

Position statement

A report published by Green Scenery & FIAN, on 10 December 2021, claims that large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) have been linked to human rights abuses and conflicts. As it is used as an example, Socfin Agricultural Company (SAC) rejects any allegations made in this report and seeks to clarify the concerns that have been raised by the report.

SAC has one mission: to produce 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.

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 following 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 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.

SAC has a transparent relationship with its stakeholders of the Malen Chiefdom. The state and local communities benefit from SAC's presence in the region.

SAC has a strong CSR program, as is continuously confirmed by an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) certificate which is granted after respecting all terms of reference and based on periodic field visits/monitoring. Quarterly reports are submitted by SAC to the EPA (Environment Protection Agency)

and the CSR activities are publicly available in SACs annual sustainability report published on the Socfin website. Continuous dialogue with communities is maintained by SAC's extensive Community Liaison department and the monthly Social & Grievances Committee Meetings during which CSR activities and its progress are discussed.

SAC respects the rights of its direct and indirect workers

The work hours/task of people directly or indirectly working for SAC is in accordance with sector specific standards and national legislation on minimum wage. All employees are paid at least the minimum wage based on the duration of a normal workday or a task equivalent to this as evidenced by timesheets and pay slips.

SAC is open to constructive cooperation and feedback based on facts

The report at hand is largely based on hearsay, there is regularly no factual basis for the allegations and independent sources are lacking. The sources cited have been repeatedly factually refuted and the time spent in the Malen Chiefdom by FIAN and its local partner, Green Scenery, is far from sufficient to obtain an accurate assessment. The last visit of FIAN was in 2015 and again in 2021 for one day.

Contrary to what is mentioned in the report, SAC is committed **to participate in the long-term socio-economic development of the region** in which it operates. SAC continues the process of the full implementation of the Socfin Group's Responsible Management Policy released in March 2017 and updated in 2021 and is fully committed to continuously invest in community relations, transparent communication and building constructive partnerships with NGOs.