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Tropical peatland conservation and rehabilitation
as a sustainable economic development option
for private sector and local communities

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Tropical peatlands are being degraded by unsustainable developments, with dire consequences in terms of biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, subsidence (linked to flooding and saltwater intrusion), impacts on livelihoods, public health, environmental security, fisheries and sustainable forestry potential. Unsustainable use of peatlands by the palm oil sector results in intra-sectoral market impacts for the growers and downstream industry trading sustainably produced palm oil. The unsustainability of drainage reliant tropical peat land-use necessitates development of sustainable alternatives: land-uses that do not require drainage such as paludiculture and conservation (including peatland rehabilitation). Such land-uses can provide a basis for a range of economic developments which – given the right approaches - can both benefit private sector and local communities. They can be combined with marketing of resulting carbon credits. The current voluntary carbon market involves a substantial and rapidly growing number of investors. Funding for peatland ecosystem rehabilitation and conservation is not anymore a limiting factor. However, recent land grabbing by oil palm and pulp wood sectors have left few viable areas for hydrological restoration. Recent policy developments in Indonesia, parts of Malaysia and in the RSPO stem hopeful that this will change rapidly and that peatland areas will increasingly become available for management under ecosystem restoration concessions or other secure tenure options. This will provide for a most cost effective option for the region and the world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This must involve support and empowerment of local communities, including employment and benefit sharing.