

2021 Report

IUCN SSC/CEESP Oil Crops Task Force



CHAIR
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CHAIR
Malika Virah-Sawmy
Sensemakers
Collective

NUMBER OF MEMBERS
20

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE
Website: <https://www.iucn-optf.org>

Mission statement

Our mission is to strengthen the use of different forms of knowledge on the environmental and social impacts and benefits of vegetable oils in policy decisions, whether for sustainable production, consumption, or trade. We aim to realise this through harnessing trusted messengers and accessible and evidence-based messages.

Projected impact 2021–2025

Vegetable oil crops, the main focus of the Oil Crops Task Force, cover some 425 mha of agricultural land. Crops like oil palm are considered a threat to over 300 species listed as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered, but all oil crops threaten species where they displace natural ecosystems. At the same time, some crops, especially the perennial crops like oil palm, coconut and olive, can provide habitat to some species. Improved practices are needed for all crops, while their different yields require land that is optimally allocated to oil production to meet growing demand.

Targets 2021–2025

ASSESS

- T-001 Conduct high resolution global mapping study for all major oil crops.
- T-003 Conduct systematic review or other study on the social and environmental impacts of vegetable oil production.

T-007 Conduct global mapping of coconut production areas.

NETWORK

- T-002 Bring Co-Chair in to the group and expand membership for broader expertise across all major vegetable oils.
- T-004 Communicate key insights from Task Force work to global audience at IUCN World Conservation Congress 2021.
- T-006 Organise Task Force planning meetings.

COMMUNICATE

- T-005 Engage media attention to Task Force's key findings.

Activities and results 2021

ASSESS

Communication

T-001 (KSR 5)

Media attention to Task Force's key findings: 150

Result description: We conducted a global high resolution mapping exercise for oil palm plantations and published the resulting paper in 2021. In 2021, we received funding for a similar mapping exercise for coconut. The latter work is ongoing. We are seeking additional funding for mapping other crops. The publications by the Oil Crops Specialist Group are well cited. The 2018 Situation Analysis on Oil Palm and Biodiversity is one of the most downloaded

online IUCN studies and had been cited 137 times in October 2021. Similarly, the *Nature Plants* paper published in 2021 has had more than 15,000 reads and has now been cited 23 times, indicating significant scientific interest in the Task Force's findings. We estimate the number of annual citations of papers published through the work by the Oil Crops Task Force at 150.

T-003 (KSR 5)

Number of readings/citations per scientific paper published: 100

Result description: We have been unable to find funding to conduct a global review of the social impacts of vegetable oil production, so this work is pending. We were, however, able to secure funding for a smaller study that looks into the trade-offs and synergies between sustainable development goals indicators in an Indonesian oil palm setting, across different production scales (no oil palm, smallholder oil palm, industrial production). The objective of this proof of concept study is to determine how these trade-offs and synergies can be determined in a complex systems analysis. If the outcomes are promising the plan is to scale up to multi-country and multi-oil crop study. The Indonesia study is ongoing, but a paper will be published in 2022.

Research activities

T-007 (KSR 5)

Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region: 1

Female orangutan and her baby in an forest set aside in an oil palm plantation, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Photo: Nardiyono



Methane capture facilities for palm oil mill effluent for electricity generation, Belitung, Indonesia
Photo: Erik Meijaard



Result description: The global mapping of coconut has started based on a grant from GEO-Microsoft. We have located the areas in the world where coconut is grown and are currently developing the training data for the machine learning for identifying coconut from satellite imagery.

NETWORK

Capacity building

T-004 (KSR 4)

Tangible perceptions change among IUCN members about oil crop sustainability: 10%

Result description: We have communicated the findings from the Task Force studies in a range of scientific and popular media and the Task Force Co-Chairs and members frequently engage in public debates about palm oil and other edible oils and their respective social and environmental impacts. We conducted an online session at the IUCN Congress in which the Co-Chairs and two Task Force members presented our findings on impacts to an online audience. Since the Task Force became active in 2017 and since we published the Situation Analysis on oil palm and biodiversity, there seems to have been a marked shift in popular reporting about palm oil impacts with much frequent reference to other oils and their impacts, and the respective land needs of different crops for meeting future oil demand. We cannot well qualify this change in perceptions, but we have conducted further studies on perception change among edible oil consumers to test the assumptions we have made in the Task Force's Theory of Change and about the best target audiences for our work.

Membership

T-002 (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 6

Result description: The new Co-Chair, Dr Malika Virah-Sawmy, joined the Task Force in 2021, following approval from the Commission Chairs. Five new Task Force members were added to the Task Force in 2021, while three members stepped down as they were no longer engaged with edible oils. Our current membership stands at 20, with a few more membership applications pending. As the mandate of the Task Force has shifted from a focus on palm oil only to a broader focus on all major edible oils and sustainable agriculture, we have taken on several specialists on soy and other oil crops.

Synergy

T-006 (KSR 2)

Number of internal Task Force meetings: 3

Result description: We organised three online Task Force meetings. This included one webinar during the IUCN Congress in September 2021 to a global audience and one, in October 2021, to discuss the results of an edible oil perception study commissioned by the Task Force. The latter meeting was used to discuss the Task Force's current Theory of Change and how the insights from the oil perception study could potentially change the Theory of Change. As the 'perception' meeting was set up during Asian and European daytime hours, an additional online meeting was organised in November 2021 to discuss various findings with Task Force members based in the Americas and Pacific. Input from Task Force members was used to slightly change the Task Force's Theory of Change, but broadly maintain the current course on using science to influence media, public opinion of oil crop impacts, and ultimately consumers and policy makers.

COMMUNICATE

Communication

T-005 (KSR 12)

Number of press releases: 2

Result description: The Task Force engaged with a range of media, including, for example, an interview with Erik Meijaard in the monthly newsletter of EMVI (Netherlands Centre of Expertise for Food Industries) and another interview with Erik Meijaard in the Netherlands Financieel Dagblad. The Task Force also engaged with media around the publication Meijaard, E., et al. 2020. The environmental impacts of palm oil in context. *Nature Plants* 6:1418–1426. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-020-00813-w>. This was reported in 14 media outlets and resulted in 215 Tweets. In November 2021, this article was in the 99th percentile (ranked 4,005th) of the 458,074 tracked articles of a similar age in all journals and the 97th percentile (ranked 2nd) of the 44 tracked articles of a similar age in *Nature Plants*.

Acknowledgements

We thank Austindo Nusantara Jaya and the University of New York for providing financial support for implementing the edible oil perception studies.

Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 7

Geographic regions: 7 Global

Actions during 2021:

Assess: 3 (KSR 5)

Network: 3 (KSR 2, 4)

Communicate: 1 (KSR 12)

Overall achievement 2021–2025:

