Land O’Lakes Venture 37 leads the implementation of the CAT through a consortium of four leading agricultural development and academic institutions with funding from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW) with technical support from the Agricultural Transformation Initiative (ATI):
Welcome to our sixth edition of the Centre for Agricultural Transformation (CAT) Newsletter which is highlighting some major activities we have implemented in the 2nd quarter of 2023. In this 2nd quarter, in collaboration with our partners, we held a mega farmer field day on 6th April 2023 at the CAT Smart Farm, located at Natural Resources College (NRC) in Lilongwe.

Smallholder tobacco farmers and other smallholder farmers from various districts in the country participated to learn about improved agricultural technologies and innovations, including good soil management practices for increased agricultural productivity. As CAT, we also partnered with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Malawi Investment Trade Centre (MITC) during the launch of Malawi National Agribusiness Dealroom, a platform for increasing agribusiness investments among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malawi. We also joined the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW) in the handover ceremony for the construction site of the CAT Centre of Excellence at the Lilongwe of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)'s NRC campus, opposite the Smart Farm. No doubt, the CAT Centre of Excellence is a game changer which will support smallholder farmers, researchers, students and private sector players in catalyzing agricultural transformation. We also continued to provide technical advice to our business incubation and commercialization (BIC) partners and their allied smallholder tobacco farmers on business growth and agronomic management practices through our routine project monitoring activities and remote agri-clinics. We are, therefore, grateful to all our partners for this kind of collaboration in the 2nd quarter.

As we go into the 3rd quarter, we implore you to continue partnering with us through various interventions that have been lined up in the quarter and beyond, including participation in the 19th Malawi National Agriculture Fair where we will exhibit our work through some selected smallholder farmers and BIC partners. We look forward to continued collaboration in our collective quest to help smallholder tobacco farmers diversify, increase production and productivity as well as incomes for the betterment of their lives.

We wish you all the best in your everyday undertakings and thanks for your unfailing support.

Macleod Nkhoma
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
761 PEOPLE ATTEND CAT FARMER FIELD DAY TO LEARN MODERN FARMING TECHNOLOGIES AND GOOD SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.

Farmer Field Days (FFDs) are important platforms for sharing agricultural information and knowledge among smallholder farmers and private sector players, promoting peer-learning and getting feedback on interventions being undertaken. FFDs are also platforms for sharing agricultural policy information and act as opportunities for meeting with farmers face-to-face to encourage them on their work. On 6 April 2023, CAT held a mega farmer field day at its NRC Smart Farm in Lilongwe which attracted 761 (394 males and 367 females) participants, including tobacco and non-tobacco smallholder farmers drawn from various districts across the country. It aimed at exposing farmers to modern agricultural technologies as well as good soil management practices. Supported by the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW), the event was held under the theme: “Good Soils and Crop Diversification: Catalysts for Increased Agricultural Productivity.” One of the smallholder farmers who attended the event, Lucia Tokoma, aged 44, from Traditional Authority (T/A) M’bwatalika in Lilongwe said she acquired new knowledge on various agricultural technologies to help her improve in farming. Speaking to multitudes of farmers who gathered at the venue, CAT Executive Director Macleod Nkhoma urged them to follow modern farming technologies to boost their yields in the wake of climate change. “We want you, farmers, to diversify and focus on modern technologies for optimal benefits. This is why we are bringing tobacco and non-tobacco smallholder farmers at our smart farms for them to learn about new and improved agricultural technologies and innovations we are showcasing with our partners on different demo plots and in various value chains such as banana, sunflower, groundnut, soybean, chia seeds, upland rice, among others,” explained Nkhoma. Guest of Honor, who is also Program Manager for Lilongwe Agricultural Development Division (ADD), Sheila Kang’ombe, said adopting new farming technologies was a sure way to help farmers harvest high yields amid shocks caused by climate change. “I am impressed with what I have seen on the ground where our farmers are introduced to and encouraged to adopt modern farming methods from the CAT Smart Farm. I urge more farmers to visit the farm so they can get bumper harvests,” she said. Vice President and Country Director for the Foundation for Smoke-Free World and Agricultural Transformation Initiative (FSFW-ATI), Candida Nakhumwa, said the Foundation is currently supporting the CAT to give a platform to more smallholder tobacco farmers and farmers in general to learn modern ways of agriculture including use of improved seed, plant nutrition, plant protection, irrigation and soil restoration practices, among others.
CAT, AGRA AND MITC LAUNCH MALAWI NATIONAL AGROBUSINESS DEALROOM TO PROMOTE AGROBUSINESS INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES.

The Centre for Agricultural Transformation (CAT), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the Malawi Investment Trade Centre (MITC) have collaborated by launching the Malawi National Agribusiness Dealroom, a platform designed to coordinate increased investment opportunities in small and medium-sized agribusinesses in Malawi that ultimately support smallholder farmers in the country. The launch took place on 21 June 2023 in Lilongwe supported by Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA). It brought together 139 (105 males and 34 females) potential investors, agribusinesses, agri-business experts as well as other public and private sector players to discuss, explore opportunities and forge business network links necessary for addressing existing financial challenges. Speaking after the launch, CAT Director of Science, Technology and Innovation - Geoffrey Kananji - said: "As CAT, we strongly believe in partnerships. Partnerships are the way to go and there is evidence on the ground. The event today is a clear testimony where CAT, AGRA and MITC are demonstrating the importance of working together to support smallholder farmers and agribusinesses to register maximum impact. What we have done today is not the end but the beginning of better things to come. Alongside this as CAT, we have partnered with Standard Bank Malawi to deliver an agricultural specific incubation with them dubbed PHUKA program which will run for six weeks to support agribusinesses in the country." During the launch, six of CAT partners such as Muliko Livestock Services, Teren, ACADES, Theophilus, Agwenda and Market Support Link pitched their business potential and products to prospective investors. The Agribusiness Dealroom is a matchmaking platform that convenes stakeholders from the entire eco-system to facilitate partnerships and investments in African agriculture. It specifically supports governments and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with access to finance and partnership opportunities.
FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD FUNDS NEW CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN MALAWI.

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World recently announced the start of construction of a new Centre for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi that will be the physical hub for CAT-related work that focuses on helping the nation's smallholder farmers increase productivity and transition into growing crops other than tobacco. The African country currently ranks among the most tobacco-dependent economies in the world.

Agricultural transformation represents one area of commitment in the Foundation's mission to end tobacco smoking in this generation. The new building on the campus of Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources will house an incubation center for science, technology, and business that focuses on research, learning, and innovation with an aim of supporting smallholder farmers' agricultural diversification efforts and productivity.

The Foundation's CAT announcement coincided with World No Tobacco Day, the World Health Organization's annual day to focus attention worldwide on the harmful health outcomes associated with cigarette smoking.

"World No Tobacco Day highlights the importance of helping farmers transition away from growing tobacco. Malawi is ready, willing, and able to move away from tobacco as one of its main exports, but the work must start at ground level," said Candida Nakhumwa, Vice President and Malawi Country Director, Foundation for a Smoke-Free World.

"Tobacco farmers and the land on which tobacco is grown are often overlooked in the conversation about ending smoking. The global decline in tobacco demand is bringing negative economic consequences to tobacco farmers. They must be supported to find competitive and sustainable alternative livelihoods," she adds.

Centre for Agricultural Transformation Provides Much-Needed Support to Farmers

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World funded the technical activities of the CAT with a five-year grant from 2019. As part of its strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate the harm caused by tobacco smoking, the nonprofit organization provides grants that support health and science research, agricultural diversification, and industry transformation. The Foundation has awarded $125 million in grant expenditures since its inception in 2017.

In Lilongwe, the new CAT building, which will support the CAT technical activities will provide a central location for the effort to educate Malawi farmers on pathways for agricultural diversification, increasing productivity and production for agriculture commodities other than tobacco. Programs offered through the CAT give smallholder farmers access to innovative agriculture science and technology that can support them in making the transition.

The CAT, which the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World fully funds, currently manages its programs without a central location. Even so, it has established smart farms at the Bunda and Natural Resources Campus of Lilongwe University for Agriculture and Natural Resources, as well as the Makoka Research Station. At the smart farms, farmers have explored working with a variety of different crops, including groundnuts, soybean, dairy, mushrooms, and bananas.
The new hub for the CAT is also supported by the Agricultural Transformation Initiative, an affiliate of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. Nakhumwua said the centre's programs and initiatives will provide "much-needed support to farmers, agribusinesses, communities, and other stakeholders working to build long-term resilience by diversifying away from tobacco production."

**Malawi Ranks Among Biggest Tobacco-Producing Countries in the World**

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World focuses on adult smoking cessation and harm reduction efforts in three areas - health and science research, agricultural transformation, and industry transformation. Each is considered critical to successfully combating smoking, which leads to more than 7 million deaths each year around the world.

One often overlooked factor in reducing the use of tobacco for smoking is helping farmers, particularly in developing nations, transition into diverse agricultural value chains, including crops, livestock and aquaculture. Malawi is a country that the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World has focused on because of its high ranking among tobacco-producing countries.

While China, Brazil, and India are the world’s largest producers of tobacco, Malawi is the only country in the world where tobacco exports account for more than 1 percent of total gross domestic product. In Malawi, tobacco exports account for 8.45 percent of the country’s GDP, making tobacco the country’s most-produced and exported crop. Taken together, these numbers show that Malawi - a country where almost 77 percent of the workforce is in agriculture and more than half of the country lives in poverty - is one of the most tobacco-dependent countries in the world.

**How CAT Can Help Malawi Farmers Move Past Tobacco**

One of the key components to what the CAT offers is an education for farmers on techniques that can help increase crop yield. Mwatitha Braynati, a Malawian groundnut farmer since 2020, said that CAT helped her accomplish this goal.

"Before the CAT came to partner with us, my groundnut harvest totaled just 30 bags. Two years later, in 2022, from the same 1 hectare of land, my harvest increased to 120 bags with technical guidance from the CAT," she said. "Next year I expect it to increase to 150 bags by applying the new practices and technologies demonstrated through the CAT smart farms. The proceeds from the sale of this harvest have ensured my family of seven children and four grandchildren is happy and does not lack for a good variety of food at home."

CAT initiatives focus on teaching farmers the significance of using improved crop varieties, as well as innovative technologies in planting nutrition, plant protection, soil enhancement, irrigation, and ecosystem restoration. While these programs help farmers increase productivity and production in the short term, the long-term goal is to pave the way for Malawi farmers to rid themselves of dependence on tobacco farming. CAT programs focus on helping smallholder farmers produce enough for their families, and also on improving productivity to the point where they can have surplus to sell in both the domestic and foreign exchange markets.

The CAT provides a place for farmers to view and experiment with agricultural technology, as well as create partnerships and develop business plans. This includes technical assistance, mentorship, agribusiness development support, and access to a network of connections who can help farmers move forward with agricultural diversification. After completion of the CAT building, farmers will also be able to access soil testing and food testing laboratories to ensure their products meet market quality levels. With its growing workforce and large agricultural industry, Malawi is positioned to transition from tobacco and become a larger exporter of other types of crops.  

(\textit{Source: Foundation for a Smoke-Free World Funds New Centre for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi | HNGN - Headlines & Global News})
The Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) is one of the four consortium members of the CAT. At MUST, 11 CAT Scholars (4 PhD and 7 MSc) have been trained in areas of Food Science and Technology, Renewable Energy and Data Science. The training in food science and technology is critical to inform value addition done by agribusinesses who are the off-takers (markets) for smallholder farmers.

Additionally, $50,000 funds have been leveraged due to the CAT program, in which MUST has managed to secure other agriculture related grants. For example, the Borlaug Higher Education for Agricultural Research and Development (BHEARD) program provided US$50,000 to build institutional capacity that will be critical in supporting programs tailored at smallholder farmers across the country.
VOICES FROM THE FIELD

CAT has reached out to 40,235 smallholder tobacco farmers through its 28 partners, according to a CAT Impact Survey for 2022. CAT selected a few targeted smallholder farmers and partners and asked them how the CAT support has benefited them. Here is what they say:

“When you come back next year, you will see a different story. I have gained a lot from the CAT support. I follow what they taught us and now harvest high yields per small area especially the CAT groundnut variety.” – Billy Mgala, groundnut farmer, Matheza Village, T/A Chulu in Kasungu.

“We have impacted lives of 620 small farmers and their families. We have supported the smallholder farmers with new modern farming innovations and technologies on Cassava Production for high yield for economic viability at personal and household level. We have built capacities of farmers on new farming technologies, business management, value addition, provision of high yield varieties, climate smart agriculture, and conducted supportive visits for smallholder farmers with extension services which have helped farmers gain knowledge on how to increase cassava production” – Mark Songolo, Factory Production Manager – Africa Agriculture Holdings Limited.

“Previously, most of us here were just growing maize alongside tobacco because we didn’t have the seed and fertilizers to increase our production for other crops. Thanks to CAT, now we can grow soybean which demands less labor and profits are higher than tobacco” – Alinafe Phiri, soybean farmer, Khaya Village, T/A Mabilabo in Mzimba

“In the past, I was doing farming without following proper methods and I didn’t know the importance of using certified seeds like the groundnuts I am growing now. Following the support from CAT, we were properly advised on good farming methods and diversification. Later on, we were given groundnut seeds to grow and were also promised of ready good market” – Rosemary Mbewe, groundnut farmer, Chikwesa Village, T/A Mwase, Kasungu.

“I have purchased various farm inputs as well as a bicycle with profits from groundnuts, soybeans and chilies sales under a contract farming agreement. Now, I no longer do piece work on crop fields or take usury or beg to find money as I used to do before CAT came in. The support from CAT has helped me a lot” – Joyce Zebron, chilies farmer, Chitedze village, T/A Mwadzama in Nkhatakota.

“Each time I went to the smart farm, I used to listen more to what the extension workers were telling us on the advantages of crop varieties like maize, soybeans, groundnuts and other root crops. Being a maize farmer, my immediate interest has always been on maize. As farmers, we shouldn’t just come to the smart farm for nothing but should take what they show us and do it ourselves. I have done it at home in my dambo field and found it to be beneficial. I encourage my fellow farmers to practice what they learn from the smart farm” – Harry Kasondo, maize farmer, Mpokosa village, T/A Chadza in Lilongwe.
“With the invaluable support from CAT, we successfully reached an impressive number of 2,300 smallholder farmers through our input loan program. This initiative enabled us to extend vital financial assistance to a substantial agricultural community, empowering them to enhance their farming activities and achieve sustainable growth. We have observed significant positive outcomes from our initiatives. Specifically, 74 percent of the farmers we worked with have witnessed a remarkable income increase of over 42 percent. This improvement clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of our support in helping farmers enhance their financial well-being and achieve greater economic prosperity” – Madalitso Chipekwe, Program Manager – ACADES

“We have seen a huge change in terms of yield and incomes among the smallholder farmers. Sunflower is becoming more popular among our smallholder farmers which indicates a positive adoption rate. As an example of 2023 harvest, more than 20 farmers have harvested over 1200 kilograms of sunflower with the value of K600,000. Smallholder farmers collectively harvested 238,416 kilograms in the year of 2022 compared to the previous years before CAT” – Chikondi Khonje, Managing Director - Going Green Limited

“We have reached a total of 274 farmers (151 female) since January 2021 when CAT came. The response has been good considering that no farmer so far has reported that our product has not helped him or her. In the last farming season, we even failed to meet the demand as smallholder farmers demanded to purchase additional 460 bags of VUNA COMPOST, but we were in short supply of the product because demand was high among smallholder farmers” – Marko Chiumbo, Managing Director - Green Ventures Limited

“As a project, our main objective is to promote productivity by providing improved inputs and extension services to 2,000 farmers in Malawi. We have managed to recruit, train and provide quality seed to 2,000 farmers. During this time, we have seen a number of farmers who were stuck in tobacco estates joining our program due to easy access to inputs for legume production” – Rita Chakhaza, Project Manager – Guja Investment Limited.

“As an enterprise, we have learnt that it’s possible for farmers to diversify and improve their economic fortunes by venturing into beekeeping. With the necessary trainings that were funded by CAT, farmers have gained skills in beehive hanging and management, enhancing colonization rates. The derivation of economic benefits from beekeeping by smallholder farmers has contributed to sustainable management of Mwimba Forest Reserve through joint efforts of the college and the surrounding communities” – Dennis Nyirenda, Project Manager – Mwimba College Honey Enterprise
UPCOMING EVENTS

Exhibition at the National Agricultural Fair,  
24-26 August 2023

Phuka Incubation, 6 weeks program,  
August-September 2023

Market Access and Segmentation tools Training for CAT Partners,  
August – September 2023

GEMS and Market Segmentation tool training for LUANAR and MUST students,  
August – September 2023

Drone training for BIC partners,  
August – September 2023
PICTORIAL FOCUS ON THE MEGA FARMER FIELD DAY HELD ON 6TH APRIL 2023 AT CAT-NRC SMART FARM

The CAT organized a mega farmer field day to expose tobacco and non-tobacco smallholder farmers to various modern agricultural technologies (including improved seeds, plant nutrition, plant protection), as well as sensitize them on the importance of maintaining good soil health. The focus on good soil health came following the soil amendment works which CAT conducted at the CAT-NRC Smart Farm. The Guest of Honor during the event was Mrs. Sheila Kang’ombe, Program Manager for Lilongwe Agricultural Development Division (ADD). Here are a few photos taken during the day.

L-R: Dr. Agnes Mwangwela, Deputy Vice chancellor for LUANAR (in green top), Dr. Candida Nakhumwa – Vice President and Country Director for Foundation for a Smoke-Free world (FSFW), and Mrs. Sheila Kang’ombe – Guest of Honour and Program Manager, Lilongwe ADD at the NASFAM demo plot.

CAT Executive Director, Macleod Nkhoma makes a point as Mrs Kang’ombe (Left) and Senior Group Mazilo (second Left in brown jacket) look on.

Beatrice Lewani of Agricultural Supplies and Services Limited (ASSL) showing off a pesticide bottle farmers can buy to protect soybean from the devastating soybean rust disease.

A cross-section of farmers touring a soybean demo plot inside the Smart Farm.
Some students and farmers at groundnut demo plots listening to a presentation on good management practices for groundnuts by Pyxus.

Value addition – some patrons appreciating cooking oil processed from sunflower, one of the value chains the CAT focuses on.

Farm machinery was also on display during the field day to promote use of agricultural mechanization.
Supported with the help of a grant from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, Inc. The grant is administered with the help of the Foundation’s affiliate, the Agricultural Transformation Initiative (ATI), a nonprofit organization in Malawi, which is working toward diversifying the country’s tobacco-dependent economy.

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