

Assessment of High Conservation Values in Presco Ologbo extension Concession, Nigeria

HCV assessment
Summary | 06 August 2013



About Proforest

Proforest is an independent company working with natural resource management and specialising in practical approaches to sustainability.

Our work ranges from international policy development to the practical implementation of requirements on the ground, with a particular focus on turning policy into practice. Our extensive and up-to-date knowledge of the international context ensures that our work for individual companies and organisations is set within an appropriate framework. At the same time, we are able to bring a wealth of current practical experience to policy development processes and debates.

The Proforest team is international and multilingual and has a broad variety of backgrounds, ranging from industry to academia and NGOs. This allows us to work comfortably in many types of organisations, as well as in a range of cultures. We have in-house knowledge of more than 15 languages, including Mandarin, Malay, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

Proforest was set up in 2000. Our expertise covers all aspects of the natural resources sector, from forestry and agricultural commodities to conservation, supply chain management and responsible investment.

SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

General background

Presco Plc with administrative headquarters located at Obaretin Estate in the Edo State of Nigeria, is a public listed liability company established and incorporated into Nigerian laws in 24th September 1991. Presco is a subsidiary of SIAT S.A., a Belgian company engaged in a variety of agribusiness but with a specialisation in the development of oil palm plantations and in the extraction, refining and fractionation of crude palm oil into finished products. Presco currently has three estates, the Cowan estate in Delta State with a total oil palm plantation of 2,558 ha the Obaretin in Edo State with a total area of 5,631ha, and the Ologbo estate also located in the Edo State and with a total land area for the first concession being 7,300 ha. Of the 7,300 ha of the Ologbo, Presco has set aside about 3,800 ha to be managed as a conservation area. The conservation areas were identified based on studies carried out by CIRAD under a collaborative research programme between Presco and CIRAD geared towards ensuring that implementation of the oil palm plantation development project at Ologbo is environmentally responsible and socially beneficial. This approach was very crucial given that Ologbo concession was originally part of Ologbo forest reserve which has been under systematic de-reservation by the State Government within the last decade. The State government policy of managing of the Ologbo Forest Reserve has been that de-reservation of any part of the forest reserve becomes the last option after the forest has been razed down by illegal chainsaw activities and government licensed farming activities of the local population.

In October 2012, Presco acquired an additional 3,243.7 ha concession in two parcels of Plot "A" and "B" with land area of 2,248.891 ha and 994.81 respectively. The Certificate of Occupancy of this newly acquired concession was issued by the State Governor in December 2012. These concessions will be an extension to the existing Presco Ologbo oil palm plantations. The Ologbo oil palm plantation has been established on land which previously were part of the Ologbo forest reserve but had to be de-reserved by the State Government when the forest has been totally destroyed by state licensed subsistence farming and chain-saw operations. As a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and as part of its commitments to the RSPO requirements including the New Planting Procedure (NPP), Presco in May 2013 requested Proforest to carry out a High Conservation Value assessment of the newly acquired concession prior to its conversion to oil palm plantation.

Biophysical context

The forests of Edo State form part of the Lower Guinean Forest Ecosystem (LGFE) which extends from western Nigeria to the South-Western Cameroon. The natural vegetation in this area is known to contain high concentration of biodiversity, and in fact one of the globally recognised important priority area for conservation. The Lower Guinea Forest Ecosystem is separated from the Upper Guinean Forest ecosystem by the Dahomey Gap, which is a mixture of savannah and dry forests in Togo and Benin. Together, the Upper and Lower Guinean Forest Ecosystems of this region constitute the Guinean High Forest Hotspot which is home to some 9,000 vascular plant species, (20% of which are considered to be endemic), over 785 bird species (of which 78 are known to be endemic) and some 320 mammal species (of which more than sixty are known endemics, including 18 primates). The Guinean High Forest Hotspot is renowned for its high primate diversity with more than 30 distinct species. As many as 9 primate species are known to be endemic to the forests of Nigeria and Cameroon alone.

In spite of its significant biodiversity and global importance, the extent of the Guinean High forest has been reduced from an estimated 1,265,000 km² to 141,000 km², representing an estimated 85% loss during the last century (CEPF, 2000). The remaining forests are mainly concentrated in protected areas while the rest is highly fragmented. The Guinean High Forests is ranked as the highest priority for primate conservation but also one facing the highest threat (CEPF, 2000).

Climate

The Edo state of Nigeria has a tropical climate characterized by two distinct conditions of wet and dry seasons. The wet season is generally April-October with a brief dry season in August. The dry season generally occurs during November-March. The annual rainfall averages 2500mm near the coastal area and 1500mm in the extreme northern part of the state. Temperatures across the state is relatively high averaging about 25 degrees C in the rainy season and about 28 degrees Celsius in the dry season. Three vegetation belt are discernible from the south to the north, the mangrove swamp forest in the southern part, the rain forest at the middle while the northern part has the savannah vegetation. The climate is humid tropical in the south and sub-humid in the north.

The Concession

The concession assessed for HCVs is located in the Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area (LGA) of the Edo State of Nigeria. The concession is located in the former Ologbo Forest Reserve land in a south-south-west of Benin City, the State capital of the Edo State and to the west of the Benin-Sapele Highway. The concession is near trapezoid in shape with the following coordinates: the most westerly point of the concession is at 6° 07'31.14"N, 05°32' 23.56"E with its easternmost edge at 6°06' 12.34"N and 5°38' 09.31"E. The southernmost edge is at 6° 05'56.43"N whilst the northernmost tip is at 6°08'33.16"N and 5°37' 35.84"E. Although located in a former Ologbo forest reserve, a number of settlements including Ikara, Ologbo, Ogbekpen, Iyanomor and Obayantor are within walking distance from the concession. The large number of settlements and the high population density of the area coupled with poor management systems have largely contributed to degradation and conversion of the former Ologbo forest reserve into agricultural and farmlands. The entire forest reserve is nearly gone to the extent that of the over 17,000 ha of the original cover, only about 4.5% consisting mainly of marshland and planted trees now remain (State Forest Director, Pers Comm. June 2013).

Socio-cultural context

The people of Edo State are of three major ethnic groups; namely the Binis, Esan and Afemai. Other ethnic groups are the Owans and Akoko Edos. All these ethnic groups generally traced their origin to the ancient Benin Kingdom hence the dialects of the groups vary with their distance from Benin City. The Binis speaking people who occupy seven out of the eighteen Local Government Areas of the state constitute 57.54% while others Esan (17.14%) Afemai comprising of Etsako (12.19%), Owan (7.43%), and Akoko Edo (5.70%). However, the Igbira speaking communities exist in Akoko Edo as well as Urhobos, Izons, Itsekiris communities in Ovia North East and South West Local Government Areas especially in the borderlands. Additionally, Ika speaking communities exist in Igbanke in Orhionmwon LGA. Significant similarities in culture exist in the areas of religious worships, folk-lore, dances, and festivals, traditional modes of dressing, arts and craft. The political pattern and behaviour are based on a situation where both the monarchical and republican ideas flourished in an integrated manner. The colourful traditional festivals in the state manifest its rich cultural heritage. Critical among these are the Igue and Ekaba festivals celebrated by the Etsako people during the initiation (age group) of the Binis and Manhood. With an estimated population of 3,218, 332 made up of 1,640,461 males and 1, 577, 871 females and a growth rate of 2.7% per annum (NPC, 2006), as well as a total landmass of 19,187 square kilometers, the state as a whole has a population density of about 168 persons per square kilometers. However, the population density of the project area is comparatively high and this is attributable to its proximity to the State capital of Benin City.

RSPO and HCV

The RSPO was formally established in 8th April 2004 under article 60 of the Swiss Civil Code as a global, multistakeholder initiative on sustainable palm oil. Members of RSPO come from the entire palm oil supply chain in several countries across the world that produce and use palm oil. The membership of RSPO are from different institutions and organisations including environmental NGOs, banks, investors, oil palm growers, manufacturers, processors and retailers. Through a multistakeholder consensus building process, the RSPO has developed a set of principles and Criteria and guidelines for sustainable palm oil production. However, in order to strengthen its sustainability requirements, the RSPO adopted the HCV concept as one of its core requirements to be met by oil palm growers wishing to achieve RSPO certification. The HCV concept was originally developed in 1999 by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as Principle 9 of the FSC Standard for sustainable forestry. Since then, the concept has been extensively used in the context of FSC certification for sustainable forestry and in landuse programmes. The concept has been adopted by RSPO making identification and management of HCVs a crucial requirement of the RSPO certification standards. The RSPO certification for sustainable palm oil requires that new oil palm plantations developed after November 2005 must not replace areas needed to maintain or enhance HCVs. In order to enhance effective and consistent application of the concept across different regions of the world, a Global HCV Toolkit titled "The High Conservation Value Forest Toolkit" was produced in December 2003. This document together with other associated documents such as the "Good Practice Guidelines for High Conservation Value assessment" developed by Proforest in 2008 were the main documents and assessment guidelines used for this assessment.

Assessment methodology

The HCV assessment adopted a three-phase assessment process with stakeholder consultations being an integral part of each phase of the process. The first part of the assessment was a brief scoping of the concession during baseline review carried on Presco existing plantations in March 2013. The scoping was followed by the HCV pre-assessment and then the field assessment and verification of HCVs.

Although not officially planned but coincidental, the objective of the scoping was for Proforest team to assess whether Presco would need to carry out an HCV assessment for the new concession prior to conversion and if so identify an appropriate approach and methodology for this assessment. The pre-assessment largely focused on gathering available documents, reports and information about the concession and the landscape of which the concession forms a part through desktop and web-based studies. It was also used for a preliminary assessment of the likely presence of HCV 1, 2 or 3 in the immediate landscape and to enhance the teams' understanding of expertise, resources and time requirements for the field assessment and verification. The field assessment aimed at identifying all the biological, ecological and social HCVs and the areas where these attributes are found, and to make appropriate management recommendations for Presco to maintain or enhance the values in those areas that make them HCVs.

Additionally, stakeholder consultations at the state level and with the host communities were carried out. The consultations aimed at eliciting stakeholders' input into the assessment process and the HCV management recommendations respectively. Additionally, the stakeholder consultations were to ensure key stakeholders were informed of the project, to enable them provide relevant information needed for the HCV assessment, and to allow them to contribute to the assessment process. It was also aimed at soliciting stakeholders' inputs in identifying HCVs present in the concessions and in the landscape, and contributing to the HCV management and monitoring recommendations which are highlighted in this report and are to be further

elaborated and implemented by Presco. This report includes the comments and inputs of all stakeholders consulted during this assessment.

HCV Findings and management recommendations

A summary of the HCV findings have been presented in a tabular form in this section. However, details of the justifications of the presence or absence of a particular HCV have been presented in “Identification of HCVs” in Sections 5. Table 1 below provides a summary of HCVs present, potentially present or absent in the Presco Ologbo concession.

Table 1: Summary of HCVs present and absent in Presco Ologbo concession

| HCV | Description | Present | Potentially present | Absent |
|---------|---|---------|---------------------|--------|
| HCV1.1 | Protected areas | | | |
| HCV 1.2 | Concentrations of rare, threatened or endangered species | | | |
| HCV 1.3 | Concentrations of endemic species | | | |
| HCV 1.4 | Seasonal concentration of species | | | |
| HCV 2 | Large landscape level forests | | | |
| HCV 3 | Rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems | | | |
| HCV 4.1 | Areas critical to water catchments | | | |
| | Riparian vegetation and watersheds in the concession | | | |
| HCV 4.2 | Areas critical to erosion control | | | |
| HCV 4.3 | Areas providing barriers to destructive fires | | | |
| HCV 5 | Areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities | | | |
| HCV 6 | Areas critical to local communities traditional cultural identity | | | |

Findings

The findings of this assessment suggest that the concession does not contain any primary forest or areas of peat soils. However, the concessions were found to contain HCVs 4.1 and 6 as detailed in Table 1 above. Additionally, although the concession is state land and does not necessarily contain local peoples’ land, most of the local population particularly from Ogbekpen, Ologbo, Iyanomor and Okwani Camp have active farms in the concession. The people of these communities particularly Ogbekpen are requesting that either Presco compensates farmers for their crops or extend the deadline for farmers to leave the land so farmers can harvest all their food crops. The farmers suggested an extension for a period not less than 2 years when they were asked the duration of extension being requested. However, the requested extension if granted will mean Presco would have to violate the provision of the Certificate of Occupancy that

Presco has signed (October 2012) with the State Governor which enjoins the company to develop the land within the two years after issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy.

HCV 4.1: Areas critical to water catchment

The assessment identified networks of rivers and streams in the landscape with a particular unnamed stream flowing through the concession. The stream which is a tributary of the Igogoin River is used by the people of Ogbekpen and forms a large marshy area in the concession. Additionally, this stream and the associated marshy area have good vegetation along them that play a crucial role in maintaining bank stability and maintaining the riparian ecosystems. The vegetation along the stream and the associated marshy area in the concession have been identified as HCV 4.1 for this assessment.

HCV 6: Areas critical to local communities' traditional and cultural identity

The information gathered during this assessment suggest that there exists a strong link between the local population's traditional and cultural identities, and the vegetation in the concession. Host communities of the concession continue to uphold traditional and cultural practices. This is exemplified by the myriads of shrines alleged by the various communities as contained in the concession. This area is set aside from all forms of farming/conversion activities. Consultations made with the community indicated that no particular religious-cultural communities' shrines that were reported to be located in the landscape and those in the concession. Six shrines were reported to be located in the concession although only one (Ogbekpen community shrine) was verified and mapped due largely to non-availability of chief priests to take the assessment team to the field. The Ogbekpen shrine has been identified as HCV 6 while recommendations have been made to Presco to follow up with Ologbo and Iyanomor communities to ascertain and map their shrine areas and exclude them from all forms of conversions activities.

Conclusions and general recommendations

The field assessment findings and the feedback from the stakeholder consultations suggest that the concession is suitable for sustainable palm oil development **with the exception of the HCVs and associated HCV management areas described in this report**. In addition, conversion of the non-HCV areas of the concessions to oil palm plantations should demonstrate a net gain for the local economy and the host populations, as per the social and economic provisions of RSPO. Findings of the community consultations suggest that some local populations particularly farmers are facing significant livelihood challenges, which is likely to increase if those farmers currently with farms on the concession are moved out of the land without any reasonable alternative. Given the potential negative impact of conversion of this concession into palm particularly on local peoples' farms and livelihood, Presco must develop in collaboration with the host communities and potentially with the State Government, a comprehensive social development plan that genuinely ensures the company's contribution to local development. This might make the local population to be at least more inclined to accept the loss of current and future farmlands.

General observations

Presco has committed itself in meeting RSPO certification compliance management including identification and maintenance of HCVs for its existing operations and all new palm plantations development. However, the level of understanding of RSPO certification requirements within Presco is quite weak. It is therefore recommended that steps are taken by the management of Presco to ensure that management and all field level workers have requisite experience and

adequate understanding of the processes and steps needed to be followed in implementing the recommendations contained in this report including compliance with other requirements under the RSPO certification standards.

Summary of HCVs identified and management recommendations

Summary of HCVs identified and proposed management recommendations

Table 2: Summary of HCVs identified and the proposed management recommendations

| HCV | Findings | Management objective | Spatial presence | Status of mapping | Management recommendations |
|-----|---|---|---|-------------------|--|
| 4.1 | The riparian vegetation along the stream and the associated marshy areas | To ensure perpetual flow of clean water for the host communities by setting aside and maintaining appropriate buffer zones for all rivers and streams in the concessions | The un-named stream that flows through the concession and crossing the road from Ogbekpen to the concession | Partially mapped | Riparian vegetation and buffering of rivers and streams. Recommending 10 metre buffer at each side of the stream. These should be established, mapped and respected. Management recommendations include protection and maintenance of buffer zones along this river and the associated marshy areas. |
| 6 | Ogbekpen shrine and verification of all other shrines for Iyanomor and Ologbo communities | To ensure that Ogbekpen shrine is appeased for destruction, and protected from future land preparation activities. Also to ensure all other shrines are mapped and excluded from any conversion activities. | Specific areas | Partially mapped | Subject to agreement with the host communities' concerned, an appropriate management area should be set aside for the protection and maintenance of all community shrine areas and excluded from all forms of conversion activities. |