



The role of zero-deforestation commitments in protecting and enhancing rural livelihoods

Peter Newton and Rayna Benzeev

Many zero-deforestation commitments pledge to enhance social sustainability in commodity supply chains. We review zero-deforestation commitments, and the peer-reviewed and gray literature, to characterize the role of these commitments in protecting and enhancing the well-being of indigenous and traditional forest-dependent people, laborers, and smallholders. First, we find that social criteria in zero-deforestation commitments pertain to labor standards, land rights, and community consultation. Second, we find that few publications examine the impacts of zero-deforestation commitments on social outcomes. Of those few, most are gray literature reports that rely on field-intensive data-collection to evaluate compliance with social criteria. Third, we highlight opportunities for linking zero-deforestation commitments to certification programs, and for developing jurisdictional approaches to sustainable sourcing. Finally, we call for more research to better-understand the social dimensions of zero-deforestation commitments.

Address

Environmental Studies Program, University of Colorado Boulder, Sustainability, Energy and Environment Complex, 4001 Discovery Drive, Boulder, CO 80303, USA

Corresponding author: Newton, Peter (peter.newton@colorado.edu)

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Introduction

The production of agricultural commodities, including beef, palm oil, paper and pulp, and soy, is a key driver of deforestation across the tropics [1,2]. International trade in these commodities is therefore implicated in many negative impacts on the livelihoods of indigenous and forest-dependent people, who depend on intact forest systems to support their livelihoods [3].

Over the past decade, there has been a rapid surge in the number of companies and multinational corporations making *zero-deforestation commitments* (as they have become commonly and collectively known), which are publicly stated declarations of intent by private sector corporations to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains [4–7]. For a given commodity and corporation, these pledges cover an entire value chain: including producers, processors, traders, manufacturers, and retailers [4]. Several non-profit initiatives, including Forest500 and Supply Change, have tracked more than 447 (as of 2017) commitments to end forest loss and enhance sustainability in their commodity supply chains [4]. The sectors most commonly included in zero-deforestation commitments (ZDCs) are the four agricultural commodity supply chains most strongly associated with tropical deforestation: beef, palm oil, paper and pulp, and soy [4]. Individual ZDCs vary considerably in their content: they include widely varying criteria; they differ in their definition of zero deforestation (e.g. net-, legal-, or gross-deforestation) [6]; and some are time-bound whereas others are not.

Declaration and adoption of ZDCs have been motivated and facilitated by a suite of factors, including: awareness-raising and naming-and-shaming by environmental NGOs [8]; Corporate Social Responsibility concerns [9]; and a growing recognition of the business case for reducing socio-environmental liabilities [10]. Some of the earliest commitments came from members of the Consumer Goods Forum who, in 2010, pledged to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains and achieve zero net deforestation by 2020 [5]. Subsequently, a large number of additional commitments culminated in the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests [7].

Studies are emerging that aim to understand the efficacy of these commitments in reducing deforestation. Indeed, the body of evidence describing the role of supply-chain initiatives in reducing deforestation is now sufficiently large to support the first synthetic review on this topic [7]. Individual papers have concluded that ZDCs have had moderate to significant success: for example, Heilmayr and Lambin [11] reported modest success of a private-sector led moratorium on forest clearance in Chile. But there is also considerable uncertainty about their impacts: for example, recent papers studying the same outcome (avoided deforestation) of the same ZDC (the soy moratorium in Brazil) have arrived at contrasting conclusions, ranging from broadly optimistic [12] to more cautious

[13]. The same mix of results is true of analyses of Brazil's cattle sector agreements [14–16].

Zero-deforestation commitments focus foremost on forest cover change as their primary objective. However, the scope of these commitments extend beyond forest cover [17], to additionally incorporate other environmental objectives, including: restrictions on burning as a mechanism for forest clearance; regulation of peatland management practices; and commitment to conserve high-conservation value and/or high carbon stock forests. As an example, the Golden Agri-Resources Forest Conservation Policy incorporates all of these additional dimensions of environmental sustainability [6,18].

In addition to environmental objectives, most ZDCs also make commitments to enhancing social sustainability in their supply chains. Social dimensions of ZDCs pertain to the livelihoods of people affected by those commitments. These criteria are important, since millions of people who live in and around forests, and who depend on them for their livelihoods, are affected by the production of agricultural commodities in tropical forested landscapes [19,20]. These people include: indigenous and other forest-dependent people who live in and around forests where commodity agriculture is expanding [19]; laborers that work directly for companies involved in commodity production or processing; and smallholders that produce commodities and sell them to the companies bound by these commitments [21].

In contrast to a growing number of studies on the characteristics and impacts of ZDCs as they pertain to reducing deforestation, which have been recently reviewed [7], very little has been written to synthesize the current understanding of the social dimensions of ZDCs. It is therefore this paper's objective to review the literature as it characterizes the potential and actual impacts of ZDCs on rural livelihoods.

Zero deforestation commitments and social sustainability

The review responds to three related questions: first, what social sustainability criteria do zero-deforestation commitments include?; second, what is the current understanding of the impacts of zero-deforestation commitments on social outcomes?; and third, what does the literature suggest about the possible strategies for achieving compliance with the social criteria of zero-deforestation commitments?

The social sustainability criteria included in zero-deforestation commitments

Comprehensive tracking by the Supply Change initiative found that most zero-deforestation commitments do include social criteria: as of 2017, 323 of 447 ZDCs included one or more social criteria [4]. However, their

analysis identified just three broad categories of social criteria: 'Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)', 'support smallholders', and 'human rights protection'. To understand whether the taxonomy of social criteria within ZDCs was more nuanced than that, we reviewed 86 ZDCs and identified the specific social criteria contained within the 32 of them that contained sufficient explicit detail in a publicly available document. We identified 15 distinct types of criteria, which we categorized into three broader groups: labor standards, land rights, and community consultation and inclusion (Table 1). In many cases, the language used in these commitments reflects language previously used by other agencies: for example, by certification bodies such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), and by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Here, we briefly discuss the types of criteria included in each of these three categories.

Labor standards

Commitments that include criteria for labor standards aim to support the human rights of workers in terms of working conditions, health and safety, wages, discrimination and harassment, forced labor, bonded labor, and/or human trafficking [17,22]. These commitments most commonly express intent to fully eliminate child and slave labor, as well as referencing contract, temporary, and/or migrant workers.

Land rights

Commitments that include criteria in reference to land rights aim to avoid development of land for which indigenous or traditional forest-dependent people claim legal or customary rights [17]. Criteria variously stipulate that companies should not be involved in land grabs, should respect land tenure rights, and should engage in participatory land mapping with local communities.

Community consultation and inclusion

Commitments that include criteria that refer to consultation with communities frequently stipulate the need to respect the rights of communities to give or withhold their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) [23]. Commitments that include criteria that refer to inclusion of communities frequently stipulate the need to promote smallholder inclusion and gender equity, as part of an open, transparent, and participatory process.

Some companies go further, and include more progressive criteria in their sustainable sourcing commitments. For example, Kellogg Company Global Sustainability 2020 Commitments state an intention to develop programs 'to help small-scale producers improve their livelihoods through agronomic practices and improved business skills', and 'to provide resources and education that improve the livelihoods of women farmers/workers, their families, and communities' [24]. Unilever has a stated

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