

Scaling-Up Conservation Agriculture in Kenya

January 2020

Program Highlights in Kenya

- Over 17,000 farmers, 76% of whom are women, are practicing conservation agriculture.
- Farmers practicing conservation agriculture have been more resilient to drought.
- Kenyan partners are facilitating innovations in gender-sensitive mechanization that have contributed to reducing agricultural workloads for women.
- The program is playing a key connecting role through the Conservation Agriculture Platform, bringing together 30 institutions including NGOs, government, multilateral agencies, academic institutions, and the private sector.

Scaling-Up Conservation Agriculture in East Africa is a five-year program (2015-2020) of Canadian Foodgrains Bank with funding from the Government of Canada to enable 50,000 smallholder farmers in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania to practice conservation agriculture. Now in its fifth and final year, key areas of focus include building and strengthening support structures that will enable conservation agriculture (CA) to continue beyond the *Scaling-Up CA* program, including policy advocacy, training government extension officers, and facilitating strategic private sector linkages.

In Kenya, the program is implemented by Mennonite Central Committee and World Renew with five local partners: Anglican Development Services (ADS) Mount Kenya, ADS Western, Nakuru Region Inter Diocesan Christian Community Services, Sahelian Solutions, and Utooni Development Organization. Program activities take place in Busia, Kajiado, Kitui, Machakos, Makueni, Murang'a, and Nakuru counties.

What is conservation agriculture?

Conservation agriculture is characterized by the practice of three principles: minimal or zero tillage, permanent organic soil cover (mulch or cover crop residues), and diversified crop production.

Adoption and Innovation of Conservation Agriculture Farming Systems

As of September 2019, the five partners in Kenya have trained 18,913 farmers in CA principles and 17,245 farmers (13,088 female and 4,157 male) have adopted at least two of the three CA principles in their own fields. This means the program target of 17,170 practicing farmers in Kenya by September 2020 has already been surpassed.

All Kenyan program locations have experienced periods of drought. However, almost all farmers who have tried conservation agriculture report improved soil health and moisture retention. This has meant that they managed to harvest a crop, even in seasons when crops grown using conventional methods completely failed. Field staff observed that, despite the drought, about 40% of farmers had food remaining in their homes from the previous season as they stored cereals in hermetic bags which were safe and easy to use with almost no post-harvest losses or damages.

Partner organizations have continued training of farmers on diversifying farming practices, including raising small livestock and planting drought-resistant crops such as sorghum. Training on alternative, complementary livelihoods such as rearing indigenous poultry as a measure to mitigate the effects of drought and enable farmers to earn an income during drought seasons are also included.

Kenyan partners are working with local fabricators to develop innovative tools that are appropriate for CA. Long-handled scrapers are a simple tool that reduce soil disturbance. They have also made weeding easier for men which has, in turn, contributed to a more equitable distribution of weeding burden. The program has also enabled farmers to experiment with soil ripping tools that are compatible with CA principles and have introduced jab planters which require up to four times less labour than planting by hand. In Nakuru, these innovations have reduced the labour time of participating female farmers by 50%.

Engaging County and National Governments

All partners in Kenya have partnered closely with the county governments of the programming communities. This has included hosting CA policy champion trainings to equip government officials, farmers, and CA service providers with a practical understanding of CA and raise the profile of CA within the local government. Partners have also implemented a trainer or trainers approach with government staff. Additionally, data from farmer experimentation and learning has been shared with county policy makers so that these learnings can be applied in local extension services.

Empowering Women Through Savings Groups

Over 13,000 farmers, 11,608 of whom are women have joined a savings group through the program. These savings groups promote community cohesion and provide a forum for farmers to meet voluntarily and frequently in addition to enabling farmers to collectively source and purchase inputs such as certified seed in bulk. They also provide opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in the community.



These savings groups have enabled farmers to better cope with drought. Funds have been used to purchase food, rent farmland, pay farm labour, pay school fees and medical bills, and invest in poultry. Some entrepreneurial groups have started multitiered kitchen gardens to produce vegetables. As savings groups mature, partners are training groups on larger income-generating activities.

Facilitating Multisectoral Co-operation

Program partners participate on a Conservation Agriculture Platform (CA Hub Kenya) to foster cooperation and facilitate knowledge sharing among international and local NGO, national and county government, research and academic institutions, multilateral agencies and the private sector. The Hub Kenya membership has grown from just under 10 to 30 institutions within the last three years. Some partners are also working with diverse stakeholders in their own region to establish local CA Communities of Practice. In partnership with the African Conservation Tillage Network, the program continued to engage stakeholders and identify opportunities for policy development for the support of conservation agriculture across East Africa.

Supporting Market Linkages

The program has also facilitated linkages with the private sector by connecting farmers with companies developing scale-appropriate equipment for conservation agriculture and with microfinance institutions. through CA, farmers are experiencing increased and more consistent yields, and some farmer groups have signed contracts with buyers and benefited from participating in aggregation groups. This has led to need for improved post-harvest storage and marketing strategies. The *Scaling-Up CA* program has worked with partners to promote the use of hermetic bags and is linking farmers with suppliers of the bags. This allows farmers to sell crops later in the year when prices increase or store the crops until the next lean season, ensuring better household food security. For example, a Business to Business forum was organized in Nakuru, in partnership with the East Africa Grain Council. As a result, two marketing producers' groups were linked with a local miller who purchased their maize for KES 1,700 per kg, significantly higher than the farm gate price of KES 1,200. In other regions, farmer aggregation groups have begun cooperatively marketing sorghum, green grams, cowpeas and beans.

For More Information

Mueni Udeozor, Program Coordinator
mudeozor@foodgrainsbank.ca
+254 7912 73109

John Kimathi Kirima, CA Technical Specialist
jkirima@foodgrainsbank.ca
+254 721 271 254

Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working to end global hunger through food assistance, nutrition, and sustainable food security programming. This program is being implemented by three Canadian Foodgrains Bank members: Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Tearfund Canada, and World Renew.

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