

Assessment of High Conservation Values in SNL's Ubima Oil Palm Estate Rivers State, Nigeria

Full assessment report
Final | Version 2 | March 2017



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Our team comprises specialists in forest management, agricultural commodities such as palm oil, conservation and sustainability initiatives and certification. We have extensive experience in Africa and internationally and can work in English, French and Portuguese.

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Assessment location: Ubima,
Ikwere and Etche Local Government Areas,
Rivers State, Nigeria

Dates of assessment: December, 2016 - February, 2017
Size of assessment area: 9,490 ha
Total number of hectares as HCV management areas: 35.9 ha
Planned land use: Existing Oil Palm Plantation
ALS Tier Rating: Tier 2
Certification scheme: RSPO

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Purpose of HCV assessment

This is a report of a full High Conservation Value (HCV) assessment commissioned by Siat Nigeria Limited (SNL) for the company's existing oil palm plantations at Ubima in the Ikwerre Local Government Area of the Rivers State of Nigeria. The 9,490 ha oil palm plantation straddles the Ikwerre and Etche Local Government Areas of the Rivers State. As a subsidiary of the SIAT Group which is a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) production, the HCV assessment is part of SNL's commitments under RSPO and its own environmental and social responsibility best practice requirement, including compliance with statutory legal requirements in Nigeria at both the Federal and State levels.

The purpose of this HCV assessment, which was carried out within the context of the RSPO certification, is to undertake a comprehensive and participatory assessment of HCVs in the existing Ubima oil palm plantation, with a view to identifying any area(s) required to maintain or enhance one or more of the six categories of HCVs and local people's land that may be located within the plantation. The main objective of this HCV assessment was to identify and document the HCVs within the established oil palm plantations of SIAT Nigeria and to provide management recommendations to the company for the maintenance and/or enhancement of the HCVs.

Specific objectives of this HCV assessment were to:

- i. identify all HCVs and potential HCVs in the plantation and the adjoining landscape that could be impacted by all activities associated with the management of an existing oil palm plantation. The assessment was carried out in consultation with all relevant stakeholders
- ii. identify existing or potential threats to the identified HCVs in the plantation
- iii. map all localised HCVs and their management areas
- iv. provide recommendations for the management, monitoring and protection of the identified HCVs in the plantation. The above objectives collectively aim at demonstrating compliance with RSPO's requirements on HCVs in existing plantations (criterion 5.2) and also assist the company to implement best practices for the management of conservation values within the plantation blocks under the scope of this assessment. The process steps and activities carried out during this HCV assessment were in line with the requirements of RSPO's requirements on HCVs and those of the HCV Resource Network Assessor Licensing Scheme.

RSPO requirements on HCVs

The RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) contain a set of mandatory requirements for existing oil palm plantations which growers intend to certify under the RSPO certification scheme. **Principle 5** (Environmental Responsibility and Conservation of Natural Resources and Biodiversity) consists of a set of assessments and verification activities to be conducted by growers and certification bodies (CB) that specifically provides for maintaining biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods in and around the plantation. Criterion 5.2 of the RSPO Principles and Criteria specifically states that “the status of rare, threatened or endangered species and other High Conservation Value habitats, if any, that exist in the plantation or that could be affected by plantation or mill management, shall be identified and operations managed to best ensure that they are maintained and/or enhanced”. Although all HCV assessments conducted from 1 January 2015 are required to be led by an independent HCV lead assessor licensed under the HCVRN ALS, RSPO requirements allows growers to conduct HCV assessments for existing plantations.

HCV overview and references used

High Conservation Values (HCVs) refer to biological, ecological, social or cultural values considered outstandingly significant or critically important at the national, regional or global level and which require special measures for their maintenance and/or enhancement.

Box 1: Summary of the 6 HCV categories

HCV 1: Concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered (RTE) species that are significant at global, regional or national levels.

HCV 2: Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs), large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.

HCV 3: Rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia. **HCV 4:** Basic ecosystem services in critical situations including protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes.

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HCV 5: Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of local communities/indigenous people (for example for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water), identified through engagement with these communities or indigenous peoples.

HCV 6: Sites, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of local communities or indigenous peoples, identified through engagement with these local communities or indigenous peoples.

The HCV concept aims to identify whether these values are present and to develop appropriate management and monitoring strategies to maintain and/or enhance the values. The concept was originally developed in 1999 by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and has since been widely used in the context of FSC certification for sustainable forestry. The HCV approach was adopted by the RSPO and incorporated into the RSPO's first P&Cs in 2005. The six categories of HCVs and their definitions are listed in Box 1.

There is currently no HCV National Interpretation (NI) for Nigeria. There are NIs for Ghana and Gabon, which could be useful for regional comparison; however, these are yet to be updated following update of the Generic Guidance document. Therefore, the process to identify HCVs and subsequent analysis and reporting has relied heavily on the following guidance documents:

- Brown, E., N. Dudley, A. Lindhe, D.R. Muhtaman, C. Stewart, and T. Synnott (eds.). 2013 (October). Common Guidance for the identification of High Conservation Values. HCV Resource Network.
<https://www.hcvnetwork.org/resources/cg-identification-sep-2014-english>
- Brown, E. and M.J.M. Senior. 2014 (September). Common Guidance for the Management and Monitoring of HCVs. HCV Resource Network.
<https://www.hcvnetwork.org/resources/cg-management-and-monitoring-2014-english>
- The HCV Assessment Manual prepared by Proforest for the HCV-RN.

Several other information sources have been used (see references) including the relatively recent reference: ZSL's Guide to Conserving HCV Species and Habitats in West African Oil Palm Landscapes. Others include an interpretation of global HCVF toolkit for use in Ghana published by WWF (Rayden et. al., 2006) and a similar version for Gabon (Stewart and Rayden, 2008).

4 Methods and Timelines

4.1 Assessment Timelines

Following a desk study in October 2016, field work carried out in December 2016. Details of the assessment timeline are provided in Table 2 below.

4.2 Assessment methods

The assessment methods were structured in two phases: a pre-assessment phase, and a full HCV assessment phase. Presco conducted baseline assessment of the plantations in 2013 and therefore have pretty good understanding of the Ubima plantation. The pre-assessment therefore included desk-based research and document review without any field visitations. The field data collection included biological surveys, stakeholder consultations and participatory mapping. Table 2 below provides details of the assessment timelines.

Table 2: The HCV assessment timelines

Process steps	Main activities	Timeline				
		Oct 2016	Nov 2016	Dec 2016	Jan 2017	Feb 2017
Pre-assessment	Review of data and information from SNL and other sources					
	Analysis of information including feedback to client					
	Preparation of Full HCV assessment proposal and contracting					
Field assessment	Fauna survey including and field verifications					
	Participatory mapping and identification of social HCVs					
Communities and stakeholder consultations	Communities consultations					
	Consultations with state and local government agencies, experts and NGOs					
Analysis drafting of report	Analysis of field data and drafting of report					
Client Review of reports	SNL review					
Finalization of report	Finalization and submission of report					

4.3 HCV Risk Assessment / Tier Rating

The HCV Resource Network Assessor Licensing Scheme requires HCV lead assessors to rate each new HCV assessment according to a pre-defined tier rating system. HCV assessments are categorised into Tier 1 (high risk) and Tier 2 (low

risk). The Tier rating is based on the level of perceived risk associated with the project using a tier system in line with the recommendations of the HCV Resource Network. Table 3 below provides details of the tier rating of this assessment.

Table 3: The HCV assessment Tier Rating

Indicators of potential Risk	The assessment is Tier 1 if the response to any of the following is YES	Finding	Details
Rating			
Scale of project: the overall area (ha) affected by production activities.	Will the operation cover or affect more than 50,000 ha?	NO	The project is an existing oil palm plantation of 9,490 ha
Intensity			
Conversion of natural ecosystem or habitat: a change from the natural ecosystem or habitat composition and structure to forestry plantation, agriculture or other land cover/ land use.	Is conversion of more than 500 ha of natural ecosystem or habitat planned?	NO	Developed land is 9,490 ha of oil palm trees and very few patches of wetland vegetation
Risk			
Experience level of HCV assessor: while an assessor holds a provisional licence, a peer review is required as an additional means of quality assurance.	Does the assessor hold a provisional HCV licence	NO	The assessor holds a Full ALS HCV license, and is among the first generation of provisional HCV assessors. The assessor has vast HCV assessment experience.
Threats to biodiversity: production activities that may disturb or damage a national or international priority biodiversity area.	Does the project area contain, border or overlap with any priority biodiversity areas?	NO	The Ubima old oil palm plantation neither borders nor overlap with any priority biodiversity area
Local and indigenous people: populations of people that overlap and/or use resources in the project area	Are there local or indigenous peoples living in/using the area who have claims to land, water and or natural resources in the project area?	NO	There are local communities within the plantation apart from the workers quarters. However, nearby communities access wetlands within the plantation for fishing and for collection of NTFPs.
Within certification schemes. If used outside of a widely-recognised certification scheme, there is a higher risk that complementary safeguards may be lacking.	Is the HCV assessment taking place outside of a recognised certification scheme?	NO	SNL's parent organisation, SIAT Group, is an RSPO member. The HCV assessment also forms part of the company's own commitment to protecting biodiversity conservation values for meeting RSPO requirements.
Result	Tier 2		

Table 4: Summary of HCV assessment findings

HCV	Definition	Present	Potentially present	Absent
1	Species diversity. Concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered (RTE) species that are significant at global, regional or national levels.	Present		
2	Landscape-level ecosystems and mosaics. Large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.			Absent
3	Ecosystems and habitats. Rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia.	Present		
4	Ecosystem services. Basic ecosystem services in critical situations, including protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes.			Absent
5	Community needs. Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of local communities or indigenous peoples (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water, etc...), identified through engagement with these communities or indigenous peoples.			Absent
6	Cultural values. Sites, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of local communities or indigenous peoples, identified through engagement with these local communities or indigenous peoples.	Present		

6.2 HCV Management Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for managing the identified high conservation values in the plantation.

Table 9 below provides an outline of HCV management and monitoring recommendations that SNL must adopt and implement. A HCV implementation plan is outlined in Annex 5 of this report.

Table 9: HCV management recommendations for Ubima plantation

HCV ref	Threats	Management recommendations	Monitoring recommendations
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of the riparian forest/destruction of habitat of the HCV 1 species identified Pollution of the small wetlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation and sustainable management of the pockets of swamps in the plantation SNL should ensure that the small pockets of swamps forests and the HCV management areas are appropriately mapped and their clear boundaries on the ground maintained prior to and during land preparation for replanting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular monitoring of the extent of the management areas of the swamp forests which have been identified as HCV 1. A regular monitoring system needs to be established to ensure that forest cover is maintained and hunting pressure is

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas to deny the endangered and threatened fauna species access to water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNL should ensure waste products and domestic wastes are disposed of appropriately and as far from the swamp areas and other water bodies in the landscape. • Signage: SNL should put signage at all the protected wetland areas indicating that they are “No Go Areas” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kept at a minimal level in the forest along the smaller swamp areas • Regular monitoring of water quality • Regular maintenance and monitoring of signage to ensure they deliver their intended objective
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion of the Iyo swamp forest • Pollution of the swamp 	<p>Clearly demarcate the Iyo swamp and its management area to avoid being mistakenly converted by land preparation team. Exclude the swamp area from all conversion activities and ensure it is adequately buffered.</p> <p>SNL to develop appropriate SOPs for effective management of the swamp area. Education and sensitization of field workers on the importance of the swamp and the need to stay away from the swamp area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swamp area demarcated and regular monitoring of the area • Avoid application of agrochemicals close to the swamp and their buffer • Ensure yearly review of effectiveness of SOPs • Periodic review of effectiveness of workers’ sensitization and awareness of the swamp
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing of Iyo, Okobu and Weyese shrine sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative management of small wetlands and shrine areas with the local communities • Prepare SOPs that includes the two HCV 6 areas in the plantation. • Sign post to indicate where and what those HCV 6 areas are. Also to show they are “No Go Areas” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A simplified HCV monitoring system/protocols in collaboration with the local communities. • Regular monitoring to assess effectiveness of SOPs • Regular monitoring of sign posts

7 Synthesis

7.1 HCV management areas

The total HCV management areas for all HCVs is approximately 35.9 ha. These areas have been recommended as set-aside areas within the SNL existing plantations at Ubima (Figure 17).

HCV 3 and 4: The swamps (HCV 3) and the forest around the swamp areas (HCV4) together measure approximately 16.2 ha. The set-aside of this pockets of forest is recommended to support the continued environmental and ecosystem services they provide. In addition, the forest pockets around the staff quarters, measuring approximately 19.7 ha, are recommended as HCV 3. Therefore, the total HCV 3 area is approximately 35.9ha.

HCV 6: The Iyo, Weyese and Okobu HCV 6 areas in the plantation and their management areas approximately covering 8.82 ha must be protected and maintained. As indicated in Section 5.6.3, the shrines are located in the wetland areas, and therefore the HCV 6 areas overlap with the HCV 3.

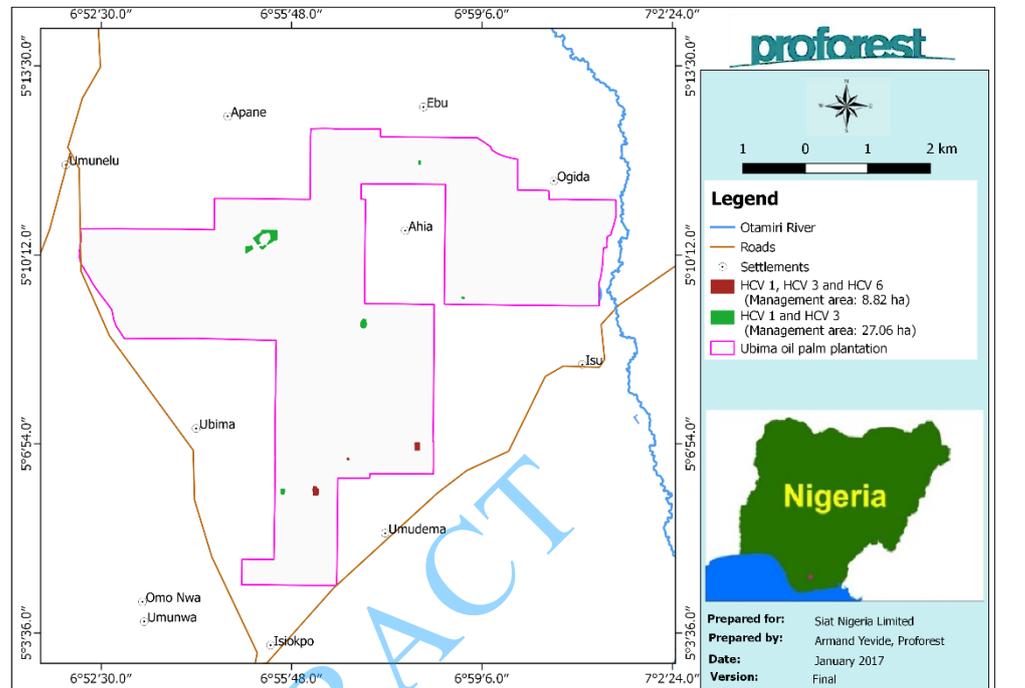


Figure 17: Map showing HCV management areas in the Ubima Estate. Total area is about 35.9 ha.

7.2 Cross-cutting management recommendations

SOPs for HCV management and monitoring

It is extremely important and considered best practice for simplified check-lists to be provided for general plantation operations to ensure ease of reference by operational staff and field workers. Similarly, training on management of HCVs and their management areas and monitoring protocols should be developed and provided to all relevant field workers and supervisors including providing them with checklists for their use.

Community engagement

SNL must strengthen its community engagement and consultations including engaging with all communities in a way that allows free flow and exchange of information. This must include regular meetings with the local population aimed at addressing their specific concerns particularly those relating to the land compensation to the affected families.

Training and capacity building

In order to ensure the identified HCVs are appropriately managed, SNL needs to ensure its staff and field workers have the adequate capacity to ensure effective management and monitoring of HCV management areas with the objective to maintain and/or enhance their continual existence. The capacity development effort must particularly focus on geospatial data for subsequent analysis and continued monitoring of the status of HCVs over time.

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