

## **Upgrading community development projects into sustainable value chains.**

Palm oil as we know it has been produced and traded out of West Africa ever since the end of the slave trade. This important oil used in the production of both cosmetics and food has been traded between West Africa and Europe ever since its discovery in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The intensification of the palm oil production has however had little success in the sub region albeit various efforts by government and international organizations to capitalize on world demand for the commodity. Smallholder production and processing of palm oil is still the order of the day in many parts of West Africa as South East Asia has become home to lead production.

The production sustainable palm oil might as well be the only chance for smallholders to compete with large plantations multinationals. International markets can present lucrative opportunities for smallholders to increase their income and raise their standards of living.

Another important aspect of such organic production schemes besides an increase in income levels is that, farmers can incorporate sustainable methods of production into their day-to-day agricultural

activities. The conservation of agrobiodiversity at the same integrating into international value chains and markets is a challenge that smallholders can overcome when they participate in the production and processing of sustainable palm oil.

Thus the certification schemes as that of organic and fair trade gives rural communities the opportunity to access international markets for their produce without having to change or abandon their livelihood patterns. Something that is not true for communities that have been occupied by oil palm plantations.

Small processing of palm oil also serves as employment for women, especially young women in rural communities. The livelihoods of the women met during fieldwork depends solely on their ability to process and trade palm oil. Women are empowered through this means whereby they can earn an independent income. The incomes that these women earn goes a long way in supporting not only themselves but in supporting their direct families and relatives.

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