Agricultural lands occupy almost half of the world’s land surface and a further expansion is projected to feed a global population expected to reach 9 billion by 2050. The social and economic contribution that agriculture makes at both the macro and micro levels is also well documented: agriculture contributes 30% of the GDP in many low-income countries and employs more than 2 billion people globally. Over 75% of people living in poverty depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agri-business firms—local, national and international—play major roles in agricultural production and services.

As a significant land user, agri-business also has a critical role to play in holistic sustainable land management that protects and maintains essential ecosystem services and builds rural community resilience. GAA and EcoAgriculture Partners are working together to identify and learn from a selection of innovative regenerative and restorative landscape partnerships in which agri-business companies are actively involved. These case studies will support us in our shared ambition to better understand the agri-business perspective—their business rationale for landscape partnerships, institutional models, business and landscape benefits, and how to bring success to scale. We welcome your input and feedback.

Case studies are available at globalagribusinessalliance.com

PMI has built partnerships between its third party suppliers and NGOs to develop and implement initiatives on deforestation risk mitigation. The company has also developed its sustainability portfolio and partnerships to address child labour and other labour abuses, enhance farmers’ livelihood, provide access to water, and support farmers in expanding their current agricultural production beyond tobacco to mitigate the potential decline in tobacco requirements.

Rationale for business engagement in landscape partnership

Philip Morris International (PMI), in partnership with its third party leaf suppliers, is working in six contiguous Districts in Central and Northern Malawi to minimize the risk of deforestation where the Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco that the company sources is cured entirely with firewood. Both as a fuel for curing and a building material for barns used to cure Burley tobacco, wood from trees and forests has been an essential ingredient in the smallholder and commercial farming systems that supply PMI with tobacco.
In the longer term Philip Morris International is supporting the sustainability of its suppliers and farmers and consequently its tobacco supply chain in the face of declining tobacco demand.

Anticipated benefits and successes

The primary benefit already achieved for many farmers has been the reduction of fuel consumption through furnace efficiency, and for PMI and its suppliers to make measurable progress toward realizing the 2020 goal of implementing a sustainable fuelwood sourcing strategy in Malawi and reducing significantly the environmental footprint. In the longer term PMI is supporting the sustainability of its suppliers and farmers and consequently its tobacco supply chain in the face of declining tobacco demand. As it is stepping up its efforts to promote social and environmental sustainability, PMI anticipates adding biodiversity to its sustainability portfolio in due course.

Lessons learned

The experience that PMI has gained in developing partnerships around deforestation free tobacco curing, child labour and other labour abuses elimination, farmer livelihood enhancement and water supply risk mitigation is leading it to see possibilities for interconnecting them. Entry into the water field has brought recognition that water links all other activities in which the company engages across Districts in central and northern Malawi. This interconnectivity, combined with the momentum and accomplishments of its formative partnerships warrants investment in multi-stakeholder platforms to add value to what has been achieved already, and help to sustain the gains.