

## “Every country has its own challenges”

Christopher Stewart, Global Head of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, Olam International

### ► Why did Olam commit to zero deforestation?

Olam has committed to zero deforestation of high conservation value (HCV) and high carbon stock (HCS) forests, no operating in peatland, no burning during any land clearing, and no new plantations without free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from local communities. This is our Palm Policy commitment. And after four years on the ground in Gabon, thanks to the detailed, extensive and collaborative planning approach we employed, we have planted more than 40,000 ha of ecologically integrated plantations and are seeing amazing results in job creation and poverty reduction, with minimal negative social impacts.

### ► How did you put this into practice, and what difficulties did you face?

We developed our Palm Policy in 2011, based on RSPO certification, updated it in 2015 and 2016, and recruited an expert team to implement it in Gabon. Every country has its own challenges, but we were lucky in Gabon. The government made a serious commitment to sustainable agricultural development with its national strategic plan and framework of legislation, creating a very welcoming enabling environment. But there are other governments who exercise their sovereign right to convert their forest land to help provide income, food security and economic development, without a balancing consideration for landscape ecological management or climate impacts. And here lies the problem.

### ► What changes would help you?

NGOs play a positive role in showing us areas where we can improve, but they could help us more by exploring alternatives to a one-size-fits-all solution. Governments in countries with extensive natural landscapes and deep social development challenges understandably want higher-yielding agriculture, and it appears to be “a reasonable ask” to make clear what is acceptable/unacceptable, especially in site selection, and to balance any negative environmental impacts with compensatory actions. And together, we need a broad-based cross-regional dialogue, where NGOs, corporations and governments can engage positively and seek out country-specific solutions.

### ► Where do you see such commitments into the future?

Commitments are important, but we have to have to get the implementation right to achieve the incredible opportunity before us today. Olam alone sources directly from about a million smallholders and reaches four times more. We have a flagship programme, the Olam Livelihood Charter, that provides economic, social and environmental support to 345,000 smallholders growing coffee, cocoa, cashew and cotton. A key element is training in climate-smart agriculture and the value of standing forest. So, as one of the companies most deeply embedded in smallholder supply chains, we can make more of an impact through creative partnerships. As an industry, we need to understand how we can create shared value within our sourcing supply chains, but also, how we can work with others to contribute more to landscape-scale initiatives in key regions where we operate, such as by supporting large-scale forest restoration programmes.