

Position statement

(28/06/2022)

An [article](#) published by Green Scenery, Sierra Leone on 19 April 2022, questioned the RSPO certification of Socfin Agricultural Company through a [petition](#) signed by MALOA members (Malen Affected Land Owners and Users Association).

Socfin Agricultural Company (SAC) rejects any allegations made in this article.

Moreover, the methodology used by the organization to set up this petition has been widely questioned by the local authorities and the multistakeholder platform:

- [Malen Chiefdom authorities report](#);
- [District multi stakeholders platform report](#).

Therefore, we seek to clarify the concerns that have been raised by the petition.

SAC and the Socfin Group selected an RSPO auditor firm from several certifying bodies, accredited by Assurance Services International (ASI), **recognised by RSPO**. These experts conducted their mission impartially and independently as any professional in this business. SAC offered transportation to these experts during their plantation visit, taking into account the complex and isolated environment of the plantation.

As required by the ethics of the profession and their mission, not one member of the plantation's management team participated in the meetings with the stakeholders.

The process of electing chiefdom representatives is specific to these administrations and is managed in a totally independent manner as required for this type of process. If there were anomalies the District Council who oversees chiefdom administrations would have stepped in to address the situation.

The presumption of innocence is always respected and when an investigation leads to the suspicion of a theft, a search is carried out at the suspect's home. In such case the police are present at the time of search and identifying fruit. Depending on the case, the police may solicit some members of the Ministry of Defense to accompany them.

SAC leases land from willing owners. There have been several cases where the land was not leased as landowners declined to lease the land to the Government of Sierra Leone. As an example, Simma Mattia and Shiaka Sama both members of MALOA did not lease their land to the Government of Sierra Leone as is the case with other plots. These plots are still in the possession of the original landowners.

FPIC was done with all relevant stakeholders at the concept of the idea of coming to Malen and continued at every stage of SAC developing its activities.

- FPIC was judged satisfactory when it was checked in preparation and during the RSPO audit by SCS Global services and Proforest;
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has checked and approved SAC's FPIC activities;
- SAC carried out an extensive land sensitization program to all communities in 2021 as part of the ongoing FPIC process and again in the early part of 2022.

The legitimacy of the Association has always been questioned by some local communities and authorities as MALOA is not legally registered and its actions have been rejected by the local authorities.

A rigorous mapping of the owners' plots and the plantation was carried out in 2021 and the result was communicated to the communities. A sensitization with all communities was conducted in March & April 2021 providing all the details of land acquired and compensated by showing the booklets of all the listed people compensated that amounts to over 6 500 individuals both of land users and land owners. In April & May 2022 another sensitization was made with communities showing them the maps of the small plots of land measured during the surveys.

The land leasing process was carried out in full compliance with national laws and regulations and international standards. There is a Land Lease Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the landowner families. SAC has a Sub Lease Agreement for the land rights with the Government of Sierra Leone. SAC is therefore not directly leasing from the landowners.

Lease procedures are in line with national regulations and are characterized by a sharing arrangement into four categories. The greatest share of proceeds (50%) goes to the landowners followed by the chiefdom authorities (20%), the Pujehun District Council (20%) and the Ministry of Agriculture (10%). SAC continues to lobby for a greater amount of lease rent to be paid to the landowners. However, this is bound by national legislation and changing it requires parliament's approval.

SAC is always open to constructive cooperation and dialogue with its stakeholders. In this specific case there has been no official report provided by the Technical Committee of the Vice President's Office despite the lobbying of SAC, MALOA and other parties for it. This is a common request the all parties all share.

Contrary to the image portrayed by the article, SAC is committed to producing palm oil in a way that allows for long-term socio-economic development of the Malen district in Sierra Leone. This approach is based on a code of conduct and good management practices covered in the Socfin Group's Responsible Management Policy, which includes strengthening and protecting communities' rights, improving their quality of life and protecting the environment in and around its plantation.