

RSPO Launches Community Outreach Programme in Nigeria

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In partnership with local organisation Foremost Development Services (FDS), RSPO kicks off its community engagement and outreach programme in Nigeria to foster closer ties with local communities, and commits \$300,000 to boost sustainable palm oil production in Edo State.

RSPO has successfully launched the Community Engagement and Outreach Programme for Nigeria, in partnership with [Foremost Development Services \(FDS\)](#) as the intermediary organisation. The Programme's activities will be centralised in Edo State, which leads the country's production in RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO) volumes, and is envisioned to create informed and proactive engagement of communities with RSPO at all levels.

To kick off the programme, RSPO disclosed that it is committing US\$300,000 to boost sustainable palm oil production in Edo State. A three day interactive training session was held in Benin City from 25 to 27 October, where the RSPO Secretariat and stakeholder groups discussed various RSPO topics, including the RSPO Principles and Criteria for the

Production of Sustainable Palm Oil, the RSPO Smallholder Strategy, the RSPO Smallholder Support Fund, Smallholder Certification and Grievance mechanisms, among others.

“Nurturing trust and strengthening our partnership among local communities are at the core of RSPO’s Outreach Programme,” said Imam A. El Marzuq, RSPO Senior Manager, Global Community Outreach & Engagement. “This helps create avenues of dialogue for us to better understand their needs and concerns, and ensure that the fundamental rights of community members, landowners, plantation workers, small farmers and their families are respected, which is among the objectives of RSPO’s Principles and Criteria.”



Abdul-Lateef Jimo, representing the [Okomu Oil Palm Company](#) who participated in the programme, said “The training and consequently, the outreach programme came at a time when we needed a lifeline in our gospel of making sustainable palm oil the norm in Nigeria. The training was well attended by critical stakeholders and well packaged by the RSPO Secretariat. Kudos and I strongly believe the programme will achieve its intended outcome.”



Network of intermediaries

While the expansion of palm oil in many developing countries has led to increased revenue and improved livelihoods for farmers, particularly in emerging producer countries, it also risks serious social and environmental impacts including lack of effective legal protection of the rights of workers, communities and Indigenous Peoples and communities; disputes and community divisions caused by improper implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent ([FPIC](#)); insufficient incentives for small-scale producers to apply environmental standards; and significant market obstacles that exclude smallholders.

Mindful of these challenges, RSPO has recognised the need for more comprehensive outreach efforts in producer countries through a network of intermediaries identified from the related or affected communities, to pave the way for a more effective engagement process.

FDS, local development and sustainability consultants specialised in agricultural, forestry and environmental management, has been selected to lead the programme in Nigeria for a period of 24 months. Working alongside RSPO in promoting sustainable palm oil to relevant stakeholders, they will be overseeing the capacity building of communities, thematic groups, palm oil sector workers, and local civil society organisations in accessing and participating in the RSPO System.

“It is a great opportunity to partner with RSPO on the Outreach Programme,” said Fatai Afolabi, representing FDS. “At FDS, our hope is for a better world, and to achieve this, we think, talk, and take sustainability very seriously. This partnership aims to help FDS and RSPO achieve the goal of teaching sustainability, and because FDS has worked in the oil palm sector for around three decades, we recognise and appreciate that this programme

comes at a time when there is a lot of new investment in oil palm in Nigeria. We have confidence that the outreach programme would be successful.”

Nigeria’s Palm Oil Revival

RSPO’s community outreach programme in Nigeria comes at a time when the country is experiencing a significant [revival](#) in its oil palm sector, bolstered by the support from the Nigerian government and private investors. Nigeria currently accounts for [one third](#) of the total volumes of palm oil production in Africa, of which 10% is RSPO certified.

“Nigeria is currently witnessing significant investments in the palm oil sector, and Edo State is at the forefront of this ongoing development. The RSPO Community Outreach and Engagement Programme is therefore timely”, said Eli Dzwornu Agbitor, RSPO Head – Africa. “It is our hope that this intervention would result in mutual understanding of sustainability by all stakeholders, and ensure that the ongoing palm oil expansion is undertaken in a manner that respects the rights of local people, enhances livelihoods, promotes ethical business conduct, and mainstreams environmental/ecological safeguards”.