

# The Path Towards 100% Sustainable Palm Oil

*A study of German and UK actors engaged in the Palm Oil Sector*

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates how different actors in Germany and the UK justify their engagement with palm oil and which tensions arise due to this. Drawing upon the political economy studies of multi-stakeholder initiatives, as well as the pragmatic sociological notion of justification, disputes and critique, this paper addresses the importance of institutions and their safeguarding of value, in a rapidly changing and volatile environment in which organizations are operating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through data collection in the shape of interviews, news archives and annual reports, this thesis utilizes triangulation to understand the nuances of what arguments are present within the palm oil industry, specifically in the national context of the UK and Germany. The interviews were conducted in relation to a larger research project at Copenhagen Business School, with representatives from organizations engaged with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. The news archives were compiled from national media sources over a one-year period in both Germany and the UK, and the official documents were drawn from locally headquartered (in Germany and the UK) down-stream organizations that were mapped in terms of their involvement in the palm oil industry.

The tensions identified arose through broad themes of balancing interests, misinformation or lack of information and the unaligned idea of what the 'end goal' of certification may be. This paper contributes to the notion that non-state governance through multi-stakeholder initiatives such as certification provide a stable framework for discussion and deliberation that allows for the sustainable development of a commodity such as palm oil. Furthermore, the findings suggest that institutions have the potential to unite and guide countries that may differ in many aspects yet have actors that share the ambition to move their industries to become more sustainable. In addition, the paper presents implications for the future of sustainable development in the palm oil sector and the commodity sector as a whole.

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## Glossary

CSPO	Certified Sustainable Palm Oil
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DE	Germany
ESPO	European Sustainable Palm Oil
EU	European Union
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods (Shorter shelf life / low price)
MSI	Multi-stakeholder Initiative
POIG	Palm Oil Innovation Group
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
UK	United Kingdom
WWF	World Wildlife Fund for Nature

## Introduction

### The Issue of Palm Oil

Palm oil is a plant oil retrieved from the fruit of palm oil trees and is mainly produced in Malaysia and Indonesia. Palm oil is an extremely versatile plant oil which is used in over 50% of supermarket products(WWF, n.d.-b). Due to its neutral taste and attributes at room temperature as well as yield of production, palm oil has been a preferred plant oil for many consumer goods manufacturers for over 30 years(European Parliament, 2017). The issue with conventional palm oil production has been the practices connected to the retrieval and cultivation. These practices have been unsustainable and destructive to the biodiversity of the affected areas and have not provided adequate working conditions. According to BBC (2018), approximately 8% of deforestation between 1990 and 2008 is said to have been caused by palm oil production (BBC, 2018). Furthermore, this destruction of the environment has affected not only the species that live in these areas but also the citizens. Yet, with the current global consumption of palm oil, and it's unique and versatile attributes, it is difficult to fully replace. In order to mitigate the impact on the environment and affected societies, actors are working towards minimizing the burden of the production of palm oil on the environment and society (WWF, n.d.-a). Palm oil has further been a popular use for biofuels, and is now being phased out by the EU RED II directive, yet this paper will focus on the palm oil in the consumer goods industry (Teffer, 2018).

### Tackling Complex Issues in Global Value Chains

While developments, in terms of the market for certified sustainable palm oil, have been led by European countries there are still many factors that influence the adherence to certified sustainable palm oil in Europe (Barthel et al., 2018). On the one hand, the European market is driven by a greater commitment to sustainability, and there is an increasing willingness from corporations to engage in ethical sourcing of commodities such as palm oil(IUCN, n.d.). Yet there are also growing pressure from NGOs and the consumers' growing awareness, mirrored in retaliation of, for example the commodity of palm oil. There is a lack of transparency and common knowledge to how bad or good palm oil is for consumption and the planet as a whole. At the same time, corporations who do not have full control over their supply chains, are struggling to administer and audit their use of sustainable palm oil. As a reaction to this, the Amsterdam Declaration, initially signed by six

European countries, including the UK and Germany commits these countries to support 100% sustainably sourced palm oil by 2020 (Den. - Fra. - Ger. - Neth.- Nor.- UK., 2015). According to the commitment, the countries strive to fulfill this goal by working together to increase traceability and monitoring of the industry as well as promote national commitment by companies and other industry actors. One of these, being the private certification organization: The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil.

#### The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

As mentioned above, there are many actors in the shape of nations, organizations and other affected that have an interest in the palm oil industry. It becomes difficult for national governments to navigate and legislate on these matters as they are highly complex and dispersed across many legislative borders and tiers of the value chain. In situations where governments are unable to create sustainable long-term solutions, there has been an increase in partnerships and non-governmental organizations who have sought to fill the void. There has been an increased prominence of multi-stakeholder initiatives in which actors with different stakes in an industry come together to try to solve the issues that an industry is facing which has not been successfully solved by traditional governance. Often this has been seen in the context of sustainability (Riisgaard, Lund-Thomsen, & Coe, 2017).. Standard setting and the implementation through certification are some of the ways in which these MSIs can contribute and provide guidance for an industry to achieve certain sustainability targets.

One of the main acting bodies in terms of sustainable palm oil certification is the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (from now on referred to as RSPO). Also one of the main action points, specified in the European commitment towards 100% sustainable palm oil, is to achieve RSPO certified palm oil as a minimum(ESPO, 2015). Formally established in 2004 in Switzerland, the RSPO brought together actors such as the non-governmental organization, World Wildlife Fund, Swiss consumer goods retailer, Migros and consumer goods manufacturer, Unilever in order to promote more sustainable sourcing of palm oil (RSPO, 2018a). Today, the RSPO has members from each sector engaged in the palm oil industry, oil palm growers, palm oil processors, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks and investors and NGOS. The RSPO aims to “make sustainable palm

the norm” (RSPO, 2018a) and in order to ensure this, they have developed a set of criteria to be fulfilled to be Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO). This criteria both focuses on environmental and social factors that the corporations must adhere to.

Figure 1: Principles & Criteria of the RSPO

<b>PROSPERITY</b>	Principle 1: Behave ethically and transparently
	Principle 2: Operate legally and respect rights
	Principle 3: Optimize productivity, efficiency, positive impacts and resilience
<b>PEOPLE</b>	Principle 4: Respect community and human rights and deliver benefits
	Principle 5: Small-holder inclusion
	Principle 6: Respect workers' rights and conditions
<b>PLANET</b>	Principle 7: Protect, conserve and enhance ecosystems and the environment

Adapted from the Principles and Criteria for the Production Of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO, 2018b)

The RSPO has divided their criteria into three subtopics or 'impact areas': prosperity, people and planet and seven principles(RSPO, 2018b). These impact areas cover the goals that the RSPO aims to achieve and members must comply to the seven principles which are measured through a range of indicators. PROSPERITY refers to the sector's wealth and development, while PEOPLE concerns the human right protection and improvements of livelihoods(RSPO, 2018b). PLANET encompasses the overall principle of responsible and respectful utilization of the environment.

A main feature of the RSPO is the diversity of the actors and the opportunities for these different voices to impact the development and implementation of certification. The RSPO, like the palm oil industry as a whole, still face a lot of challenges in terms of promoting sustainable palm oil, but also ensuring that global production practices become more sustainable over time. These challenges, together with an increasing media presence of opposing NGOs, such as Greenpeace, has led to an increase in awareness on the topic and has left civil society in doubt of what the right solution is in terms of palm oil production and consumption. Whether efforts should be focused on certifying sustainable palm oil, or rather on boycotting and banning palm oil.

#### Sustainable Palm Oil in Europe

This thesis has been written in parallel with an ongoing research project on the RSPO at the *Department of Management, Communication and Society at Copenhagen Business School* and the interviews analyzed in this paper stem from the larger project.

While the RSPO represents members from all parts of the palm oil supply chain: producers, processors or traders, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks and investors, and environmental and social NGOs (RSPO, 2018a) this project aims to look at these from a national context. This thesis specifically investigates how palm oil engagement is justified by actors involved with manufacturing, retailing, consumption, financing and advocacy in two European countries: the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany. Understanding this, the thesis also aims to discover the underlying tensions that are present within and among the nations' justifications, and suggest implications of these findings for the future of sustainable development of commodities.

The foundations of this qualitative study have been inspired by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's (2006) pragmatic sociology on critique and justification. Bringing together economic sociology and political economy to investigate how actors engage with multi-stakeholder initiatives and justify this. In addition, this paper explores how tensions in these perspectives be explained. This is done through the collection of data by interviews, news archives and official documents and statements issued by organizations that are involved with palm oil.

The thesis will commence by introducing the current literature of Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance, targeting the studies on non-state involvement in the form of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and certification. Thereafter, the theoretical framework inspired by pragmatic sociology will be introduced. This will be followed by the description of the research design and data analysis process. Following this, the findings from the research will be presented and analyzed. Finally, the implications of these findings will be discussed, and further research will be addressed.

## Literature Review

In recent years, political economy and business literature have investigated corporate responsibility within and surrounding corporations. Furthermore, a lot of research has gone into how the social, political and legal environment influence the conducting of business. In addition to this, the growth of globalization has led to a need for states to expand their governance in order to encompass more than what takes place within their respective nations. This has further led to the increase of non-state actors becoming engaged in setting the global agenda and coming up with solutions for widespread challenges (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). This growing importance of non-state involvement is also seen in terms of certification and standard setting where the deliberative and collaborative nature of these initiatives ensure successful implementation and durability of the decisions made. As a reaction to transnational challenges and the need for certification further coordination and governance, beyond state legislation, is emerging. Some of this is taking the shape of MSIs and in the case of the RSPO, certification is developed in order to tackle sociopolitical and environmental challenges that the world is faced with today.

### The Responsibility of Corporations

Studies on the responsibility of corporations have over the past 20 years emerged from focusing on whether it is *profitable* to engage in CSR in 2000 (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000) to becoming a necessity for businesses in order to exist in society. Now it is no longer a question of *if* but rather *how* businesses should integrate corporate responsibility into their strategy in order to benefit the external environment in addition to satisfying the objectives of the business. Often CSR literature leads back to the four dimensions of Carroll's (1979, 1999) model of CSR, which he presented as being economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic (Carroll, 1979, 1999). To elaborate on this, companies must be profitable, abide by laws, do what is ethically right and contribute to society (Carroll, 1979, 1999). Yet corporations continue to struggle with the ambiguity of CSR and what this broad term of being responsible as a corporation. This need, has led to the discussion of the broader term of responsibility as a company. Matten and Crane(2005) went on to discuss the notion of business in society, as mentioned by Carroll as the fourth dimension of his CSR model. Through their change of terminology from corporate responsibility to corporate citizenship, Matten and Crane signaled a shift from businesses reacting to the harm they had exposed their stakeholders to, to

businesses being directly involved with the stakeholders as well as taking responsibility for the implications of these interactions (Matten & Crane, 2005; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Rasche & Gilbert, 2012). How companies should act responsible and shape their CSR is still a heavily discussed topic today, especially in the emergence of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. This new assumption of responsibility that researchers such as Matten & Crane urge corporations to assume, combined with the external pressures placed by civic society, businesses demand new models that will enable the engagement with the ecosystems and different organizations (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

#### Governing Responsibility

Through the growth and expansion, multinational corporations face increasing complexity due to the multitude of legal systems in the different nations in which they operate (Rotter et al., 2014). Businesses are coming to understand their new roles in engaging more with their environment and the importance of political consideration when viewing the value chain (Rotter et al., 2014). By taking a more political stance, businesses are however then also entering gray zones of the nature of legal matters or human rights causes that they must find solutions for and mitigate. This is not a competence that the corporations may necessarily possess and they may not have the expertise within all fields of their value chain to be able to directly control the repercussions of their business activities. Yet this does not mean that they are not responsible for these actions. Thus, they may need to partner up in order to achieve the knowledge and exert the impact that is desired on the affected area of society (Rotter et al., 2014).

## Multi-stakeholder Initiatives

Private governance initiatives began emerging in the 1990s, stressing the need for non-state governance and collaboration, dialogue and representation which both local governments and global regulatory agencies struggle to provide due to the high complexity, broad range of actors and the transnational scope (Schouten, Leroy, & Glasbergen, 2012). Matten & Crane posited that corporations enter “when traditional government actors fail to be the counterpart”(Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 171). Yet companies, especially those dealing with commodities that do not own their entire value chain are often faced with the lack of representation in terms of external parties and suppliers. This representation can be sought from external actors that bring together the different stakeholders of the specific product being produced in order to produce alignment through non-legislated forms such as certification and standards.

Andreas Rasche and Dirk Ulrich Gilbert (2012) describe multi-stakeholder initiatives as voluntary and collaborative forms of governance, that have the power to successfully define, implement and enforce rules, based on voluntary commitment of members from various sectors of the targeted industry(Rasche & Gilbert, 2012). MSIs involve both public and private organizations, that voluntarily commit to follow the rules and targets. MSIs can be divided into three categories, principle based, certification and reporting MSIs (Rasche, Larsen, Gwozdz, & Moon, 2017).

The introduction of roundtables added a dimension to the certification multi stakeholder initiatives in that it not only brings together a multitude of different actors, but also, as implied with the *round table*, the roundtable also aims to prioritize the equal power distribution among the say of the members (Ponte, 2014). These roundtables, as described by Schouten et al. (2012), are specifically designed to target sustainability in commodity chains. In addition, Schouten among others studied the deliberative capacity of these private governance models, and the importance of inclusiveness as well as the impact that they have on democracy in terms of influencing the governance of both environmental and social concerns(Schouten et al., 2012).

Bringing together a vast variety of actors to discuss highly controversial and complex topics in which each actor has a vested interest has shown to not only be highly complicated but also presents

different challenges both from external pressures, but also just in terms of coordinating the efforts within the roundtable itself (Ponte, 2014). While these MSIs are often put in place in order to enhance legitimacy and accountability, filling the voids that state governance are unable to fill, studies have found that these are some of their largest challenges. Rasche and Gilbert (2012) presented their findings on loose and tight coupling in terms of multi-stakeholder initiatives, providing insight into how local and national embeddedness requires different types of constellations in order to allow for successful interactions (Rasche & Gilbert, 2012). Furthermore, they point towards potential challenges that these initiatives may face and highlight the issue of accountability that is often present in these voluntary and collaborative forms of governance (Rasche & Gilbert, 2012).

Emmanuelle Cheyns' 2011 paper on multi-stakeholder initiatives with specific focus on sustainable agriculture, addresses specifically the RSPO through a pragmatic sociological perspective and studies the interactions between the members of the roundtable (Cheyns, 2011). Cheyns studied the specific challenges observed within the roundtable and derived that some of the main challenges include the potential lack of urgency, difficulty in defining a common goal and asymmetric distribution of power. What this project aims to do is look at the environment of this commitment setting from a more macro perspective, additionally bringing in other actors that are not directly in contact with the RSPO as members, but also members of the civic society and the national media to understand what dynamics and justifications are being discussed in the broader national context of Germany and UK: nations that are also engaged in the RSPO and have committed to becoming 100% sustainable in terms of palm oil use by 2020.

The research conducted in this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of what is going on in the sphere that surrounds the engagement in palm oil within two specific European countries that have committed to become 100% sustainable within palm oil by 2020. The surrounding environment is important in understanding the challenges the RSPO and other change makers face in the transformation to 100% sustainable palm oil. The RSPO is included within this ecosystem.

This project aims to contribute to the current literature through combining international business, political economy and sociology in order to get a more in depth understanding of the national environment in which these certification schemes navigate. This is done by looking closer at different actors within these roundtables in order to try create a better understanding of the reality and potential tensions that could occur in the future by comparing the justification of the actors with justifications presented in media and official reports. While there have been studies in understanding the standards through a discursive approach, also applying pragmatic sociological dimensions, this project aims to dig deeper into the justification of selected actors, and the impact of, and on, the external environment (Ponte 2013). Furthermore, this thesis seeks to provide insight into how European countries differ on precisely this matter by providing a case study of two countries UK and Germany.

## Conceptual Framework

To investigate how different actors, representing different organizations and interests, justify engagement in the palm oil sector, the theoretical framework is inspired by the concepts of justification, critique, disputes and the importance of institutions. The conceptual framework specifically focuses on the contributions by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in their work *De la Justification* (1991) (later translated and published as *On Justification*, 2006) in addition to other works within the realm of pragmatic sociology. This thesis will use pragmatic sociology and its conceptions of justification, critique and institutions in order to analyze how different actors justify their standpoint with certified sustainable palm oil and use the theoretical concept as a tool to help predict future scenarios for other certification schemes and the dilemmas that may arise, and what justifications are most dominant in the selected countries. Most commonly, pragmatic sociology has been applied to view individual actors within organizations. This paper however aims to use these notions in order to view organizations as individual actors, developing justifications through a condensation of what their representatives say (interviews), what image they portray to the public, (media archives), and what they would like to communicate (official documents). This triangulation aims to present the justification of the actors that contribute to the national and international discussions on sustainable palm oil.

### Pragmatic Sociology

Pragmatic sociology emerged among French sociologists as a reaction towards critical sociology, which is most commonly linked to sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Luc Boltanski, one of these modern French sociologists, describes Bourdieu's critical sociology to be 'too powerful or too vague in character' (Boltanski, 2011, p. 20). Furthermore, he argues that critical sociology does not account for the reality that is experienced by the observed actors. In Boltanski's collected works *On Critique*, he goes on to argue that critical sociology designates overestimated powers to the sociologists (Boltanski, 2011). Boltanski claims that critical sociology portrays sociology in a superior manner to other sciences and thus spurs notions of arrogance and preeminence, risking the loss of meaning by neglecting the actual reality of the respondent in favor of the sociologist's interpretation hereof (Boltanski, 2011). This reflexivity and portrayal of the respondents' experienced realities is a main component of what Boltanski together with Laurent Thévenot aimed to include in their

development of pragmatic sociology. Pragmatic sociology, as with the pragmatic tradition, puts the actor at the center of observation, focusing on *description* and the actors as they are, 'en situation'. (Boltanski, 2011, p. 24)

### Justification

Based on their main work, *On Justification* (2006), building on Bourdieu's sociology of critique, Boltanski and Thévenot, have created a framework that has shaped contemporary sociological research and assisted in the understanding of how actors justify and come to consensus on matters of conflict and disputes by placing importance on the actors (Gadinger, 2016). Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) commenced their research by looking into how scholars develop data through selection and coding (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Through further research on individuals that felt they were lacking recognition and representation, Boltanski and Thévenot found that these individuals, explained recognition through acting as representatives in their own ways. In these cases where human beings make the normal treatment of variables insufficient, through using the variable to express the other variable, Boltanski and Thévenot argue that researchers must be able to compare the respondent with someone they know in order for the respondent to be categorized (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Their other parallel study was based on giving the task of coding questionnaires to junior, low level staff. This in routine went very well as long as the junior followed the instructions, however, they observed that when junior staff member came across something that was difficult to categorize, they often assigned a code by basing it off other responses in the questionnaire. By assigning an incorrect code, the staff member would thus change the order of the respondents' worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). According to Boltanski and Thévenot, the researchers are thus at risk of assigning a particular worth to respondents, due to comparisons of people or situations they already know. Their studies also imply a certain degree of consciousness by the actors in decision making, basing judgment and justification on previous experience, yet also highlight the importance of the awareness of the researchers' implications (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). This idea of justification being based off experiences, influenced the research design of the project starting from the planning stage of the data collection throughout the data analysis and the discussion. As addressed above, pragmatic sociology is highly focused on descriptive aspects of the actors' experience of reality. According to Boltanski's newer work, reality

cannot be seen as standalone, singled out from the environment as he claims social constructionists do. Rather reality exists in relationship to the rest of the world and must thus be seen in context with this (Boltanski, 2011). Reality is further targeted towards the maintenance of order and the resolution of disputes.

Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) work also addresses describing and interpreting situations in which people engage in disputes. Their findings led to the development of six orders of worth that individuals refer to and navigate within when engaging in disputes and providing justification. Justification arises in times of dispute, a clash between a different weighting of the orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). If there is no dispute, then there is also no need for justification. They argue that actors possess six orders of worth: the civic, domestic, industrial, market, inspiration and fame, and that individuals use these orders of worth to justify and legitimize their views (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Actors possess each of these worths, but when engaging in disputes, selected orders of worth emerge as more dominant, and thus create tensions and dispute as different justifications are provided around the same situation. Further development of the theory, has come in the suggestion of a seventh city or order of worth: the ecological or green city (Latour, 1998).

Table 1: The Orders of Worth

(Adapted and condensed from Boltanski & Thévenot and Latour’s addition (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Latour, 1998)

<b>ORDER OF WORTH</b>	<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>
<b>CIVIC</b>	Collective action
<b>DOMESTIC</b>	Loyalty and trustworthiness
<b>INDUSTRIAL</b>	Efficiency and structure
<b>MARKET</b>	Money and economic value
<b>INSPIRATION</b>	Creativity and emotion
<b>FAME</b>	Reputation
<b>ECOLOGICAL/GREEN</b>	Environment (Suggested by Latour)

This framework was originally constructed for the analysis of individuals and their experienced reality (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). As this project is observing actors in the shape of organizations and their representatives, the orders of worth were utilized as inspiration for the analysis of the texts, and the broader notion of justification and reasons for disputes, as described by Boltanski and Thévenot, has been used as a foundation for the analysis of the findings.

### Competence

Another concept that is presented in their work, is the idea of competence with regards to the capacity for the actor to successfully justify or critique (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). This relates in particular to the actors' justice and moral sense. Boltanski writes that this idea of focusing on the actor 'en situation' and the 'spirit of pragmatism' allows for the study of sociology of critique to view actors, that are navigating in a realm of uncertainty, as individuals that will be inclined to develop qualifications and proceed to investigations (Boltanski, 2011). Boltanski further discusses the concept of common sense, in his newer work, but when extending the theory to broader concepts of ecosystems in which several different conflicting logics exist it becomes difficult to determine what common sense exists, and how to arrive at it. Referring back to their notion on justification, Boltanski and Thévenot would presumably argue that common sense exists when disputes between various justifications come to a consensus. Yet how this common sense is spread throughout society as we know it, is unclear.

### Institutions & Certification

In Boltanski's more recent work, *On Critique* (2011) he addresses the importance of institutions and their potential to ensure order by coordinating and organizing current and future behaviors. Institutions further aid in representing and sustaining the reality that actors aim to justify (Boltanski, 2011). Institutions are representations of orders of worth and justifications that stand independently of what actors may have of conflicts in the moment of time. Institutions are however at the same time difficult constructs as they are constructed by the same actors that engage in them. It can however be said, through Boltanski's critical lenses, that institutions have the capacity to preserve their identity while moving through different situations and contexts. Institutions act as

controls and bearers of value when placed in volatile environments of conflicting logics of individual actors (Boltanski, 2011).

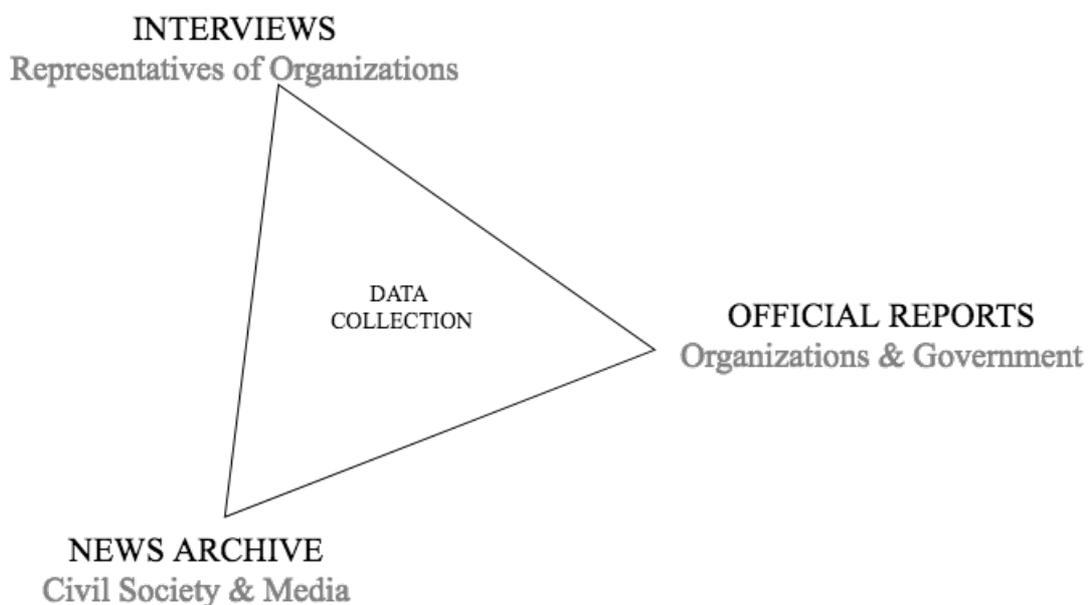
Similarly, in one of Laurent Thévenot's most recent works, Thévenot looks specifically at certification and how there has been an emergence of the need for more formalized structures such as certification and standards (Thévenot, 2015). Referring to François Eymard-Duvernay's studies, he presents quality conventions as transfers of worth that do not appeal to the market order of worth, which as presented before, represents the justifications surrounding the economic matters (Thévenot, 2015). This is similar to how Boltanski describes institutions (Boltanski, 2011). Schemes such as certification have allowed for the justification of orders of worth such as the civic or domestic worth, and as argued by Thévenot, have contributed to the development of capitalism. Laurent Thévenot assimilates quality conventions, in particular standard certification as being the enablers of justifying other worths than the market worth. Similarly, multi-stakeholder initiatives govern interest on a common good by representing different orders of worth. Furthermore, by presenting new forms of governance and constructed society, certification has the potential to create security in volatile environments and thus make it more feasible to make informed predictions on the future developments (Thévenot, 2015).

## Research Design

### Approach

The pragmatic design of the research emphasized the research question by using the theories and methods that were needed in order to understand the problem (Creswell, 2014). The appropriate, available and accessible theories and approaches to process the empirical data was applied. Through the analysis of interviews, news archives as well as official reports. The design was flexible and allowed for elaboration on aspects that were insufficiently or not at all covered in the various data collection stages. This meant that throughout the data collection, the researcher remained reflexive and critical towards the information, striving towards finding different data sources of primary and secondary data to confirm and disprove the data found in the other data collection stages. This triangulation, as depicted below, allowed for voices from different actors at different levels of analysis to be represented in the local environment in which these discussions are taking place.

Figure 2: Triangulation of data collection



This reflexivity when applying preexisting theories, allowed for the appearance of new phenomena and the critique hereof (Douven, 2011). The aim of the research design was hence not to apply one theory to a problem, nor was it to uncover new grounded theories. Rather than approaching the research in an inductive or deductive manner, the research was approached abductively which allowed for the flexible use of theory in the collection and processing of data. Moving in between theory and what is observed from the empirical data. In the initial phase of preliminary research and interview coding, the concepts of justification, disputes and importance of institutions arose and thus the theoretical framework, as presented previously, was used to provide a structure to the initial data collection phase. However, this did not prohibit the documentation of data that skewed from what Boltanski and Thévenot posit in their theory. This abductive notion permeated the data collection and data analysis process, as addressed in the section below. Rather than uncovering new and innovative theories or proving a hypothesis, the focus was on reflexivity and exploration. This required the researcher to critically assess findings and analyses throughout the duration of the project. The theory was thus used in order to provide a framework rather than a container in which all the data must fit (Lather, 1986 in Creswell, 2014 p 67). The notion of justification and disputes also aided in the development of codes for the data analysis stage. The critical approach to theory and the involvement of the researcher led to a constant pursuit of information to confirm or disprove the empirical data. This in turn resulted in the data collection reaching points of saturation which provided more confidence in the conclusions derived from the data.

### Scope

This research was conducted from January 2018 to December 2018. The qualitative research was conducted through the analysis of interviews, news archives and official reports. The main data primarily stems from January 2016 - August 2018. The interviews were conducted as part of a research project at Copenhagen Business School in 2017, the news archives were published between August 2017 and August 2018 and the official documents were mainly published in 2016 and onwards. The aim of the project was to discover how actors in the two selected countries justified engagement with palm oil both through individual interviews and investigation of annual reports and further investigate how media in the nations portrayed these actions. For this, two countries were chosen as the cases to study, the UK and Germany. These countries were chosen

based on their commitment to the Amsterdam Agreement and the size of their economies' and influence on European business.

In order to narrow down the scope, this project specifically focuses on the consumer goods side of palm oil use in the local environments of the United Kingdom and Germany and thus focuses less on the energy side of the discussion, in terms of biofuels. This particularly guided the compilation of the official reports. Due to the language fluency of the researcher, the texts were kept in their original language, which allowed for meaning to be preserved. The coding was conducted in English.

### Data Collection

The data was collected through two different methods – interviewing and the composition of two text archives from three different sources: interviews, media archives and official reports. This broad range of sources and triangulation of the data aimed to uncover nuances that would not be able to investigate through a single source analysis.

### Interviews

Interviews were chosen as the first data source as they provided historical information, and a more personal narrative coming from the engaged organizations' representatives (Creswell, 2014). The 13 interviews (five from Germany and eight from UK) used in this project stem from a larger research project within the department of Management, Society and Communication at Copenhagen Business School. As this thesis is a part of a larger research project, the interviews were conducted by colleagues within the department and were primarily used for knowledge collection in this thesis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The respondents were selected due to their involvement within actor organizations related to the RSPO. The contact was limited to access, through contact details and preexisting personal connections and knowledge of the research project. Five interviews were conducted in Germany while seven were conducted in the UK. The respondents represented actors within the member categories that the RSPO engages with: Retailers, NGOS, investors, consumer goods manufacturers (RSPO, 2018a) as well as additional actors from civil society in the shape of associations and government officials. The interviews were conducted over skype once the contact was established. These interviews took place in the time span between 2016 and 2017. The

respondents received the semi- structured interview guide prior to the interview and were guaranteed discretion and confidentiality. In this paper, the respondents were kept anonymous to secure confidentiality of the respondent. They were only presented through a classification of the organizations they represent. The interviews were transcribed from audio to text and were thereafter transferred to the coding software. The interviews were viewed critically and analyzed in combination with the two other data sources. The findings coming from the responses were thus not presented in isolation on a stand- alone matter, but rather in combination with the rest of the data collected.

Table 2: Interview Overview

Transcript Number	Country	Position	Organization Type
1	DE	General Secretary	Commodity Forum
2	DE	CEO	Business Association
3	DE	Consultant	Food Association
4	DE	Business Development Manager	Certification Institution
5	DE	Palm Oil Expert	NGO
6	UK	(Palm Oil) Technical Advisor	NGO
7	UK	Senior Policy Advisor	NGO
8	UK	Sustainable Development Manager	Retailer
9	UK	Senior Consultant	Consultancy
10	UK	Director	Business Association
11	UK	Field Conservation Manager	Zoo
12	UK	Blogger	NGO
13	UK	Secretary General	Commodity Association

### *News Archive*

The news archive was constructed individually for the two countries with the use of the global news database Factiva (“Factiva,” n.d.). The Factiva search was conducted twice. Both searches were in the time range of 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2017 to 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2018. One was for German media and the other one was for the UK. In the free text form, palm oil was entered in the native language including quotation marks to ensure that only palm oil was searched for and not palm and oil individually: “palm oil” (for UK) and “Palmöl” (for Germany). This term had to occur in the title or the first paragraph of the text. Under “Regions” the chosen country was selected. The search was only conducted for the native language – respectively English and German. Republished news, obituaries and recurring pricing and market data were excluded. Duplicates were also excluded. In total there were 188 German articles and 254 UK articles in this time frame, given the aforementioned specifications. The archives were coded in the same manner as the interviews, this is explained in greater detail in Data Analysis.

### *Official Documents*

As the third and last source of data, official reports from national stakeholders of palm oil production and consumption was compiled. Reports issued by the organizations on the topic of palm oil were analyzed. When these were not available, the sustainability reports were analyzed. All this data was available to the public and has therefore not been made anonymous in the same way that was done with the interviews. The selection of national stakeholders was done through both inspiration from the classification applied by the RSPO to their members (RSPO, 2018a), but also through doing market research on respectively Germany and the UK, in terms of the actors who are highly involved in the palm oil industry. This included looking at market shares and selecting the ones with the highest share in each country. The result of the mapping can be seen in the table below and the subsequent description of categories.

Table 3: Overview of Official Reports Collection

(Official Documents, Appendix 3)

Retailers	NGOs	Banks and Investors	Manufacturers	Government
REWE (DE)	WWF Deutschland (DE)	HSBC (UK)	Reckitt Benckiser (UK)	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (DE)
Aldi Süd (DE)	Greenpeace München (DE)	Generation Investment Management (UK)	United Biscuits (UK)	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
Lidl (DE)	Rettet den Regenwald (DE)	Standard Chartered Bank (UK)	Associated British Foods (UK)	
DM- Drogerie Markt (DE)	FONAP	Barclays (UK)	Premier Foods (UK)	
EDEKA (DE)	GIZ(DE)	Royal Bank of Scotland (UK)	Henkel (DE)	
Tesco (UK)	WWF UK	Lloyds Banking Group (UK)	Storck (DE)	
Sainsburys (UK)	Greenpeace UK	Deutsche Bank (DE)	Intersnack (DE)	
Asda (Walmart)(UK)	ZSL (UK)	KfW (DE)	Dr. Oetker (DE)	
Morrisons (UK)	Rainforest Foundation (UK)	DZ Bank (DE)	Beiersdorf (DE)	
Waitrose (UK)	Amnesty (UK)	Commerzbank (DE)		
Iceland (UK)				

### **Description of categories:**

(FMCG) Retailers: The top five largest retailers from the UK and Germany were selected based on market research on Factiva (“Factiva,” n.d.)

NGOs: These NGOs were selected based on mentions in interviews and media and their relevance towards the topic of Palm Oil, both for and against, in both countries. In terms of international NGOs, the national or local departments were chosen.

(FMCG) Manufacturers: In terms of the global manufacturers, the selection was based on the five corporations that used the most palm oil per annum according to the scorecard constructed by the World Wide Fund for Nature, for each country (WWF, 2016). Where possible, the websites for Germany and UK were used to retrieve the reports on Palm Oil Policies, and when these were not available, the company websites were searched for pages that contained the words “palm oil” or German corresponding words.

Banks and Investors: Selection was based on the members listed on the RSPO and the market research on the top five corporate banks in respectively the UK and Germany.

Government: The national ministries concerned with environment and food were selected.

### Data Analysis

#### *Coding – Interviews and News Archive*

All the transcriptions from the interviews and articles from the news archive were manually coded using NVivo software. The descriptive codes were generated in preliminary manual coding work in connection to work done for the project in the Department of Management, Communication and Society at Copenhagen Business School. Through preliminary coding, of the interviews conducted in the department as part of a larger research project, prior to the commencement of this thesis, patterns started to emerge in terms of frequency, and similarity (Saldaña, 2008). These findings were transferred to codes which were subsequently used to recode the interviews and the news archive. If a new, important code appeared, it was added, and noted in the coding notes (Creswell,

2014). The 'Other' code allowed for outlying yet important information to be highlighted. Some of the codes were coded in vivo such as boycott, responsibility, scandals, traceability and transparency, while most of them were mainly descriptive, based on a meaning condensation of the passages (Saldaña, 2008). Some passages took up more than one code. The results of the first round of coding was reviewed and analyzed and these codes were then condensed into themes, to get a broader conceptual understanding and begin the data analysis. The overview of the codes can be seen below.

Figure 3: Codebook

Alternatives	Politics
Ban	Price
Banks	Products
Biodiversity	Regulation
Boycott	Reporting
Collaboration	Reputation
Consumers	Responsibility
Downstream (small holders, oil palm producers, processors, traders)	RSPO
External Pressures	Safety
Fires	Scandals
Government	Society
Health	Species
Human Rights	Traceability
Labelling	Traceability
Labor	Transparency
Marketing	Trust (certification)
Media	Trust (organization)
Organic	Upstream (manufacturers, retailers)
Other	Waste
Other Oils	Working Conditions

### *Content Analysis*

The official documents were not coded in the software but rather the content of the texts was condensed and plotted in a matrix. The content analysis was conducted through meaning condensation. Once all the data from the interviews, news archives and official documents was coded, the collective findings were condensed, compared and analyzed using the NVivo software as well as conducting manual analyses of the data. Firstly, the countries were analyzed separately and thereafter they were compared to each other. The outcomes are presented in the analysis.

### *Considerations*

By working with the data and topic for over a year, the researcher became familiarized with the field and thus had the flexibility and knowledge in order to modify the research design in order to fit the topic studied. Yet, in order to allow for new findings to appear, through the retroductive approach, the researcher also aimed to be guided by the findings and not strictly by theory and presupposed hypotheses.

The data collection phase emphasized the importance of securing the meaning that the studied individuals attribute to the matter, and not bring in the researcher's point of view (Creswell 186). This could not be fully avoided, as the analysis of qualitative data brings a certain degree of observation bias. The abductive approach aimed to reduce this bias, by constant critical examination of the findings and reflexivity in terms of the data sources. There was an awareness that this abductive approach could suppress the actors' true voice in order to represent the most pressing argument (Douven, 2011). In order to minimize the risk of this, care was taken when drawing conclusions from the findings. The arguments are assessed critically and presented in the analysis in the discussion where the validity is further discussed, and other perspectives are included.

The triangulation of the data increased the validity of the data as it ensured that themes and categories appeared across data sources, but also allowed for these co-existing data sources to pose critical questions towards each other and show disparities in the various outlets (Creswell, 2014). The negative and discrepant information was not omitted from the findings and their presentation

represented additional areas that the conceptual framework or scope of study, may not have caught had the research been conducted deductively.

The mass amounts of texts analyzed required the condensation into codes, yet this condensation may also imply a certain degree of loss of meaning as codes cannot account for the nuances in the actors' expressed opinions and statements. By referring back to the original transcripts and texts in the analysis of the data, and presenting direct examples and excerpts from these sources, the loss of these nuances was mitigated. Furthermore, the codes were not mutually exclusive, and therefore there could be more than one code applied to a passage.

## Analysis

Based on the qualitative research conducted through processing interviews, news archives and official documents, the following analysis is an insight into how different actors justify the use of palm oil, the tensions between these justifications and how these tensions can be explained.

While the aim was to compare the two countries of Germany and UK, it was found that the corresponding actors in each nation had many similarities. The analysis below is a condensation of the codes into the six themes: Effects, Responsibility & Reputation, Transparency & Traceability, Political Agenda, Certification, Boycott & Alternatives. These themes reflect the justifications of levels of engagement presented by the actors in interviews, news articles and official documents.

Table 4: Themes Developed from the Findings

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Examples of Codes (not exhaustive)</b>
Effects	Deforestation, species, labour, human rights
Responsibility & Reputation	Responsibility, reputation, scandals, trust (organization), media, collaboration, external pressures
Transparency & Traceability	Transparency, traceability, trust (certification), labelling, marketing, communication
Political Agenda	Government, politics
Certification	RSPO, certification
Boycott & Alternatives	Boycott, alternatives, other oils, ban, products, efficiency, economic

The concurrent analysis provides an insight into how the different actors engaged within these themes and where potential tensions were prevalent.

## Overall Findings

Overall, across all the data sources, the code of “species” was the most frequent code. Species referred to any time the topic of endangered animals came up in relation to palm oil production. In particular, the orangutan. While the frequency of the codes varied, some of the other codes that

were frequently present in texts were responsibility, consumers, alternatives to palm oil, traceability, boycotts and certification. While the mentioning of the RSPO came up frequently in the UK News Archive, it did not appear once in the German News Archive. This was different in the Official Documents where almost every statement or policy from the German and UK organizations referred to the RSPO in order to explain the organization's engagement with palm oil.

## Effects

The main overarching theme was the attributes of palm oil, which initially started as a code, and developed into an overarching theme. It encompasses both the effects of unsustainably sourced palm oil. Looking at the effects of conventional palm oil production, as mentioned, the main coded item was Species referring to mainly orangutans or Sumatran tigers. This was often used to convey the hazard that conventional palm oil production is causing to the environment and the loss of biodiversity this contributes to. In addition to species, environmental harm and biodiversity loss also came up frequently in the interviews, news articles and official documents. In the UK News Archive, an article even referred to palm oil production as “sacrificing the rain forest” (News Archive UK, Appendix 2).

Often in combination with mentions of the harm on environment, the human right violations of palm oil production sites were addressed. This was both in terms of poor working conditions but also the widespread effects on the surrounding communities. Referring to the producing nations this was used as an argument against the conventional production of palm oil, or even a boycott of the plant oil entirely. On the other side, when addressing sustainable palm oil, texts stated that palm oil is able to be produced in more sustainable ways, and this thus does not have as grave of an impact on the environment. On Greenpeace UK's webpage regarding palm oil they stated “palm oil *can* be grown without destroying rainforests” (Greenpeace, Official Documents, Appendix 3).

In terms of the attributes, the main argument towards sourcing palm oil in the first place was the high yields of production and the lack of alternatives that have the same attributes as palm oil. A

### Responsibility & Reputation:

In terms of the negative effects, that palm oil has on the environment, these potential repercussions of business activities have the risk of harming the reputation of organizations, if they do not assume responsibility. Responsibility and reputation was an overarching theme across all the data and indicated that actors associated this theme with fear of the risk of scandals. A respondent from a German commodity forum, claimed that retailers do not engage in sustainable palm oil to promote it, but rather to ensure that they protect their own reputation (Interview 1, Appendix 1). The theme of reputation This response reflects the argument that retailers can't afford to *not* engage in sustainability issues and must also take responsibility for the commodities they use in the products they sell. While the respondent from a British zoo stated that it is now more common for people to expect palm oil policies to be the norm, in the investigation process it was apparent that several of the retailers or manufacturers did not have a palm oil policy readily available to the public on their website (Interview 11, Appendix 1). Most of these 'policies' mentioned the engagement with the RSPO and used the RSPO's definitions to communicate the importance of sustainable palm oil. If not available as a policy, palm oil was often addressed in broader reports covering several commodities or sustainability measures.

Both in the UK and Germany there is a strong focus on the certification of Own Brand products by the various retailers. There was not a lot of mention on how they are dealing with the other products from other manufacturers. The retailers thus assume responsibility of certifying products that they are responsible for producing. This is also easier for them as they have a greater insight into the supply chain of their own products. It could be argued that this in turn could result in a lack of pressure on the other manufacturers, apart from increased products. Yet there is a tendency that generic own brands do not have the same brand recognition as larger brands, such as Nutella or KitKat. Furthermore, this assumes that retailers push the responsibility of certifying branded goods to the respective FMCG manufacturers.

Many of the interviews together with the official documents reflected the interest in both engaging with responsible partners, but also setting a best practice example as a role model in the different parts of the supply chain that the actors are engaged with. Official reports by Premier Foods, Standard Chartered Bank and Tesco among others stated an expectation of compliance from partners that they decide to operate with (Official Documents, Appendix 3). According to the interview with a representative from a UK Zoo, Marks and Spencer, among others, are pushing the agenda for preferential sourcing agreements. This means that these retailers wish to select partners only from those that comply with the standards that Marks and Spencer's adheres to (Interview 11, Appendix 1). This expectation was also visible with the banks' official statements across both Germany and the UK (Official Documents, Appendix 3).

While there was a high regard for the corporations acting responsibly there was also a high demand for sustainability in the potential interactions that these actors may have with others. Commerzbank, according to their statement on the website, requires all of their customers who engage with palm oil to be members of the RSPO (Commerzbank, Official Documents, Appendix 2). Commerzbank further uses their membership of the RSPO to highlight their willingness to be first movers as they refer to their early engagement with the RSPO and the importance of palm oil to the global economy, making up a third of global consumption of plant oil (Commerzbank, Official Documents, Appendix 2). Banks and investors also have a high interest in safeguarding their reputation and limiting potential risks. A respondent from a UK NGO also addressed this by explaining that investors are undergoing a large divestment to ensure that they are engaging with more responsible corporations (Interview 6, Appendix 1). This is often analyzed on a broader scale of environmental and social risks, as palm oil, that is not certified sustainable, has an influence on both of these risks and therefore is a parameter when discussing mitigation of risks in commodity investment. This aversion of risk is further highlighted by the only mention of palm oil in reports from the German investment bank, KfW, which presents examples of where the investment bank has had to react to NGO pressures on a subsidiary dealing with palm oil. Specifically, they refer to an incident in which critical reactions from Greenpeace led to them seizing their engagement in new investment projects concerning palm oil. This was already back in 2007 (KfW, Official Documents, Appendix 2).

In terms of reputation, scandals were also addressed in the various data sources. Retailers and manufacturers tend to be weary of the media and specific NGO campaigns targeting palm oil, as they have experienced from previous situations, that this may have an impact on consumers. An example hereof was the 2010 Greenpeace campaign on Orangutans and Kit Kats. Referring to this campaign by Greenpeace, a respondent from an environmental NGO said the following:

*“At the time I was working for Unilever and I remember finding the video and sending it around to my teams, just being like, “This could have been us,” basically. And I think that was a real wake up call for a number of brands that this issue isn’t going to go away and it’s something that needs to be tackled, because it has huge impact and if you’re a big palm oil using company you’re at risk, so you need to act.”* (Interview 12, Appendix 1)

This media scandal risk can also be caused by incidents that don’t necessarily have anything to do with the issue itself. This was shown by findings from the UK News Archive. In the UK News Archive, there were several articles on dogs dying after consuming a substance that had washed up on the British shores. It was said that this substance was palm oil that had been washed off ship tanks. In this case, palm oil was also connected to the death of dogs and could have further influenced civil society’s opinion on the plant oil, despite the actual issue.

In terms of responsibility on a higher level, nations also have a responsibility in setting examples. An example here of is in terms of sustainability and driving the development of this agenda. When discussing the potential of boycotting palm oil, a UK respondent mentioned:

*“If Europe pulls away from palm oil, then it will all go to India and China where they absolutely couldn't care about sustainability issues.”* (Interview 13, Appendix 1).

Thus, by nations engaging and taking responsibility for the improvements in environmental impact and working conditions of palm oil production, they are sending signals to other nations.

## Transparency & Traceability

Transparency and ethical behavior is the first principle of the RSPOs criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil production (RSPO, 2018b). As all palm oil is imported to Europe, traceability and transparency in terms of the supply chain was also an important theme among almost all of the actors. There's still a high demand for more transparency and traceability within the industry. Furthermore, the findings show that retaliation to palm oil, from a consumer point of view, could in fact stem from the lack of information and broader context on palm oil. As referred to in the previous section on reputation, the actors are all very concerned about how they are perceived by their partners, and often addressing a controversial topic, such as palm oil, thus needs to be addressed with care, and this takes time and effort to do so, which may not be the priority of corporations.

In terms of traceability within the supply chain, as mentioned previously, most of the manufacturers and retailers are members of the RSPO and are thus certified and follow standards. They may also be demanding the same of the suppliers, yet the difficulty lies in the auditing and controlling hereof. The difficulty lies in ensuring that these practices are actually implemented at all stages of the value chain, and that the palm oil that they receive is in fact palm oil that is sourced sustainably. This is not something the down-stream suppliers can check once receiving the palm oil, and thus they need to have systems in place that secure that the small holders are putting this into practice on the ground level. From a critical point of view, a local German unit of Greenpeace states in their web page on palm oil, that:

*“Currently, no company can guarantee that the palm oil that they use stems from sustainable production!”* (Greenpeace München, Official Documents, Appendix 3)<sup>1</sup>

In terms of development of this traceability issue, a respondent from a UK industry association argued that competition among the companies is spurring a higher development of traceability systems. Companies cannot afford not to become more familiar with their supply chains. Both from a cost point of view, but also most definitely from a CSR perspective. More control of the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from: *“Keine Firma kann derzeit garantieren, dass das eingesetzte Palmöl aus umweltverträglicher Produktion stammt!”*

supply chain will ensure that the various partners live up to standards in terms of sustainability and human rights, protecting the communities in which the palm oil is sourced from.

On the matter of transparency, the communication to consumers is vital. While NGOs represent some of the interests of the citizens of these nations, consumer choices also play a large role in the development of palm oil. If consumers decide to no longer purchase products that contain palm oil, the entire value chain will be affected. A topic that appeared in a few German articles was the topic on food security and how palm oil must also be seen as a source of food for citizens who do not have the means to decide whether or not to consume palm oil (News Archive, Appendix 2).

It can be argued that the palm oil debate, from a consumer point of view is highly un-nuanced, and volatile. The consumers often react to media reports, scandals and NGO campaigns. While they were not directly interviewed, through the data collection, it can be assumed that the majority of the respondents from the interviews were also consumers. From a more common perception based on the media reports it seems as if palm oil is either portrayed as good or bad. There is a lack of nuance in the reporting and explanation of why the topic on palm oil is highly complex and has both positive and negative aspects. Thus, this does not leave the space for the entrance of a midway, sustainable palm oil, as the word and connotations of palm oil are predominantly negative. This is signified in the interview respondent's claim that retailers refrain from putting the RSPO stamp on the products as they don't want to draw more attention to the product containing palm oil, beyond the EU legal requirement of specifying the plant oil in the ingredient description. The actors involved in palm oil are helping to guide the consumers and need to take this responsibility seriously.

“But I think, I think to be honest, the public, there isn't enough public awareness about sustainable palm oil for them, for a lot of people to have an opinion on the RSPO at the moment. I think when we talk about sustainable palm oil we do have peo--you know, especially, and certainly in terms of the community/people that come to the zoo. They certainly know about sustainable palm oil. But they don't look into as much detail as whether the RSPO is credible or not. They wouldn't. They use our guidance. So, if we're asking them

to kind of go and buy products that are RSPO certified, then that tends to be what they'll, what they'll do." (Interview 11, Appendix 1)

Additionally, in terms of what the customers are additionally concerned about, is nutrition and health, this is also shown by the German consumers' interest in organic products (Interview 2, Appendix 1). They are looking for products that are safe to consume and healthy for their bodies. Furthermore, there were some disparities around price premiums. While customers want sustainable products, it is not certain whether they would actually be willing to pay the premium as they are very price sensitive, particularly in Germany. There is a concern from retailers that a potential added cost due to certification could lead to a loss in sales (Interview 2, Appendix 1).

What the lack of traceability and transparency can result in, is a lack of trust in among the actors of palm oil. One interview respondent argued that the lack of information on the market availability and demand of palm oil is leading to a lack of trust among the members in the RSPO.

*"And it's also a substantive issue around trust, because when we have conversations within our RSPO board, then we're all coming from different perspectives, and there's a lack of trust because people don't necessarily have confidence around the context in which people are framing their situations, because of this lack of clarity about the reality of market availability and demand."* (Interview 8, Appendix 1).

The issue highlights that the RSPO must not only create more transparency for the institution itself, but also encourage and aid the organizations and members to practice transparency when they engage with palm oil certification.

#### Boycott & Alternatives

When the actors were promoting the use of sustainable palm oil, the theme of 'Alternatives' appeared. This *alternatives* code referred to alternative plant oils and products that did not contain palm oil, and how alternatives could and could not be used in the production of these. In the interviews this also discussed the attributes that promotes the use of palm oil, and thus makes it

less attractive to replace it with other plant oils. Yet, the consensus was that this was the case when discussing *sustainable palm oil* and not just conventional palm oil. In order to understand alternatives, the attributes of palm oil were also used as a way to justify actors' engagement and continuous use of palm oil. The special attributes of palm oil make it a versatile, efficient and popular plant oil. Furthermore, the high yields that can be produced in comparison to other plant oils was a further argument towards continuing the production of palm oil.

This theme also discussed the downsides of replacing palm oil with alternatives. The production of these plant oils would also have an effect on the environment. This theme came up in relation to the theme of boycotting palm oil all together. Boycott came up very often in the interviews, yet in the news and the official reports, boycotts on palm oil used in food was less prevalent. Due to the passing of the EU RED directive in January 2018 there was a lot of media coverage in the news archives on what the ban on palm oil in biofuels would have of implications. While biofuel and the other uses of palm oil are not fully separable, this research has focused on the topic of palm oil in foods and other consumer products. Furthermore, there are different discussions on whether retailers react to consumers' potential boycott of palm oil products or choose to preempt it. One of the most significant actors studied, within the theme of Boycott, is the supermarket chain Iceland. On top of discussing their own, generic brands, Iceland have decided to remove palm oil from all of their products; for the time being. In a letter from Richard Walker, the CEO, posted on their website, the following is stated:

*"We never called for a wider industry ban, and accept entirely that a wholesale boycott of palm oil is not the right long-term solution" – Richard Walker (Iceland, Official Documents, Appendix 3).*

Their reason to boycott it is to send a message to the actors that the current way of sourcing palm oil, whether sustainable or not, is highly messy and urge the industry to 'clean up' its act. Retailer Waitrose further states on their website that 'replacing palm oil could simply displace deforestation'. In Germany, in the News Archive, however there was a report on how a primary school had boycotted palm oil for a couple of days in relation to a topic on ethics and to raise

awareness of the impact on the rainforest (DE News Archive, Appendix 2). Boycotting palm oil, in terms of retailers and manufacturers was also mentioned in combination with the boycott of further unsustainable or unhealthy products and practices.

*“At their new site, which is currently under construction, The Thüringer Traditionsunternehmen attaches great importance on sustainability. In their future production they will not be using eggs from caged chickens or palm oil.”<sup>2</sup>*

(DE News Archive, Appendix 2)

“... to use less plastic and to refrain from using palm oil” (DE News Archive, Appendix 2).  
(Translated from: “...weniger Plastik zu verwenden und auf Palmöl zu verzichten”)

The theme of boycotts, also came up when respondents and organizations discussed ‘not’ boycotting, regarding why this was not the solution. The Zoological Society London posited that

*“Boycotting palm oil removes incentives for large businesses and small-scale farmers to adopt more sustainable practices. To prevent increased deforestation and pollution, we must create demand for producers to reduce these negative impacts”. (Zoological Society, Official Documents, Appendix 3).*

Beiersdorf’s statement on palm oil also states:

*“... a sustainable palm oil business does not lead to deforestation of rainforests...”<sup>3</sup>*

(Beiersdorf, Official Documents, Appendix 3).

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from: “Zudem legt das Thüringer Traditionsunternehmen an seinem derzeit im Bau befindlichen neuen Standort bei Arnstadt sehr viel Wert auf Nachhaltigkeit. Die Produktion soll künftig ohne Eier von Hühnern aus Käfighaltung und **ohne Palmöl auskommen**.”

<sup>3</sup> Translated from “Eine nachhaltige Palm(kern)öl-Wirtschaft führt nicht zur Abholzung von Regenwäldern (Primär- oder Sekundärwald).”

## Political Agenda

While certification and multi-stakeholder initiatives seek to divest influence of the governments to govern the sustainable sourcing of commodities, their involvement in the decisions as well as decisions on legal action have large implications on the development of the certification. The findings support that there is a dependency on public investments in order to continue the imports of palm oil. Yet, as with the banks, the government and public pension schemes are seeking to divest from risky and reputational commodities such as palm oil.

*“Scheme will exclude palm oil, thermal coal, tobacco and uranium. The UK’s £3.4bn state-backed workplace pension scheme is to begin investing in commodities, treading a cautious path as it balances generating better returns with pushing for action on climate change.”* (UK News Archive, Appendix 2).

A German respondent, who represented a certification institution in Germany remained critical towards the RSPO due to the lack of strength in the implementation, also this respondent claimed that there was a lack of knowledge of the RSPO from government officials (Interview 4, Appendix 1).

Studying the UK actors, a certain clash of agendas was apparent. Due to the current political overload, there is less time for palm oil advocacy as a UK respondent claimed (Interview 9, Appendix 1). Fully sustainable palm oil is government driven and depends on political agendas of specific actors. In 2015 they were able to meet 100% certified sustainable palm oil (Interview 10, Appendix 1).

*“There are no plans for regulation, we are virtually 100% there anyway.”* (Interview 10, Appendix 1).

The UK further has no plan to ban the use of palm oil according to a director of a business association (Interview 10, Appendix 1). A respondent from a commodity association stated:

*"Palm oil has been a major issue in other countries. It really hasn't in UK."* (Interview 13, Appendix 1).

In addition to this, there were articles in the UK News Archive that stated a certain link between a trade agreement with weapons and palm oil between the UK and Malaysia. These articles were implying, that if the UK were to put sanctions on Malaysian palm oil exports, for biofuels, it could impact their weapon trade with Malaysia. This would further impact the jobs in the local defense sector.

*"Britain risks losing £5bn of defense contracts if a planned EU ban on palm oil goes ahead, it has emerged."* (UK News Archive, Appendix 2).

Another tension in caused by external pressures was when there were talks of replacing the animal byproduct that certain pound notes are coated in, with palm oil (UK News Archive). This deliberation was put into action due to public critique, mainly from vegetarians and religious actors. Yet conclusively, the government settled for a continuation of animal fat coatings due to palm oil being 'too costly' (Kollewe, 2017).

#### Certification

In addition to responsibility in terms of responsibly sourcing palm oil, organizations are also talking about being more pre-emptive on the matter. Lidl states in their official document on palm oil, that they "use their voice" to influence decisions (Lidl, Official Documents, Appendix 1).

*"Through our membership of the RSPO, we purposefully use our voice, for example through the electronic vote through the internet."* (Lidl, Official Documents, Appendix 1).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from: "Im Rahmen unserer Mitgliedschaft beim RSPO nutzen wir gezielt unsere Stimme, beispielsweise durch die elektronische Stimmabgabe via Internet („e-voting“) im Rahmen der Mitgliederversammlungen, um positive Neuerungen mit auf den Weg zu bringen." (Lidl, Official Documents, Appendix 1).

There was not one of the 188 German news articles that mentioned the RSPO. Yet, in the official documents, it was predominantly used to describe the retailers' and manufacturers' engagement with palm oil, both in the UK and German official documents. By referring to their membership of the RSPO and its principles, the corporations present their commitment to sustainable palm oil. In the interviews with representatives of member organizations of the RSPO, there was mixed responses in terms of how powerful they viewed the RSPO. Some respondents argued that the RSPO did not have a high impact on the industry, yet the RSPO continued to appear as a seal of credibility on many of the manufacturers official documents, indicating, that it does not have as bad of a reputation as some may claim.

*“And RSPO has a quite bad reputation in Germany. If they know RSPO, a lot of them know it’s the minimum standard, or they think it’s not a credible standard. And if they know RSPO, I would say its half-half. Half say its minimum, or it’s not credible, and the other half is saying, well, it’s minimum, but better than nothing.”* (Interview 2, Appendix 1)

*“RSPO has not been enforcing its standard effectively... unfortunately, we are unable to say that there is such thing as sustainable palm oil on the [UK] market”*  
(Interview 7, Appendix 1)

One of the issues that could explain some of this tension, which is related to the transparency theme, is the ambiguity in the certification scheme, and that it does not require enough of a company to be minimally certified. As the targets are achievable it is argued that if the certification loses value. This is however also something the member organizations are working on in order to increase the level of certification that they and their partners pursue. In their policy paper, UK investment bank, HSBC, stated the following:

*“We remain open to tightening the policy further as society’s expectations change and new standards develop, including those for the palm oil sector to protect high carbon stock (‘HCS’) forests and peat.”* (HSBC, Official Documents, Appendix 3)

In further addressing the level of ambition of the RSPO in terms of creating standards that will change the industry, a respondent at a large UK retailer mentioned that there is a “lack of ambition by the RSPO” (Interview 8, Appendix 1). There is a tension with this opinion by a respondent from a German certification institution (Interview 4, Appendix 1) that claimed, that the demand for certification lies in the retailers need for certification, as a quality stamp, rather than their desire to do good in the world. This refers back to the theme of reputation and responsibility. If this were the case, there would be little incentive for the retailers to drive a further development of the RSPO than minimally required; unless competitors were to engage more. This incremental change does not correspond to the ambition of a continuous standard that can be achieved at different levels. Furthermore, the ambition level is driven by the input given by the members of the RSPO, and thus they must also contribute in order for this to increase.

*“We recognize that our responsible palm oil programme is a journey and, as we learn more about the challenges and complexities the industry faces, our programme continues to evolve and grow.”* (Reckitt Benckiser, Official Documents, Appendix 3)

FMCG manufacturer Reckitt Benckiser addresses their responsibility through describing it as a journey towards responsible palm oil and thereby acknowledges that the development requires gradual steps in order for it to be successful and sustainable.

The findings show that there is high correlation between the discussions taking place in the UK and Germany regarding the move towards more sustainable palm oil. Not only do they discuss the impact that palm oil is having on the environment and societies, through the eradication of habitats and the effect on societies, but themes such as political agendas and the tension between wanting to boycott palm oil and the lack of substantive sustainable alternatives. Furthermore, all the data sources discussed certification, both as a seal of being sustainable, which was the case for many Official Documents issued by manufacturers and retailers, but also in the sense of how certification can lack ambition when targets are not set high enough. The next section will discuss the tensions that emerged from the findings as well as investigate the potential and capacity of institutions in terms of guiding sustainable commodity production, and sustainability efforts in general.

## Discussion

While two different countries were analyzed, the findings found that the overall themes that appeared in justification were very similar and the tensions present were mostly aligned across the two countries. The following section will discuss how this justification is shaped, governed and maintained within two countries. This will be done by addressing the tensions that emerged and subsequently investigating the potential of institutions in moving towards a more sustainable future of commodities; in this case the RSPO and palm oil. To round up the discussion, the implications of the findings will be discussed in order to understand what impact they are currently having and what they could potentially have on the future of the development of sustainable commodities.

### Identified Tensions

The main tensions identified in the analysis is balancing interests, misinformation or lack of information and the idea of an 'end goal'. As sustainable palm oil is a complex issue, that engages a multitude of actors, this also means that there are many different interests and agendas that need to be balanced. Due to the complexity of the supply chain and the differing information and description of palm oil, different actors are confused as to what the overall picture of palm oil consumption is and require direction in order to make conscious decisions. Yet the actors responsible for this knowledge distribution, are both hesitant – as seen by retailers that are not willing to put the RSPO label on their products – and on the other side, driven by individual agendas of their organizations. This is seen by some media and actors that are driven by scandals and riveting stories that will entice their readers and that are feared by the organizations that are being attacked.

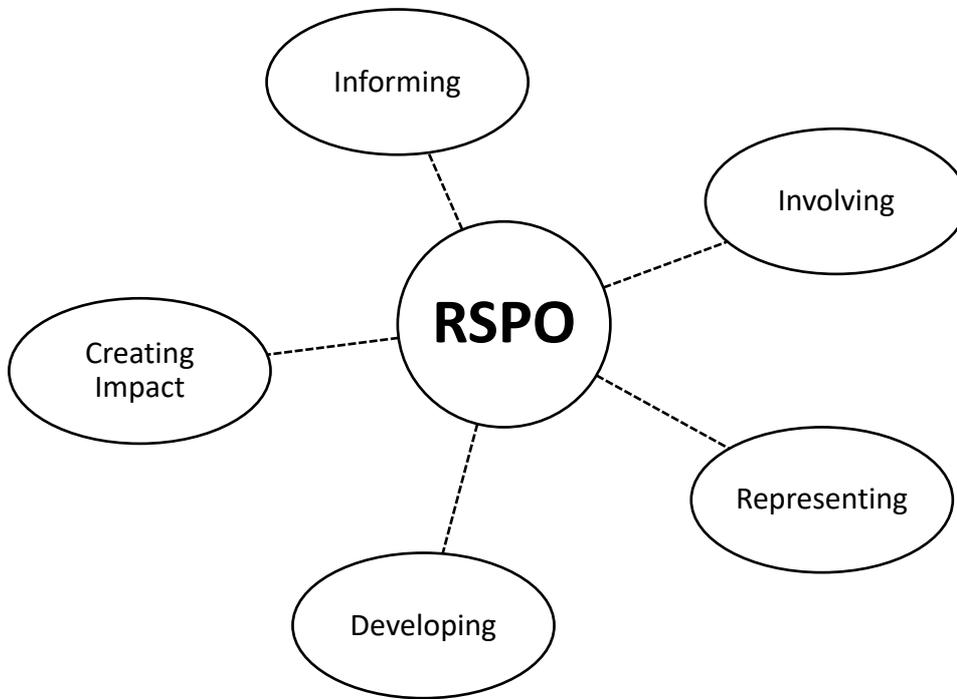
Finally, there is a disparity and ambiguity to what the 'end goal' of sustainable palm oil is, and who is responsible for the other components of the development, once this goal is reached. As presented in the previous section, some interview respondents argued that the RSPO lacks ambition. It was exhibited through the confusion of what the "end goal" of certified sustainable palm oil. Some actors expressed that the goal is achieved once all palm oil has been (minimally) certified sustainable, yet what this development in fact requires is a constant movement and not static goals of achievement. This ambiguity of the goal is also what confuses or frustrates some of the actors as they constantly have to adapt to the progresses they make. While it may be difficult to engage actors

when goals are too ambitious or broad, there is also a risk in splitting the targets up in too small manageable tasks that becomes achievable for many. In the case of sustainable palm oil, it can however be argued that any positive change towards more sustainable production is a benefit to the industry and thus better than nothing. This tension between motivating actors and demotivating by the presentation of goals was a tension that emerged from the findings.

### The Potential of Institutions

While these tensions are still present, the next section aims to discuss the potential of institutions in mitigating some of these tensions. As discussed in the theoretical framework, what institutions have the potential to do is to provide stability and capture value in situations of volatility and change. Through reflecting on the capacity that the RSPO is currently exhibiting in order to regulate the disputes and foster knowledge-based justification and discussions, this section will look into how highly effective institutions are useful in complex and highly debated topics such as sustainable palm oil. By its continuous existence despite volatile and uncertain conditions, the RSPO provides a supporting and collaborative framework to decision makers and actors that engage and are affected by these decisions. Condensing the themes discussed in the analysis. The RSPO provides a foundation for actors through informing, involving, representing, developing and creating impact.

Figure 4: The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil as an Institution



### Informing

The institution of the RSPO provides a framework in order for discussions to take place around the topic of palm oil. It is the fundament where knowledge and processes are driven. By having this constant common ground, where they are aligned on the principles of the RSPO, the actors are also placed on a level to start discussing that allows for a higher strategic abstraction in the field of sustainable palm oil. Referring back to Boltanski and Thévenot's work on justification, and notions on competences, the institution of the RSPO grants the actors involved the competence in order to justify their actions in terms of moving towards more sustainable production, and thereby also consumption, of palm oil. By increasing knowledge on the area and making it accessible to the members, the members are also better equipped to deal with the challenges that may come with the path towards more sustainable palm oil.

## Involving

It is in the name: round-table, yet the act of involving is a highly important aspect of the institution of the RSPO. The RSPO gathers stakeholders that have highly differing interests in promoting their organization's agendas. Without the foundation, that the RSPO aims to provide in uniting actors around a common goal, these actors may never have decided to talk together, and thus hindered the progress of promoting more sustainable practices in the production and consumption of palm oil. There is an importance of each stakeholder to be present and contribute to the discussion in order for the decisions made within the institution of the RSPO to be relevant and sustainable in the long run.

While the nations individually may not be importing large percentages of the total palm oil supply, together, for example within the EU, they can make changes and spur developments that will increase sustainability and inspire other nations and create impact in that way. Referring back to what was stated in some of the official documents, if the European Union decides to solve the issue of palm oil by boycotting it completely, they would merely be removing the issue from their area, but consumption and thus also production would continue in other areas by organizations that had not committed to boycotting palm oil. This would further worsen the practices of palm oil production, as without the RSPO or other driving institutions, lobbying for better conditions, there would be little incentive to produce in any way that was not the most cost efficient.

As is the case in most discussions of corporate responsibility, the assigning and assumption of responsibility is what the actors are very concerned about. The decisions on these matters also determine the progress and development of the given issue. In this case, the institution of the RSPO, implies that all engaged actors have a responsibility in using their voice in developing and implementing the standard. As has been made visible in the analysis of the findings, there are still improvements to be made in terms of assuming responsibility and thus increasing collaborative efforts between the different actors. Also, the definition of what assuming responsibility means is also vital in the interaction of the actors.

## Representing

Building on the involvement aspect, the RSPO not only represents the overall goal of sustainable palm oil, they also provide representation for voices that may usually have been neglected in common business transactions. It can be argued that the RSPO represents their principles and rules on certified sustainable palm oil, even in volatile and rapidly changing environments. Even in situations where palm oil may no longer be the main focus of the actors that with other external issues. As an institution, the RSPO provides a ground for actors to come to a consensus despite being in different situations and arguing from different justifications. The RSPO is constantly present and thus the organizations cannot neglect this priority, despite other strains on their activities.

By promoting the round table, an adaptation of a certifying multi-stakeholder initiative, the RSPO aims to provide a voice to all the different types of actors engaged in the palm oil industry. This further has the potential effect to allow for the acceptance of initiatives that the RSPO may introduce as the discussions are based on a multitude of factors that are presented in the voices of the actors. It must however be said that while this involvement and equal representation is the aim for the institution, there are difficulties in achieving this in practice, which is also a factor that the RSPO encounters, according to a paper by Stefano Ponte and Emmanuelle Cheyns (Ponte & Cheyns, 2013) . In their paper on *Voluntary standards, expert knowledge and the governance of sustainability networks* they use the RSPO as an example to show that while there may be an intent to include all actors equally, this is not the case in practice. They used the example of small-holders rarely get speaking time at the general assemblies. Yet from an abstract level, what the RSPO represents, in the ambition to join together the contribution from all members, implies a structure on the members to abide by and improve on gradually. The institution also paves the way through the various different disputes and moderating justifications, bringing together the arguments and making them more concrete.

By grouping actors from across the world and value chain, the RSPO creates the opportunity for actors to make an impact on a greater sphere of influence than they would normally be able to. The RSPO helps prioritize efforts, and continue pushing the agenda of sustainable palm oil, despite a political overload as described with the UK, or a lack of implementation of regulation or policies on

national procurement in Germany. Allowing for the market, fame and industrial orders of worth to coexist with those of the ecological and civic, applying the theoretical framework by Boltanski and Thévenot.

A component that is missing in terms of representation and involvement is the engagement of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) which could be a systematic issue of the broader multi-stakeholder initiatives structure as addressed by Andreas Rasche et al. (2017) in their paper on which firms leave multi-stakeholder initiatives (Rasche et al., 2017). They argue that this could be due to the fact that SMEs have less resources, in this case, to get certified and thus have a barrier to entry to participate in the discussions that affect the industry in which they operate. This is further supported by an interview respondent saying that certification is expensive (Interview 9, Appendix 1).

#### Developing

For the RSPO to be highly functioning and continue spurring the movement towards sustainable palm oil, they must continue to develop. To do this, they must not only promote growth and development among the members, but also contribute to this growth through analyzing data and contributing to the construction of metrics. As Thévenot discussed in his later works on certification, institutions help govern the uncertainty of the future and provide a perceived stability, which in turn allows for actors to better plan the future (Thévenot, 2015).

Furthermore, the RSPO must be receptive and adaptive to the critique it receives, in order to secure the sustainability of the certification in the long run. Yet in order to provide stability for the organizations, it must continue to uphold the principles that are underlined and the rules that determine membership, as that is what provides the members with stability. The goal for the RSPO must be to encapsulate the multitude of discussions and critique and allow for it to be present but constructive, working towards the common goal that all members have committed to: sustainable palm oil. Furthermore, the RSPO, as an overarching institution across nations, enhances the possibility of creating impact on larger areas of the world.

As an organization that grants certification, the RSPO provides flexibility and allows for the development within the industry. As it is an opt-in certification with various levels of certification, it can be a gradual process for corporations to undergo and thus make the transition more manageable by the organization, rather than Sustainable Palm Oil being a legal requirement. Furthermore, if there were to be regulation on Palm Oil, without full traceability of the palm oil, it would still be impossible to secure that the palm oil is 100% sustainable as it cannot be tested on the crude palm oil. Another code that appeared in the findings was the concept of trust, and how the lack of traceability and accountability of the organizations in the RSPO is leading to a decrease in trust. In focusing on the development of the standards, it is also important to be aware of the accountability and the traceability that is required of the members. Both the formal expectation from the RSPO for members to follow the standards and rules, but further also the trust and accountability among the members.

#### Creating Impact

It was mentioned in several interviews that respondents from the UK felt that the UK had achieved the target of 100% sustainable palm oil, yet by what the findings show is that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that palm oil is sourced as sustainably as possible, both socially and environmentally. It is vital for the RSPO to continuously keep the ball rolling in terms of achieving new and better targets. This links into the future implications. It is vital for the RSPO to communicate to the members, and for them as an institution to ensure that the members do not understand the targets as incremental, achievable goals, but rather as a gradual process that can constantly be approved. On the other hand, however, it is also important for the institution and its members to reflect on the progress that has already been made in order to ensure that the members can also see that there has been a development in the process and the industry. Without celebrating the improvements, the members may become unmotivated, lose sight of the targets and the RSPO could lose traction. If this were to happen, sustainability efforts may slow down due to the lack of institutional support and structure. Subsequently, as mentioned previously, in order to create impact the RSPO must continue to be ambitious in setting targets.

## Future Implications

Based on the findings in this paper, it can be argued that certification through a roundtable has the capacity to influence an entire industry and create not only changes to how actors engage with the topic of sustainability, but also how they conduct their activities and assume responsibility. Roundtables allow for actors that would never communicate or collaborate, despite their shared interest in a specific industry, to engage and come to a consensus on their differing justifications that otherwise would have developed into disputes that could have hindered developments. Developments that may have benefitted both parties. Furthermore, there is a high dependence on the acceptance of national governments and their engagement with the round table as well as their decisions could mean that the entire landscape for the industry changes.

There are also risks of being dependent on institutions that exist due to membership. The RSPO must continually be dynamic and improving, driving change, creating collaboration and fostering growth both for the corporations but also the organizations and the industry as a whole.

Furthermore, for the institution to remain in its position, it must continue to create legitimacy through both developments, but also providing representation and knowledge from a multitude of sources and angles. Competing institutions may challenge the RSPO, and thus the RSPO has to balance the aim to move towards sustainable palm oil, while also taking notice of the engaged members. There is a certain degree to also when the capacity of an institution is exceeded by the need for legislation. Where standards and certification schemes no longer suffice. This could be in cases where national governments have made decisions based on other external forces or political agendas, or, in this case it may be less relevant as there are no clear studies to claim that palm oil is dangerous to consume, but if this were the case, legislation would also be the case.

In terms of responsibility, the RSPO has a high degree of responsibility to ensure that the members are actually meeting the requirements with traceability monitoring and increased auditing. Furthermore, they must also demand the responsibility to also be taken over by the members themselves, who can also contribute to developing these systems and creating more of the transparency that some of the member organization representatives mentioned in the interviews. In order to make the power of the RSPO even stronger, the RSPO needs to expand this to encompass

the citizens. By contributing to the knowledge of citizens and civil society, will prove a more holistic understanding of the dilemmas of palm oil. Furthermore, the RSPO can promote a more responsible and conscious consumption from the consumers and the members of society who may be more hostile towards the RSPO due to the overload of information or misinformation that they have received through the media and other actors. A broader implication of the emergence of the growing importance of institutions, is that of the traditional business view of creating value. By having institutions present that promote a higher goal than creating economic profit, may also have a spill over affect to the way organizations do business in other contexts. Furthermore, the RSPO promotes collaboration and partnerships as it allows for the institution to achieve the higher goal of moving towards more sustainable palm oil. The successes of this model of engaging actors (that may differ in opinions and motivation) in dialogue, sharing knowledge and collaborating, may inspire businesses to engage more in these partnerships and collaborations. Understanding and accepting how this value creation can be compared to economic value will demand a higher abstraction from society in general. As introduced in the literature review, the business environment is becoming more receptive to this as urged by researchers such as Matten & Crane (2005). By shifting from responsibility to citizenship, corporations actively engage with the environment in which they conduct their activities in order to secure that their actions don't negatively affect these areas and societies.

### Limitations and Further Research

This project has various limitations which could be addressed in further research. First off, the access to respondents and data, as well as the scope of a master's thesis has limited the range of voices that the project represents. The findings also found that while there is a commitment to be certified for downstream suppliers, it is vital to engage with the smallholders and other upstream suppliers to ensure that they follow the best practices as well. In turn, they are the ones physically responsible and accountable for securing the sustainable production of palm oil. Thus, their influence and voice in decision making is vital. Promoting further changes to environmental and human rights protection in the producing nations will further develop the certification and achieve a greater impact. As the round table implies, it is important to include each type of actors' voices in order to understand the situation. This project has consciously left out the actors that were not located in the UK or

Germany, in order to stick to the geographical scope of the project. However, in order to understand the decisions and arguments, the research would be enhanced from investigating additional countries to understand the international context that these justifications are present in. Furthermore, the inclusion of small holders and other producers, would give a better insight into the dynamics within the entire value chain, and could explain some of the tensions that were found. The isolation of the project exactly shows this, that you cannot isolate the actors in order to understand the issue and the possible solutions.

Furthermore, this project aimed to investigate some of the trends and tensions that were present in the market, yet it must be kept in mind that the interview responses are not an indication of what the entire organization believes to be true, but as these people are representatives of the organizations, it gives an indication of what the types of organizations in this field as well as the nations are discussing and the current progress that the industry is going through. While many different actors have been selected, it is difficult to generalize from the findings as organizations, in particular NGOs, vary a lot on their justification depending on their area of expertise. Furthermore, the justification and critique expressed by respondents, may also be channeled by their own values and what drives them to fight for the interests of different individuals, species, the environment and organizations.

#### Further research

To build on the research on this project, a further understanding of the actors and their justifications could be studied through other sociological studies such as more systematic surveys, interviews and ethnographic studies. This could also contribute to discovering how what organizations report they do may differ from what they actually do. While there has been research conducted on the efficiency of the RSPO, there could be further research into organizations that are currently engaged in the palm oil industry but do not engage (much or at all) with the RSPO and why this is the case. The two selected nations: Germany and the UK were aligned in the way that both countries had pledged to move towards 100% sustainable palm oil through the Amsterdam Declaration, yet research could also be done on other countries that have not pledged to do so yet, to understand why this is the case, for example China.

A comparative study of different certification schemes could also provide more context to how successful institutions are in moving industries toward more sustainable practices. The findings of these studies in combination with this project could contribute to developing a framework to predict and potentially influence other commodities' transitions to become more sustainable, which will inevitably become a topic in the future as we have to become increasingly conscious about how we source products in order to protect the environment.

In addition to the above suggestions, another angle that would be interesting to investigate is understanding the current state of consumers' and members of civil society's understanding and attitude towards palm oil. Based on the findings, the retailers are highly responsive to the reactions of the consumers. Researching what corporations and other organizations can do in order to provide consumers with information on the positive and negative aspects of the product in order for the consumer to make conscious and potentially more responsible consumption choices.

## Conclusion

This project set out to investigate how different actors justify their engagement with palm oil within the national contexts of the UK and Germany and analyze what tensions were present. The findings indicated that while the two nations differ in size and political influence, there weren't many disparities between the themes discussed in the UK and Germany. The main themes of how actors justified their engagement with palm oil regarded the attributes and versatility of palm oil, the effects the production has on the environment, the reputation and responsibility of organizations and the impact of certification. Further themes that emerged in terms of justification were political agendas and the constant need for transparency and traceability in order to secure trust and sustainable development. Furthermore, the tensions were comparable, and also related to previous literature on certification and the challenges it faces. The main tensions were identified as the difficulty in aligning actors' interests, the misinformation of the market and customers, and the ambiguity surrounding the goal of the RSPO's certification and when organizations have reached the target of 100% sustainable palm oil.

There are differing opinions on how well the RSPO is able to mitigate these tensions in practice, but the findings of this thesis suggest that as a whole the RSPO has provided the palm oil industry the structure and engagement for actors to be heard, but also hear other perspectives from the industry.

The main themes emerging from the findings covered a broad scope of issues that actors refer to when justifying their engagement with palm oil. The effects of palm oil production on society and the environment, reputation and the lack of traceability were main justifications for limiting engagements with palm oil, while the responsibility that corporations, organizations and nations must assume, political agendas and certification were themes that provided justification for the engagement with palm oil.

The findings show that despite differences in nations and actors' goals, the RSPO has shown the potential institutions can have to steer sustainable development. Influence of the institution of the RSPO, in both countries, has helped shape the discussion on the matter of sustainable palm oil for

the actors engaged within the industry. This suggests that certification initiatives have the potential to permeate across nations and influence change, despite engaging with actors within differing contexts of the nations and actors. This additionally strengthens the argument of the importance of institutions in complex contexts and environments. As posited by Boltanski in his work *On Critique*, institutions have the ability to maintain values and targets regardless of what is happening in the surrounding environment. The institution of the RSPO has allowed for a vast number of actors, across countries to come together and dispute and discuss. They do this on an informed level through the knowledge gathered and shared in and around the RSPO. This collaboration and resulting consensus that emerge through disputes and the resolutions hereof, pushes the move towards more sustainably certified palm oil.

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## Appendix

This appendix contains an overview of the data, while the attached pdf/USB stick contains the larger data collection.

1– Interviews

2 – Data Archive

3 – Official Documents

## 1 - Interviews

### Interviews – Overview

(All the transcriptions are on the USB stick labelled: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS)

Interview Number	Interview Date	Country	Type of organization
1	02-06-2016	Germany	Commodity Forum
2	27-04-2017	Germany	Business Association
3	27-07-2017	Germany	Federal Association
4	03-11-2017	Germany	Certification Institution
5	08-06-2017	Germany	NGO
6	05-05-2017	UK	NGO
7	06-06-2016	UK	NGO
8	08-09-2017	UK	Retailer
9	14-08-2017	UK	Consultancy
10	14-09-2017	UK	Business Association
11	24-08-2017	UK	Zoo
12	27-07-2017	UK	NGO
13	27-09-2017	UK	Commodity Association

Interviews – Jotting Notes

Interview Number	Interview Date	Country	Type of organization	Key Points
1	02-06-2016	Germany	Commodity Forum	No retailers are promoting the use of sustainable palm oil, rather they are involved in it to cover their backs The media is stirring up the pot Public procurement and palm oil
2	27-04-2017	Germany	Business Association	Sustainability in terms of deforestation Sustainability has become a big issue Palm oil production produces high yields Customers don't want to pay high premium
3	27-07-2017	Germany	Federal Association	Biofuel is more important issue for Germany (EU directive etc.) Europe wide implementation means that organizations cannot afford to not engage.
4	03-11-2017	Germany	Certification Institution	Sustainable palm oil is mainly pushed by retailers - food and then drugstore Critical towards the RSPO and their principles Lack of knowledge on RSPO from government officials Germans don't really follow blogs, they mainly get their media and news from state run media. Demand for certification is only run by the retailers. Need for certification and not for doing anything good about the environment.
5	08-06-2017	Germany	NGO	Palm oil does not require many pesticides for production Difficult in terms of certification as it was difficult for the firms with segregation
6	05-05-2017	UK	NGO	Investors are sending a signal in terms of divestment Regarding responsible organizations Collaborative efforts Roundtables employ a lot of consultants Pound notes produced with animal fats Reputation
7	06-06-2016	UK	NGO	Regulation is hindering sustainability Predict that the standard will become the norm - no exploitation Transparency, adhering to the standards, and committing to the standards
8	08-09-2017	UK	Retailer	Attractiveness of certification schemes Lack of trust among members in RSPO due to lack of Transparency Lack of ambition from the RSPO

9	14-08-2017	UK	Consultancy	<p>Certification is expensive</p> <p>Dependency on public investment</p> <p>Difficulties in measuring percentage of sustainable palm -inconsistencies</p> <p>Whether or not to include palm oil from imported goods in the equation</p> <p>General overload in the British government right now</p> <p>MEASUREMENT ISSUES</p>
10	14-09-2017	UK	Business Association	<p>Government driven - political agendas UK met the goal in 2015 of fully sustainable palm oil</p> <p>Negative media coverage through guardian UK wont ban "there are no plans for regulation, we are virtually 100% there anyway."</p>
11	24-08-2017	UK	Zoo	<p>Moving into certifying restaurants and animal feed for their sustainable palm oil use</p> <p>Growth in awareness of palm oil in the market</p> <p>Shift from boycott to awareness of sustainability in the market</p> <p>For zoos the RSPO is not strong enough - therefore it's confusing for the zoos to promote this</p> <p>Competition is helping improve RSPO</p> <p>Apps emerging to scan products in order to see if they contain sustainable palm oil</p> <p>predict an increase in palm oil imports !!</p> <p>- Future: working more at a national level to combat some of the environmental challenges that the producing countries experience</p> <p>Justification: Threatened Species</p>
12	27-07-2017	UK	NGO	<p>Getting corporations to engage with commitments sends signals to others and spurs engagement in other commitments along the supply chain</p> <p>Engaging with hospitality sector</p> <p>Regulation on sourcing could be an up and coming theme (future)</p> <p>Challenge is the rise of smaller companies that can't afford the material as well as the big brands, but they have put competition on the larger companies simultaneously.</p> <p>Most interested in conservation but also aware of the Economic and social implementations</p> <p>Labelling is confusing</p> <p>Consumers are confused by everything</p>

13	27-09-2017	UK	Commodity Association	<p>Satisfying customers' needs through CSR</p> <p>"palm oil has been a major issue in other countries. It really hasn't in UK. "</p> <p>Political priority for a minister a few years back</p> <p>Hasn't been a big NGO issue</p> <p>No media scandals</p> <p>Does not expect the palm oil market to change over time, maybe a slight reduction</p>
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## 2 - News Archive

(All the Articles are on the USB stick in the folder labelled: NEWS ARCHIVE)

The articles were retrieved from Factiva.

## 3 - Official Documents

(All the reports are on the USB stick in the folder labelled: OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS)

An overview of the Official Documents is on the next two pages – numbered 1 and 2.

Document Number	Country	Organization	Type of Document	Title	Last updated	Link	Accessed
		Retailers					
1	DE	REWE	Guideline	Leitlinie für Palmöl – und Palmkernölerzeugnisse - 3rd Edition	August 2015	<a href="https://www.rewe-group.com/dam/de/press/leitlinien/palmoeleitlinien/Palmoeleitlinie_Versand">https://www.rewe-group.com/dam/de/press/leitlinien/palmoeleitlinien/Palmoeleitlinie_Versand</a>	10/03/2019
2	DE	Aldi Süd	Procurement Policy	Unsere Palmöl-Einkaufspolitik	November 2016	<a href="https://unternehmen.aldi-sued.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/company_photos/US_Verantwortung/Downloads/ALDI_SUED_Palmoeleitkaufpolitik.pdf">https://unternehmen.aldi-sued.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/company_photos/US_Verantwortung/Downloads/ALDI_SUED_Palmoeleitkaufpolitik.pdf</a>	10/03/2019
3	DE	Lidl	Position Paper	Positionspapier für den nachhaltigeren Einkauf von Palm(kern)öl	May 2017	<a href="https://www.lidl.de/de/assets/other/Positionspapier_fuer_den_nachhaltigeren_Einkauf_von_Palm-kern-oel.pdf">https://www.lidl.de/de/assets/other/Positionspapier_fuer_den_nachhaltigeren_Einkauf_von_Palm-kern-oel.pdf</a>	10/03/2019
4	DE	DM- Drogerie Markt	CSR Report	Jeder Einzelne zählt - Nachhaltigkeit bei dm	2018	<a href="https://www.dm.de/unternehmen/engagement/nachhaltigkeit/">https://www.dm.de/unternehmen/engagement/nachhaltigkeit/</a>	10/03/2019
5	DE	EDEKA	Web Article	EDEKA und WWF engagieren sich für nachhaltigeres Palmöl	n/a	<a href="https://www.edeka.de/nachhaltigkeit/unsere-wwf-partnerschaft/palmoeleitkauf/index.jsp">https://www.edeka.de/nachhaltigkeit/unsere-wwf-partnerschaft/palmoeleitkauf/index.jsp</a>	10/03/2019
6	UK	Tesco	Policy Statement	Sourcing palm oil responsibly	March 2018	<a href="https://www.tesco.com/reports-and-policies/uk-palm-oil-policy/">https://www.tesco.com/reports-and-policies/uk-palm-oil-policy/</a>	10/03/2019
7	UK	Sainsburys	Web Page	Leading the way on sustainable palm oil	2017	<a href="https://www.about.sainsburys.co.uk/making-a-difference/our-values/our-stories/2017/leading-the-way-on-sustainable-palm-oil">https://www.about.sainsburys.co.uk/making-a-difference/our-values/our-stories/2017/leading-the-way-on-sustainable-palm-oil</a>	10/03/2019
8	UK	Asda (Walmart)	Policy Statement	Palm oil policy	n/a	<a href="https://sustainability.asda.com/sites/default/files/Palm%20oil%20policy.pdf">https://sustainability.asda.com/sites/default/files/Palm%20oil%20policy.pdf</a>	10/03/2019
9	UK	Morrisons	Web Page	Palm oil - Morrisons	n/a	<a href="https://www.morrisons.com/our-policy/palm-oil/">https://www.morrisons.com/our-policy/palm-oil/</a>	04/01/2019
10	UK	Waitrose	Web Page	Palm Oil	n/a	<a href="https://www.waitrose.com/home/inspiration/about_waitrose/the_waitrose_way/palm-oil.html">https://www.waitrose.com/home/inspiration/about_waitrose/the_waitrose_way/palm-oil.html</a>	04/01/2019
11	UK	Iceland	A Letter from Richard Walker (on website)	Thank You for Helping to Stop Palm Oil Causing Deforestation	2018	<a href="http://about.iceland.co.uk/2018/12/01/palm-oil-thank-you/">http://about.iceland.co.uk/2018/12/01/palm-oil-thank-you/</a>	04/01/2019
		NGOs					
12	DE	WWF Deutschland	Web Page	Palmöl	July 2018	<a href="https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/landwirtschaft/produkte-aus-der-landwirtschaft/palmoe/">https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/landwirtschaft/produkte-aus-der-landwirtschaft/palmoe/</a>	10/03/2019
13	DE	Greenpeace München	Web Page	Palmöl	September 2017	<a href="https://www.greenpeace-muenchen.de/index.php/gruppen/wald-people/urwald/539-palmoe.html">https://www.greenpeace-muenchen.de/index.php/gruppen/wald-people/urwald/539-palmoe.html</a>	10/03/2019
14	DE	Rettet den Regenwald	Web Page	Palmöl – der Tod des Regenwaldes	n/a	<a href="https://www.regenwald.org/themen/palmoe/">https://www.regenwald.org/themen/palmoe/</a>	10/03/2019
15	DE	FONAP	Web Page	Herausforderungen im Palmölanbau	n/a	<a href="https://www.fonapalmoe.org/was-ist-palmoe/herausforderungen">https://www.fonapalmoe.org/was-ist-palmoe/herausforderungen</a>	10/03/2019
16	DE	GIZ	Press Release	Wirtschaft für Entwicklung (mentions palm oil once)	January 2014	<a href="https://www.giz.de/de/press/22928.html">https://www.giz.de/de/press/22928.html</a>	10/03/2019
17	UK	WWF UK	Web Article	8 Things to Know About Palm Oil	n/a	<a href="https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/8-things-know-about-palm-oil">https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/8-things-know-about-palm-oil</a>	10/03/2019
18	UK	Greenpeace UK	Web Article	Palm oil: what you need to know	September 2018	<a href="https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/facts-palm-oil-answered/">https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/facts-palm-oil-answered/</a>	10/03/2019
19	UK	ZSL	Web Page	Support sustainable palm oil	n/a	<a href="https://www.zsl.org/about-us/sustainability-at-zsl/support-sustainable-palm-oil">https://www.zsl.org/about-us/sustainability-at-zsl/support-sustainable-palm-oil</a>	10/03/2019
20	UK	Rainforest Foundation	Web Page	PALM OIL AND AGRO-INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION	n/a	<a href="https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/palmoil">https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/palmoil</a>	10/03/2019
21	Global	Amnesty	Web Article	Palm Oil and human rights: What you need to know	November 2016	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/key-facts-about-palm-oil/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/key-facts-about-palm-oil/</a>	10/03/2019
		Manufacturers					
22	UK	Reckitt Benckiser	Plan Document	RB's next steps on responsible palm oil - 2018 and beyond	n/a	<a href="https://www.rb.com/media/3322/rb-s-plans-for-responsible-palm-oil-sourcing-2018-final-all-suppliers.pdf">https://www.rb.com/media/3322/rb-s-plans-for-responsible-palm-oil-sourcing-2018-final-all-suppliers.pdf</a>	10/03/2019
23	UK	United Biscuits	Web page	Productive World	n/a	<a href="http://www.unitedbiscuits.com/our-world/productive-world/">http://www.unitedbiscuits.com/our-world/productive-world/</a>	10/03/2019
24	UK	Associated British Foods	Web page	Corporate Responsibility Update 2018	2018	<a href="https://www.abf.co.uk/responsibility">https://www.abf.co.uk/responsibility</a>	10/03/2019
25	UK	Premier Foods	Policy Statement	Palm Oil policy	2016	<a href="https://www.premierfoods.co.uk/getattachment/responsibility/Our-policies-2/Palm-Oil-Policy.pdf.aspx">https://www.premierfoods.co.uk/getattachment/responsibility/Our-policies-2/Palm-Oil-Policy.pdf.aspx</a>	10/03/2019
26	DE	Henkel	Web Page	Nachhaltiges Palm(kern)öl	n/a	<a href="https://www.henkel.de/nachhaltigkeit/positionen/palmoe/wirtschaft">https://www.henkel.de/nachhaltigkeit/positionen/palmoe/wirtschaft</a>	10/03/2019
27	DE	Storck	Web Page	Produktqualität	n/a	<a href="https://www.storck.com/de/qualitaet/produktqualitaet/">https://www.storck.com/de/qualitaet/produktqualitaet/</a>	04/01/2019
28	DE	Intersnack	Web Page	Verantwortung für die Gesellschaft	n/a	<a href="https://www.intersnack.de/unsere-engagement/verantwortung-fuer-die-gesellschaft/">https://www.intersnack.de/unsere-engagement/verantwortung-fuer-die-gesellschaft/</a>	10/03/2019
29	DE	Dr. Oetker	Web page	Über Uns - Teilnahme an Initiativen	n/a	<a href="https://www.oetker.de/ueber-dr-oetker/teilnahme-an-initiativen.html">https://www.oetker.de/ueber-dr-oetker/teilnahme-an-initiativen.html</a>	04/01/2019
30	DE	Beiersdorf	Web Page	Nachhaltiges Palm(kern)öl	n/a	<a href="https://www.beiersdorf.de/nachhaltigkeit/products/rohstoffe/palm-oil">https://www.beiersdorf.de/nachhaltigkeit/products/rohstoffe/palm-oil</a>	10/03/2019
		Banks and Investors					
31	UK	HSBC	Policy Statement	Forestry and agricultural commodities	2017	<a href="https://www.hsbc.com/our-approach/risk-and-responsibility/sustainability-risk/forestry-and-agricultural-commodities">https://www.hsbc.com/our-approach/risk-and-responsibility/sustainability-risk/forestry-and-agricultural-commodities</a>	10/03/2019
n/a	UK	Generation Investment Management	n/a	<i>not available</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a
32	UK	Standard Chartered Bank	Position Statement	POSITION STATEMENT Agro-industries	expiring 2019	<a href="https://www.sc.com/en/sustainability/position-statements/agro-industries/">https://www.sc.com/en/sustainability/position-statements/agro-industries/</a>	10/03/2019

Document Number	Country	Organization	Type of Document	Title	Last updated	Link	Accessed
33	UK	Bardays	Risk Briefing	Environmental and Social Risk Briefing Oil & Gas	2015	<a href="https://www.home.bardays.com/content/dam/bardayspublic/docs/citizenship/oil-and-gas-guidance-note.pdf">https://www.home.bardays.com/content/dam/bardayspublic/docs/citizenship/oil-and-gas-guidance-note.pdf</a>	10/03/2019
34	UK	Royal Bank of Scotland					10/03/2019
35	UK	Lloyds Banking Group	Sector Analysis Report	Sector Statements	July 2018	<a href="https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/our-group/responsible-business/reporting-centre/lbg_sector_statements_updated-jul-2018.pdf">https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/our-group/responsible-business/reporting-centre/lbg_sector_statements_updated-jul-2018.pdf</a>	04/01/2019
36	DE	Deutsche Bank	Policy Statement	Palmöl: Gemeinsam Verantwortung übernehmen für den Erhalt des Regenwaldes	2014	<a href="https://www.db.com/cr/de/konkret/palmoeel_gemeinsam_verantwortung_uebernehmen.htm">https://www.db.com/cr/de/konkret/palmoeel_gemeinsam_verantwortung_uebernehmen.htm</a>	10/03/2019
37	DE	KfW	Report	Nachhaltigkeitsbericht - Stakeholderdialog zu Finanzierungsprojekten (Later versions <i>did not mention Palm Oil</i> )	2012	<a href="https://www.kfw.de/Download-Center/Konzernthemen/Nachhaltigkeit/Nachhaltigkeitsbericht_2012_Teil-2.pdf">https://www.kfw.de/Download-Center/Konzernthemen/Nachhaltigkeit/Nachhaltigkeitsbericht_2012_Teil-2.pdf</a>	04/01/2019
n/a	DE	DZ Bank	n/a	<i>not available</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a
38	DE	Commerzbank	Statement on Webpage	Unsere Verantwortung - Mindeststandards für Palmöl	n/a	<a href="https://www.commerzbank.de/de/nachhaltigkeit/nachhaltigkeitsstandards/mitgliedschaften_und_initiativen/fso/palmoeel.html">https://www.commerzbank.de/de/nachhaltigkeit/nachhaltigkeitsstandards/mitgliedschaften_und_initiativen/fso/palmoeel.html</a>	10/03/2019
39	DE	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Press Release	Nur noch nachhaltig zertifiziertes Palmöl in Deutschland	October 2018	<a href="https://www.bmel.de/DE/Landwirtschaft/Nachhaltige-Landnutzung/Nachhaltiger-Konsum-Wirtschaften/_Texte/nachhaltiges-Palmoeel-FONAP.html">https://www.bmel.de/DE/Landwirtschaft/Nachhaltige-Landnutzung/Nachhaltiger-Konsum-Wirtschaften/_Texte/nachhaltiges-Palmoeel-FONAP.html</a>	10/03/2019
40	UK	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Report	UK statement on sustainable palm oil: final progress report	February 2017	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-statement-on-sustainable-palm-oil-final-progress-report">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-statement-on-sustainable-palm-oil-final-progress-report</a>	10/03/2019