

How Good Are Competing Palm Oil Certification Systems at Respecting Human Rights and Social Values?

By [Forest Peoples Programme](#)

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A [new report](#) from the Forest Peoples Programme assesses six different certification schemes being used by companies to facilitate their access to international markets for edible oils and biofuels. The desk-based study used the same yardstick to assess the various schemes against a range of criteria including:

- fair land acquisition, respect for customary rights and Free, Prior and Informed Consent
- treatment of smallholders
- social and environmental safeguards
- core labour standards
- gender and discrimination
- quality assurance
- access to remedy

After scoring and ranking the various schemes, the study concluded that the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has the strongest set of requirements, followed by, in declining order of ranking, Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC), and Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO). The Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) standard came out worst in the ranking and provides very little protection of human rights and community livelihoods. The review also assessed the High Carbon Stocks Approach against the same yardstick, although it is not a certification scheme, in order to gauge the relative risks and benefits of the approach being used as a stand-alone endorsement of performance.

The report's author, **Angus McInnes**, notes that:

The schemes vary a lot. None is perfect and all could benefit from adopting some stronger provisions from competing schemes. RSPO now provides the most robust standard for oil palm certification, although there are still some gaps. The main challenge for RSPO is to ensure RSPO members actually apply the standard in practice. The unreliability of complaints and remedy procedures when non-compliances are identified is also worrying.

Marcus Colchester, FPP's Senior Policy Advisor, notes:

The European biofuels market by and large relies on the ISCC certification scheme to fulfil EU requirements. Although precise figures are not available, it seems that about half of RSPO members' palm oil sold in Europe, mostly for biofuels, is ISCC- and not RSPO-certified. For those concerned about human rights and social justice, this is very troubling as the ISCC standard, while quite strong on environmental requirements, falls way below the RSPO standard on social protections.

As an addendum, the study also compared the standards of the Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG) and RSPO Next, both of which have added social and environmental provisions on top of the RSPO generic standard but lack additional challenge and remedy procedures. The POIG standard includes additional human rights and workers' rights provisions.

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[Executive Summary](#)

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