

# New insights into oil palm impacts through role playing



## Stakeholder views from Buvuma Island, Uganda



*Gamers' in a role-playing workshop said that it helped them explore the complexity of oil palm developments in the broader landscape, as they jointly constructed an action plan, and identified avenues for collaboration between local communities, project partners, local authorities and private companies.*

Challenges in tackling complex issues in natural resource and environmental management could be better overcome if only different stakeholders could put themselves in the shoes of other in the landscape – and especially of those with conflicting views and interests. Responding to this need, the Green Livelihood Alliance programme explored Companion Modelling (ComMod) as a promising participatory approach. It was considered that it could draw insights in palm oil development trajectories by developing solutions together through role-playing games and simulation models. ComMod promotes dialogue, shared learning and collective decision-making, depolarizes debates and so strengthens the adaptive management capacity of communities facing difficult landscape-level choices.

By playing a palm oil supply chain game (CoPalCam), policy makers, local stakeholders and researchers gain a deeper understanding of the palm oil supply chain. It was played at a workshop on Buvuma Island, Uganda in April 2018 with 24 local actors, plus eight project management staff, and three facilitators. They spent two intensive days, with participants taking on the roles of different stakeholders.



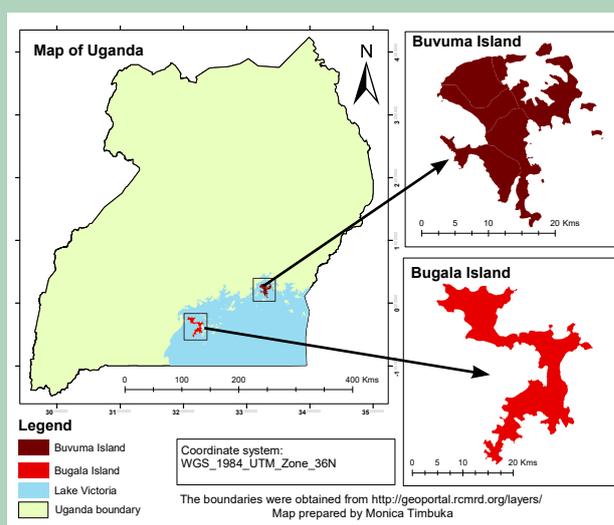
### **Roles and rules of the game**

'Players' (roles) include small, medium and large producers, industrial and artisanal mills, transport companies, secondary processors, government, the 'local market', and Indonesia and Malaysia as alternative suppliers. Smallholder plantations produce fresh fruit bunches for sale to artisanal or industrial mills and hire trucks. Mills transform fruit into crude palm oil sold in local markets or to the oil and soap industry. If local production is not enough, importation is possible. The game is divided into years, each with four harvest rounds, and high and low seasons.

## Oil palm's arrival on Lake Victoria islands

Oil palm cultivation was introduced in Bugala and neighbouring islands in Kalangala district in the early 2000s with laudable aims – providing cash incomes to impoverished rural people and improving the national economy. While the positive impacts are still to be assessed, unforeseen negative impacts have already surfaced. Forest has been lost and some people have been deprived of a livelihood. The oil palm company has a monopsony (the only buyer in a market) and controls the whole value chain. Insights into the impacts are detailed in nine articles in Ssemmanda and Opige (2018)\*. And with plans to move forward with the introduction and expansion of oil palm cultivation on Buvuma, other islands and mainland, this work is part of efforts to draw lessons from evidence in Kalangala to improve future prospects in Buvuma and beyond.

*\*Oil palm plantations in forest landscapes: impacts, aspirations and ways forward in Uganda. Tropenbos International, Wageningen, the Netherlands.*



## Learning from role-playing...

All players emphasized the need for structured cooperation, especially amongst smallholder producers. They said the game showed that working as a group empowers people, leading to better bargaining positions, higher economic benefits and more security. But CoPalCam sessions in other settings showed that economic successes without sustainable management could also result in large scale deforestation. A striking feature of the analysis are the layers of complexity in what participants took home. Most players drew a nuanced message including different levels of depth. While recognizing that oil palm ventures have risks, they also identified winning strategies, noting the value of information, trust and collective action among peers (i.e. in horizontal alliances). They also saw that it was possible to build links with other groups of stakeholders (i.e. vertical alliances), and that they could begin to develop effective joint management of the entire supply chain. And with more sessions it is possible to arrive at a fourth level of strategic depth involving long-term environmental questions and exposure to global market fluctuations.

## Impacts and perceptions

Before and after the workshop, participants were asked "What are the expected main impacts of the introduction of oil palm on Buvuma Island?" These interviews showed that the workshop changed their perceptions; of the system as a whole, as well as of problems and possible solutions; effectively demonstrating the impacts from using this approach. The general opinion as a whole was seen to have shifted towards a more negative perception on the impact of oil palm on Buvuma Island, because

of the game sessions and the associated interactions and discussions with other participants. In view of the strategic depth required to navigate future development of oil palm in Uganda (and elsewhere), this game and associated facilitation can clearly help stakeholders reach higher levels of awareness to enable cooperation and the development and implementation of more sustainable social-ecological and holistic management plans.

*The Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) programme is a strategic partnership between IUCN NL, Milieudefensie, Tropenbos International (TBI) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs that aims to bring about inclusive and sustainable governance of forested landscapes by strengthening civil society organisations in nine different countries. The workshop was funded by the GLA project through TBI, facilitated by Erika Speelman, Danny Nef and Claude Garcia from ETH/CIRAD/WUR/InSpire S&D. CoPalCam was designed by E. Fauvelle, P. Levang, E. Ngom and C. Garcia under the OPAL project ([www.opal-project.org](http://www.opal-project.org)) that aims to improve management of oil palm landscapes across Asia, Africa and Latin America by engaging stakeholders and boundary partners with plausible scenarios of oil palm development, funded by the Swiss Program for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme).*

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