural poverty.
3	Climate Change	Acknowledging the vital role of forests and forest conservation in addressing climate change.
4	Recognizing Deforestation	Recognizing the impact of agricultural commodity development as a significant driver of deforestation.
5	Public-Private Partnerships	Understanding the importance of public-private partnerships in fostering sustainable economic development.
6	Economic and Social Development	Acknowledging the necessity to promote, foster, and accelerate the economic and social development of African countries to improve living standards and ensure food security and nutrition.
7	International Commitments	Considering the relevant international and regional treaties and conventions ratified by the signatories and reaffirming the commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹² https://partnershipsforforests.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Africa-Oil-Palm-Initiative-_KP.pdf

3. Milestones and Five Years of Progress Under APOI: Country-Wise Quick Review¹³

The five years from 2016–21 have witnessed significant advancements in sustainable palm oil development in Africa, spurred by the Marrakesh Declaration and ongoing initiatives. Some of those achievements and areas of progress are as follows:

Country	Initiatives/Areas of Progress										
	National Strategy for Oil Palm Incorporates APOI Principles	Human Rights & Gender Equality	Cross-Commodity Dialogue	Emissions Reduction Initiatives (eg. REDD+)	Empowering Smallholders	HCV ¹⁴ - HCS ¹⁵ Training & Adoption	Free Prior & Informed Consent (FPIC) ¹⁶	Certification Compliance (RSPO)	Deforestation regulation	Sustainability initiatives	Other Key Initiatives
Cameroon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Crafted through collaboration among the government, private sector, producer associations, and civil society ¹⁷		Integrated approach for sustainable development in palm oil, cocoa and rubber sectors								
Democratic Republic of Congo	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
							Capacity building of the stakeholders on FPIC concepts				

¹³ https://www.proforest.net/fileadmin/uploads/proforest/Documents/Publications/APOI_highlights_2021_05_Apr_2022_EN.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/hcv-approach>

¹⁵ <https://highcarbonstock.org/>

¹⁶ <https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/our-pillars/fpic/en/>

¹⁷ <https://www.proforest.net/news-events/news/cameroon-creates-national-platform-to-govern-the-sustainable-development-of-palm-oil-14101/>

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Central African Republic	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	CAR secured a commitment from the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel) ¹⁸ for financial and technical support, ensuring the sustainability of the national platform.
Côte d'Ivoire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Partnerships at the landscape level to tackle forest and wildlife conservation
Gabon	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Gabon allocates land to smallholders for development, economically empowering them to conserve forests.

¹⁸ <https://www.enabel.be/country/central-african-republic/>

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Ghana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	Tree Crop Development Authority (TCDA) ²⁰ , a legal entity that regulates six commodity supply chains, including palm oil and coconut, has taken over APOI responsibilities.
Liberia	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Opportunity for multi-stakeholder collaboration for addressing deforestation, land tenure, community livelihoods, labor issues and integration of sustainability principles ²¹ . The Land Rights Act (2018) mandates Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for developers on customary land, ensuring livelihood protection Inclusion of RSPO smallholder certification in National Oil Palm Strategy Multi stakeholder collaboration for addressing key deforestation Integration of sustainability principles into National Oil Palm Strategy

¹⁹ https://redd.unfccc.int/media/ghana_redd_strategy.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.proforest.net/news-events/news/parliament-of-ghana-enacts-tree-crops-regulation-112471/>

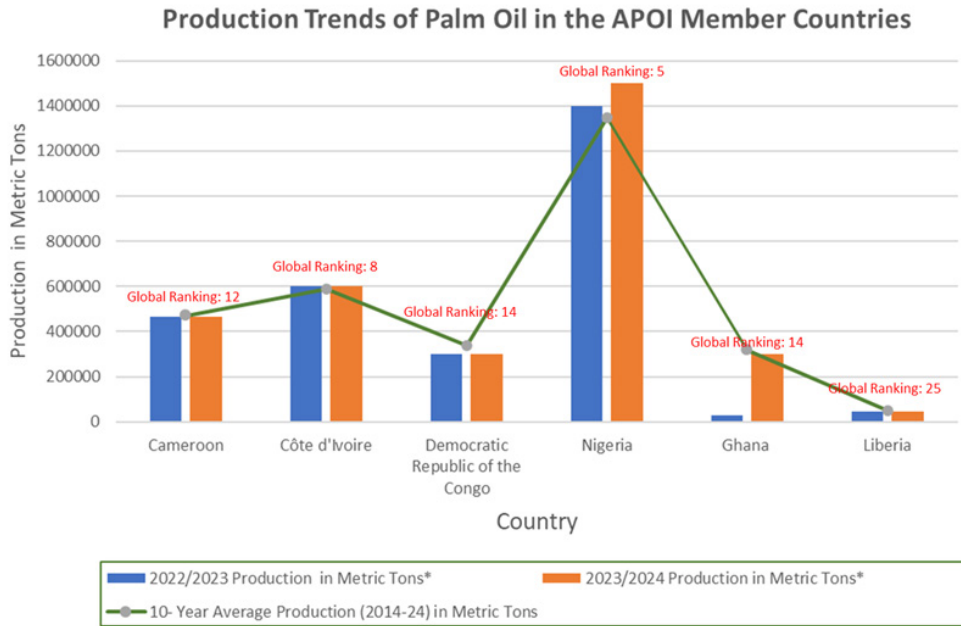
²¹ <https://www.undp.org/facs/publications/national-oil-palm-strategy-and-action-plan-liberia-2021-2025>

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Edo State, Nigeria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	A Ministerial Order has been signed to direct palm oil plantations towards savannah regions, reducing pressure on Congo Basin forests
Republic of Congo	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sierra Leone	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Endorsed its RSPO National Interpretation in November 2021, guiding all palm oil producers ²²

²² <https://rspo.org/endorsement-of-sierra-leone-national-interpretation-2021/>

4. Production Trends of Palm Oil in the APOI Member Countries²³

The graph below illustrates palm oil production trends in the six main member countries of the African Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) – Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia – for the marketing years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The data, presented in metric tons, also includes a comparison to the 10-year average production from 2014 to 2024. Additionally, the graph highlights the global ranking of these countries in terms of palm oil production.



*Marketing Year 2023 from January - December

²³ <https://fas.usda.gov/data/production/commodity/4243000>

5. Good Practices and Lessons for India

SN	Suggestions	Salient Features
1	Tailored Approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Customization: Recognize the diversity (at environmental, social, and economic levels) of state policies across the country and tailor strategies to incorporate sustainability accordingly to ensure effectiveness and better results. Inclusivity: Ensure engagement of all stakeholders from the bottom to the very top of the value chain, and facilitate an objective and contextualized process. Autonomy: Allow platforms to evolve independently based on the state's context while maintaining government involvement for alignment with national policies like the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP).
2	Leveraging Existing Platforms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency: Utilize existing platforms or forums to streamline processes and gain legitimacy. This can also save time and resources, as well as avoid duplication of efforts. Example: In Liberia, the APOI revived the dormant Oil Palm Sector Technical Working Group instead of creating a new platform. Collaboration: Collaborate with various organizations working towards similar goals like Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) etc. to harness collective efforts.
3	Adaptation and Flexibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptive Management: Embrace a participatory approach to adapt strategies based on evolving circumstances such as shifts in policy, market conditions, or social dynamics. Conflict Resolution: Address divergent views and conflicts constructively to foster collaboration and achieve shared goals. This will also ensure that all stakeholders feel heard and valued. Government Engagement: Ensure sustained political and technical engagement, especially during political transitions, to maintain momentum.
4	Facilitation and Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Skilled Facilitation: Employ skilled facilitators at various levels to nurture trust, consensus, and effective collaboration. Multi-tiered Approach: Facilitate dialogue and collaboration at both national and international/regional levels.
5	Creating Enabling Environments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Platform Establishment: Establish national and regional platforms to facilitate the learning, sharing, and replication of successful models. Knowledge Sharing: Organize regional meetings to connect stakeholders, share experiences, and foster partnerships for sustainable palm oil production. Engagement: Encourage collaboration from international organizations and private sectors through technical expertise, capacity building, and financial support.

Contact us

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