



MINUTES OF RSPO SMALLHOLDER'S FORUM AT GOPDC ON 10TH AUGUST 2010 AT THE JUNIOR CLUBHOUSE

OPENING

The MC in the person of Mr. Kemeh Mensah opened the programme at 10:00am and asked Mr. Collins Osei Konadu to give the opening prayer. The MC introduced the chairman for the occasion in the person of Mr. Lawrence Atsrin.

CHAIRMAN'S REMARK

The Chairman accepted the responsibility and highlighted the need for the oil palm industry to take advantage of the emerging RSPO certification in regard to unsure sustainability of the industry. He educated the participants about the recent fact that the U.S deliberating on rejecting cocoa from Ghana because they belief that Ghanaians are producing the cocoa by employing children below the legal working age. He therefore employed the stakeholders present to offer their constructive contributions to enable the oil palm industry to stand the test of time.

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The MC took time to introduced the management and a representative of the board of directors of GOPDC. Besides, representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Environmental Protective Agency, the DCE of Asante Akyem South and other representatives from other districts were introduced.

Chiefs from the surrounding communities as well as the spokesmen for the Okyehene and a delegate from the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II were not left out in the meeting. Moreover, smallholders, out growers, JAICA representative and other assembly members also participated in the programme.

WELCOME ADDRESS

The MC called the MD of GOPDC in the person of **Mr. Werner Pirijns** to give a short welcome address. The MD told the participants that the future marketability of palm oil would depend on the oil palm company's ability to produce sustainable palm oil by been RSPO compliant.

The Director of Agric Services in the person of Miss Anke Massart took turn and threw more light on the RSPO. She said RSPO has became necessary due to the rapid expansion of oil palm cultivation. She explained that the destruction of flora and fauna, the destruction of water bodies as well as the displacement of human settlements were some of the major concerns that

has been raised in the oil palm industry. She told the participants that the RSPO is a certification system that is governed by **Eight Principles and Thirty Nine criteria**.

The DAS hinted further that Unilever which is one of the largest consumers of palm oil have decided to purchase only palm oil produced from sustainable sources, for that matter RSPO compliant. She told the participants that the Ghana National Interpretation Document of the RSPO is supposed to interpret the Principles and Criteria to suit the Ghanaian local laws.

SHORT SPEECHES FROM DIGNITARIES.

- **EPA- Eastern Regional Director. Mr. Joseph A. Tsagy.**

The EPA representative elaborated the regulatory function of the Agency. He explained that the Agency ensures the effective and efficient utilization of resources while addressing the negative impact of human operations on the environment.

He highlighted the global issue of climate change currently causing flooding and high temperatures in various parts of the world as a major concern. He told the participants that there have been projections of Ghana's soil not being able to produce high yielding cocoa due to some negative cultural practices. He concluded by urging companies and individuals to effectively manage their waste.

- **Mr. Isaac Owusu Asante (Asante Akyem South Representative)**

Mr Owusu encouraged the participants to prepare and embrace the emerging trend in the oil palm industry especially the RSPO principles and criteria. He expressed concern about the difficulty in changing the attitude of farmers so as to facilitate the adoption of new technologies and regulations in their operations.

Mr. Asante made known that their district would be organizing a stakeholders meeting to deliberate further how they can educate people in the oil palm industry on the impact of the RSPO on their operations.

- **Mr. Ampofo Duodu- The state secretary of Okyehene, the King of Akyem Abuakwa**

Mr Ampofo took the opportunity to welcome the chiefs of Asante to the land of the Akyem Abuakwa. He said the Okyehene now known to be the living encyclopedia on environmental issues and other sustainability practices. The spokesperson was quick to add that the king is ever ready to give his maximum support to issues on the environment.

- **Nana Fred Duah Prempeh. The Representative of Asantehene**

The Asante representative told the participants that Otumfuo wished to be present for the RSPO meeting but he is currently outside the country to perform other equally important function.

Mr Fred Duah hinted that the King of Asante himself is very much interested in the cultivation of oil palm and as a result had cultivated about 1000 acres of oil palm. Moreover, the participants were told that the king is currently in the process of acquiring parcels of land from Kumawu and other areas in Asante for the cultivation of oil palm. He concluded by appealing to the oil palm companies to continue embracing emerging technologies in the oil palm industry.

- **Mr. Tom Badu (The DCE of Akyemansa)**

The DCE was very enthused about the RSPO because of the fact that majority of the people in the districts are involved in oil palm cultivation. He expressed his appreciation for the contribution of GOPDC in the economic growth not only in the district but the nation as a whole.

He was however very critical about the out growers and smallholders who are in the habit of diverting fruits that are supposed to be supplied to the company. He urged them to desist from those acts so that the company can make enough profit and contribute immensely to national development.

- **RSPO Principle and Criteria by Mr. EK Wiafe**

Mr. E.K Wiafe was called upon to enlighten the participants about the principles and criteria governing the RSPO. He said the RSPO consists of **Eight Principles and Thirty Nine criteria**. He mentioned the eight principles as:

1. Commitment to Transparency
2. Compliance with applicable laws and regulations
3. Commitment to long-term economic and financial viability
4. Use of appropriate best practices by growers and millers
5. Environmental responsibility and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity
6. Responsible consideration of employees, individuals and communities affected by growers and mills
7. Responsible development of new plantings and
8. Commitment to continuous improvements in key areas of activity

The thirty nine criteria underlining these principles were mentioned and explained in the local language for better understanding to participants. He explained further that the RSPO talks about people, profit, planet and concerns the wellbeing of the people and generations yet unborn.

- **Questions and comments from participants.**

The opportunity was given to the participants to raise questions on the main principles and criteria which were just highlighted by Mr. Wiawe and the following were the concerns:

- The need for GOPDC to meet the chiefs of the surrounding areas on quarterly bases for discussions on major issues
- Request to purchase bus to transport workers from far distances in and out of the field.
- The regular provision of personal protective equipment especially for worker on the plantation
- Clarification on whether inputs and financial credit are given to farmers in the outgrower scheme
- Participants requested GOPDC to supply agro forestry trees to be planted along rivers and streams in their farms.
- A member wanted to know if it is environmentally friendly to use 'glue' to control weaver birds.
- A member wanted some further education on best practices for the sustainability of oil palm industry, eg on soil, maintenance culture etc.
- A participant wanted to know the plans on health care, education and other social responsibility of the company as well as on conflict resolution strategies
- A member suggested that the zero burning policy would be difficult to practice but rather controlled burning would be practicable in our local condition
- A farmer expressed concern about the manner in which fruits get rotten because they are not conveyed on time from the collection centres to the mill
- The private farmers' suppliers expressed concern about lack of attention given to them in terms of information delivery on their fruit supply.
- A suggestion to reduce the felling age of the oil palm from 25yrs to 20yrs was raised.
- A member was of the view that the principle on 'Compliance with applicable laws and regulations' should be flexible on traditional holidays in our communities
- A suggestion was raised from MOFA representative for oil palm companies to work closely with the ministry of Agric for the benefit of all stakeholders.

- **Response to some of the questions raised by participants**

The Deputy Managing Director explained that the company has plans far advanced to purchase buses for the transport of workers and said management has to plan it well in order to include every community. A representative from MOFA gave clarification on provision of credit to farmers. He made known that the government is very prepared to help farmers to secure credit from financial institutions if only they are able to meet their requirements.

Moreover, the Nucleus Estate Manager said the weaver birds could be controlled with the glue so long as it is not detrimental to the health and other effects on the environment.

The farmers were educated on the use of cover crop as one of the major practices in improving the soils cultivated with oil palm.

The Ag. HRM explained to participants that the union has been very instrumental in the resolution of disputes while other complex matters are addressed at the management level. On strategic plans for sustainability, the DMD explained that the company has been embarking on expansion of the capacity of the mill to process as much fruit as possible.

It was also explained that the RSPO does not support the use of thick and reserved forest for the cultivation of oil palm. Members were told that the RSPO is not only for GOPDC but for all the oil palm companies. They were informed that almost all the major players in the oil palm industry in the country are fully aware of the emerging trend. However, the said plans would have to be employed to organize the private farmers for efficient dissemination of information.

- **Closing Remarks and Vote of thanks**

The chairman in the person of Mr. Lawrence Atrim expressed his profound appreciation to the participants for their effort in making the programme a success. He was very optimistic that the knowledge acquired would be put to practice. The MC in the person of Mr. Kemeh Mensah thanked all the invited guests after which Mr Osei Konadu prayed to end the programme at 1:20pm.

By Isaac A.Acheampong