### Updates & News Alert

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### Editor’s view: Introducing November - December 2021 CA & SAM Issue

As we transit to the new year 2022, we must remain reminded of what the Heads of States and Governments adopted in June 2014 during the African Union meeting, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea - the CAADP–Malabo declaration - to accelerate Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. The commitments include: (a) ending hunger by 2025, (b) halving poverty by 2025, (c) enhancing resilience in livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other shocks, and (d) bringing down child stunting to 10% and overweight to 5% by 2025. Furthermore, to achieve this CAADP Malabo Declaration aspirations, we are compelled to transform the business as usual farming systems of the last four decades to more resilient and sustainable systems. We cannot expect different results by doing things the same way; where low productivity, high labour and drudgery demands, feminization of agriculture and associated natural resource degradation are on the increase.

Conservation Agriculture and Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization technologies and practices are fully aligned to realization of this African Union’s 2014 Malabo Declaration Vision of 25x25, [https://bit.ly/3qqYeZ1](https://bit.ly/3qqYeZ1), which aims to support at least 25 million farm households adopt climate smart agriculture by 2025. Likewise, the African Union’s goal to send the hand hoe to the museum and liberate the African farmer from the backbreaking drudgery of tilling the land by hand calls for operationalization of the 2018 Framework for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Africa [SAMA Framework](https://bit.ly/3qqYeZ1). The Framework does also emphasize that mechanization should cover the entire agri-food value chain, including harvesting, post-harvest handling, and processing operations to increase the quality and value of the agricultural production, reduce food losses, incorporate food safety aspects and strengthen farmer-market linkages.

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### ACT’s Executive Director Desk: Season’s Greetings and Appreciation

The year 2021 has not been without challenges. The COVID-19 Pandemic disrupted global economics, constraining and interrupting many organizations’ activities and relations. The African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT) was equally exposed to these disruptions and shocks. We are, however, pleased to say that ACT managed to accomplished most of its planned activities, something that would not have been possible without the immeasurable support of our sponsors, partners and friends. The partnership and support to lift the millions of smallholder farmers out of poverty through promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture technologies, innovations and practices such as Conservation Agriculture and Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization, among others, is highly acknowledged.

Despite the trying and challenging times in 2021, ACT continues building new and stronger partnerships, uncover innovative and more efficient frontiers for serving farmers and other on-the-ground stakeholders while contributing to global and regional alliances to unlock investments for adoption of Conservation Agriculture and Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization.

Thank you all for your patronage in 2021. We look forward to growing opportunities in 2022.

Eng. Saidi Mkomwa
ACT Executive Secretary

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Continued on page 2
The Eighth Webinar: Operationalization of the Framework for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Africa (F-SAMA)

The eighth webinar in the series was organized with a view to draw lessons learned from the annual AfricaMechanize Webinar series and further the deliberations for 2022. The webinar was held virtual on Thursday, 2nd December 2021 between 09:00 – 11:00 am (GMT). The theme of the 8th webinar was “Lessons learned from the annual AfricaMechanize Webinar series and deliberations for 2022.”

Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (SAM) in Africa remains to be an urgent imperative and an indispensable pillar for attaining the Malabo Declaration Zero Hunger Vision by 2025, Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals – and Agenda 2063, the Prosperous Africa that We Want. Doubling agricultural productivity and eliminating hunger and malnutrition in Africa by 2025 will not be realized unless mechanization along the food value chain is accorded utmost priority. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the important role mechanization can play in ensuring continuity of farm operations even during uncommon situations that the world is currently witnessing.

Understanding this situation, the African Union Commission (AUC) (https://au.int/), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UNFAO) (www.fao.org), through an Africa-wide consultative process, developed a Framework for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Africa (F-SAMA) that was launched in Rome on 5th October 2018. The framework which has ten priority elements is geared towards informing policy and decision-makers in the Member States, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, and the wider development community dealing with agricultural development on the significance of mainstreaming SAM using F-SAMA principles in their overall national and regional agricultural development programmes.
Online Training of Trainers (ToTs) in Mechanization Hire Services Provision in African Countries

Africa is the continent with the least mechanised agricultural system in the world. African farmers have ten times fewer mechanised tools per farm area than farmers in other developed regions, and access has not grown as quickly as in other regions. 50-85% of farm work continues to be done manually, without the support of animals or machinery. Only 10% of total power for land preparation in sub-Saharan Africa comes from engine-powered machines, usually using fossil fuels.

Fundamentally, it is widely acknowledged that sustainable agricultural mechanization has great potential to contribute to the growth and modernization of the agricultural sector in Sub Sahara Africa (SSA) along the entire agrifood value chain. However, the use of mechanization technologies and entrepreneurial skills is still very low in the region. Moreover, many smallholder farmers often do not have the necessary capital nor access to long-term credit to invest in required farm machinery which helps them increase their land and labour productivity, increase their incomes and improve their livelihoods.

There exist a number of actors from government institutions, private sector, research and training and non-governmental organisations who are involved in the promotion of SAM. These institutions are resourceful to the successful introduction, implementation and sustaining of agricultural mechanization. Thus, SAM must be actively institutionalized in policy and institutional frameworks; farmers must be involved in awareness creation and learning by seeing (demonstration activities); pertinent support services to enhance implementation of SAM to service providers must be available and provided; knowledge management and extension service need to be enhanced. The need for capacity development of these categories of actors along the mechanized agrifood value chain is imminently a key issue to be addressed. In implementation of SAM and associated service provision as businesses, skilled labour force is critically needed to encourage efficiency and effectiveness as well as enhanced quality of service.

It is at this backdrop, that ACT and FAO designed capacity building program on ‘Mechanization Hires service provision as a business’ as part of their joint actions in operationalization of F-SAMA. The main objective of this program was to raise awareness among the agri-food machinery players on the opportunities offered in sustainable agricultural mechanization service provision, build capacity of MSPs to enhance their service provision and improve access to mechanization services by smallholder farmers. Besides, enhancing their understanding about Conservation Agriculture technology and practices and how to do quality mechanization service provision as business.

The core approach to capacity building of MSPs was anchored on the identification, supporting and strengthening of partner institutions at the grassroots and national level who will ultimately be responsible for the MSP operator trainings and the cluster-based support services. In addition to strengthening of the local partners, the training of the Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) at the partner level are supported using approved training materials and curricular, leading to certification of qualified ToTs by AfricaMechanize. The ultimate goal is to ensuring continued provision on the capacity development training services in the short and medium term.

This online training of trainers was organized by ACT with support of FAO and the Directorates of Mechanization in the different countries with an objective to build capacity of existing and potential local and national partners subsequently stage to support training of agricultural machinery operators. The training programme was designed to provide the participants with skills and competencies in both the technical and the management aspects of the small-scale mechanization business and better understanding of new technologies such as Conservation Agriculture.

Three different training were done to different target audience as follows:

1. Training of Trainers (ToTs) in Mechanization Hire Services Provision in Rice Value Chain: Target Countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone

2. Training of Trainers (ToTs) in Mechanization Hire Services Provision in Eastern and Southern Africa: Target Countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. Training of Trainers (ToTs) in Mechanization Hire Services Provision in French Speaking west & Central Africa: Target Countries: Bénin, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali et Sénégal

Information about capacity building program and course modules are available on the link [read more]. Besides, some of the training materials used during these trainings are available on the link [relevant materials].
Launch of Conservation Agriculture Road Map for Morocco: To Convert 1M ha to Conservation Agriculture

Morocco, the only country in the region to practice Conservation Agriculture (CA) at scale, will now become a hub for dryland sustainable agricultural systems, boosted by decades-long joint research on CA between ICARDA and the National Agricultural Research Institute (INRA) of Morocco.

Conservation Agriculture is a sustainable agricultural production system guided by three core principles: no (or minimal) tillage to the soil after harvest; permanent soil cover to lock in moisture and reduce evaporation; and crop diversification replacing monocropping - to enhance soil health and subsequently improve crop productivity and household resilience. Over a long and productive partnership, ICARDA and INRA have investigated crop rotation systems of cereals, legumes, and forage crops under CA at the ICARDA/INRA Marchouch research station near Rabat and across INRA’s research stations in Morocco. They produced clear scientific evidence that Conservation Agriculture is highly beneficial to the country’s agricultural system.

According to Dr. Nangia, this officially establishes CA as a scientifically sound system, trusted to deliver significant impact to the country.

Notably, the Minister of Agriculture launched the Conservation Agriculture Road Map for Morocco that seeks to reach 1 million hectares by 2030. This year the CA acreage is 50 000 hectares in 5 agricultural regions of the country. Significant efforts have been made to advance CA research over 4 decades (since early 1980s) and CA adoption trials have started in the late 1990s. So far, the CA area in Morocco has reached 30 000 hectares. The Road Map for CA mainstreaming and spreading is part of the new Moroccan Strategy named Green Generation 2020-2030.

No-Till Provides Potential for 300% Yield Increases for Kenyan Farmers

Before switching to no-till, Kenyan smallholder farmer Pauline Mughambi had trouble feeding her two children from the yields on her 1 acre (0.5 ha) of land.

The retired accountant-turned-farmer is located in Nakuru County, about 96 miles northwest of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital. Despite putting countless hours into tilling her land, Mughambi either had too little or too much moisture with conventional tillage, and her harvests were poor. Mughambi told Zenger News that she was about to give up farming, but she changed her mind when she discovered no-till.

Mughambi harvested 13 bags (1.2 tonnes) of corn in her first year of no-tilling, more than double the 6 bags (0.54 tonnes) she’d typically get from conventional tillage. Now, she’s harvesting 36-40 bags (3.25 -3.6 tonnes) in a typical year. Her no-till beans, sweet potatoes, vegetables, bananas and fodder also are giving her good returns with less work.

Mughambi has become a champion for no-till in Africa and around the world. In 2018, she won the Eastern Africa Conservation Agriculture Award, and she represented small farmers in Africa at the Eighth World Congress on Conservation Agriculture in Switzerland in 2021.

With more than enough food to feed her family, she’s been able to sell her surplus as her main source of income. She’s also putting money back in her pocket by spending less on her no-till system. Her 1 acre used to cost her about $300 to till and fertilize, but now she’s only spending about a quarter of that. The savings and extra income have allowed her to put her two kids through university, build a home and buy five dairy cows.

Mughambi has become a champion for no-till in Africa and around the world. In 2018, she won the Eastern Africa Conservation Agriculture Award, and she represented small farmers in Africa at the Eighth World Congress on Conservation Agriculture in Switzerland in 2021. Thousands of Kenyan farmers have learned about no-till through an FAO project introduced in 2007. As of 2018, approximately 26,000 farmers from 18 regions of Kenya have been trained on and are practicing no-till.

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“The ICARDA and INRA research made a strong and successful case to the government for CA to be integrated within Morocco’s new ‘Green Generation 2020-2030’ strategy,” says Dr. Vinay Nangia, ICARDA’s Research Team Leader in Soils, Water, and Agronomy.
Australia backs Conservation Agriculture centre, India

With the support of the Australian Government, the Centre of Excellence for Conservation Agriculture opened on 15th November, 2021 at the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (North Bengal Agriculture University), West Bengal, India. Agricultural extension officers, farmers, policy makers and service providers will be trained in Conservation Agriculture practices at the new facility. Participating in the opening ceremony was the Australian Consul-General in Kolkata Ms Rowan Ainsworth, who expressed that through the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio, supported by ACIAR and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia has contributed A$50,000 to the Centre. Ainsworth further said ‘Australia and India share an interest in Conservation Agriculture and the Centre will contribute to sustainable agriculture practices for resilient and inclusive farming systems in eastern India.’

The Centre will help extension officers share the most up to date information so that more smallholder farmers can learn about current labour-saving and production-boosting practices that support sustainable agricultural intensification. Vice-Chancellor Dr Swarup Kumar Chakraborti said the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (North Bengal Agriculture University) was proud to be home to the Centre of Excellence, which would provide support for Conservation Agriculture practices in the wider north east of India. ‘Research into Conservation Agriculture for sustainable intensification shows that it saves farmers time, money, water and emissions; and increases profits,’ Dr Chakraborti said. ‘While there has been good uptake of Conservation Agriculture practices in West Bengal, this new Centre will make sure farmers can access well trained support services, further improving the adoption these new technologies.’

ACIAR Research Program Manager for Crops Dr Eric Huttner said research projects in the Eastern Gangetic Plains had demonstrated the benefits of Conservation Agriculture practices in the region. These practices include establishing crops with minimum or zero tillage, retaining the previous crop residue (straw) on the ground as mulch, and rotating crops on the cultivated plot. However, Eric insisted that the successful adoption of Conservation Agriculture practices requires new skills and knowledge for smallholder farmers.

The Centre of Excellence will be the training centre for Conservation Agriculture for sustainable intensification catering to India and neighbouring countries. The curriculum and training materials, which will be delivered by the North Bengal Agriculture University and supported through the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), are based on the research findings from the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio. ‘Most notably, this includes the research project Sustainable and Resilient Farming Systems Intensification, under which research has run in West Bengal and Bihar, India, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal from 2013 until the end of September this year 2021,’ Dr Huttner said.

The project leader, Dr Brendan Brown, said establishing the Centre of Excellence was part of a plan to ensure the seven years of the project translated into sustained, long-term impact on farmers’ lives and livelihoods. This plan also includes a series of video guides on Conservation Agriculture based sustainable intensification for both farmers and service providers. CIMMYT has developed the CASI Visual Syllabus that includes a series of ‘How Do I’ videos to help people learn how to correctly implement the practices. The videos are available in Bengali, English and Hindi. Read more

Partnership brief: FAO’s partnership with ACT – Sustainable mechanization innovations for economic growth of smallholders

The African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have been working together since 2019 to support African farming households in creating opportunities for economic growth through Conservation Agriculture and sustainable agricultural mechanization.

ACT and FAO have worked closely with farmers and value chain actors to promote mechanization hire services, providing directions for investments for sustainable mechanization, and piloting mechanization and digitalization innovations adapted specifically to local contexts. This partnership has supported farmers in making the transition from subsistence farming to commercially and market-oriented farming.

In collaboration with the African Union Commission, ACT and FAO have been working to raise awareness on new ways of funding in sustainable agricultural mechanization and develop capacity for mechanization hire service providers and policy makers in support of the implementation of the Framework for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization for Africa (F-SAMA). Launched in 2018 by the African Union and FAO, the F-SAMA emphasizes the need for mainstreaming sustainable agricultural mechanization in agricultural development programmes, aiming to move smallholders from hand tool-based labour to innovative technologies. Sustainable mechanization cuts working time, relieves labour shortages, raises productivity and encourages youth into agriculture, and also aids in efficient use of agricultural resources, helping mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing harmful emissions and increasing farmer resilience. Read More
Boosting climate smart agriculture through access to ripping technology

With soil health high on the policy agenda, EURACTIV took a look at how advances in tractor technology can help boost climate-smart agriculture and promote no-till agriculture through the lens of a project in East Africa. Soil health is at the heart of the EU’s new Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, both of which aim to tackle biodiversity loss, reverse climate change and support sustainable land use.

Most recently, the EU adopted a soil strategy designed to offer an overarching policy framework for soil restoration, including plans for a soil health law by 2023. But despite gaining increasing policy recognition, soils are in a sorry state across the world. According to current estimates, 33% of the Earth’s soils are already degraded while more than 90% are at risk of becoming degraded by 2050.

One way in which farmers are working to address these issues is via no-till, or reduced-till, agriculture. A key component of the so-called Conservation Agriculture (CA), this practice involves planting crops without tilling the soil, which is the conventional way of preparing the soil for planting by digging, stirring, and turning it over. While tilling kills unwanted plants and allows for easier planting, it is costly and time-consuming and can lower the quality of the soil through soil compaction and erosion.

“No-till farming is an excellent soil conservation practice that’s been proven to help reduce soil erosion and runoff,” Barbra Muzata, head of communications for agrochemical company Corteva Africa Middle East, told EURACTIV. As part of the company’s 2030 Sustainability Goals, she is involved in a number of projects intended to educate farmers on best practices, including soil health, and nutrients and water stewardship. “Farmers are practicing Conservation Agriculture on large-scale farms to improve soil fertility, increase yields, and boost profits,” she added. Learn More
Publication

Advances in Conservation Agriculture: adoption and spread

With growing scientific concern around the limitations of tillage-based agriculture, coupled with the sector’s need to contribute to being more sustainable, the development and adoption of alternative farming techniques has never been more important. Conservation Agriculture (CA) is emerging as a key alternative. The foundations of CA are built upon the use of no-till techniques and the use of rotations and cover crops to optimise different aspects of soil and crop health and resilience.

The publication on Advances in Conservation Agriculture Volume 3: Adoption and Spread provides an authoritative review from an array of international experts on the adoption of CA principles in different regions around the world. The final volume in this collection reviews the effectiveness of CA in differing contexts (e.g. in drier conditions where water conservation is important or in areas with poor soil) and refers to the wealth of research and experiential evidence currently available. Some of the key features of this publication include:

- Summarises current research on the adoption of CA principles in different regions around the world
- Highlights the emergence of Conservation Agriculture (CA) as a key alternative to tillage-based agriculture
- Reviews the challenges of effective implementation of CA in different contexts (e.g. drier conditions, poor soil quality)

Notable remark from David R. Montgomerie, author of Dirt: The Erosion of Civilisations and Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life indicated that “With comprehensive global coverage, this remarkable compilation will stand as a milestone on the road to transforming agriculture, illustrating how innovative farmers around the world are adapting their practices to ditch the plow, cover up, and grow diversity.”

The editor of this publication Professor Amir Kassam is visiting Professor at the University of Reading (UK) and Moderator of the FAO-hosted Global Platform for Conservation Agriculture Community of Practice (Global CA-CoP). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology (UK) and has received an OBE from the British Government for services to tropical agriculture and to rural development. Prof. Kassam is Chair of the International Conservation Agriculture Advisory Panel for Africa (ICAAP-Africa), Member of the European Conservation Agriculture Federation (ECAF) and Vice-Chair of the Conservation Agriculture Association for the UK (CA-UK). He is former Chair of the Aga Khan Foundation (UK), the FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance Europe Foundation and the Tropical Agriculture Association (TAA). He has held senior positions at international organisations such as the FAO and CGIAR and has worked with many national and international programmes on sustainable agricultural development. He has published widely on Conservation Agriculture. Read more

Conservation Agriculture in Africa: Climate Smart Agricultural Development

Tillage agriculture has led to widespread soil and ecosystem degradation globally, and more particularly in the developing regions. This is especially so in Africa where traditional agricultural practices have become unsustainable due to severe exploitation of natural resources with negative impacts on the environment and food system. In addition, agricultural land use in Africa today faces major challenges including increased costs, climate change and a need to transform to more sustainable production intensification systems.

Conservation Agriculture has emerged as a major alternative sustainable climate smart agriculture approach in Africa and has spread to many African countries in the past decade as more development and research, including in sustainable mechanization, has enabled its extension and uptake. It is key to transforming Africa’s agriculture and food system given its ability to restore soil health, biodiversity and productivity of millions of smallholder farms as well as larger-scale farms.

This landmark volume is based on the material presented at the Second Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 9-12 October 2018. The main theme of the Congress was ‘Making Climate Smart Agriculture Real in Africa with Conservation Agriculture: Supporting the Malabo Declaration and Agenda 2063’. The Congress was aligned to mobilize stakeholders in all agriculture sectors to provide greater technical, institutional, development and investment support, impetus and direction to the vision and agenda for transforming African agriculture as set out by the Malabo Declaration and Agenda 2063.

This book is aimed at all agricultural stakeholders in the public, private and civil sectors in Africa engaged in supporting the transformation of conventional tillage agriculture to Conservation Agriculture. The book will be of interest to: researchers, academics, students, development stakeholders, public and private sector investors and policy makers as well as institutional libraries across the world. Read More
WEBINAR No. 9: Establishment of Operational Structures for Implementation of the F-SAMA at Sub-Regional and Regional levels

Date: Thursday, 24th February 2022  
Time: 09:00 – 12:00 hrs (GMT)

In the period of November 2020 to December 2021, eight webinars were conducted with Heads of Agricultural Mechanization and Engineering Services (HAMES) and other selected stakeholders of SAM in SSA on key initial activities on operationalization of F-SAMA. The webinars attracted more than 1,500 participants and 60 speakers from over 75 countries (45 from Africa). The virtual discussions were conducted through the AfricaMechanize information platform and organized under the joint actions of FAO, AUC, ACT and other mechanization stakeholders.

Key lessons which emerged from the eight webinars involving 19 HAMES led to a resolution to organise a webinar bringing together HAMES across sub-Saharan Africa, to establish operational structures for supporting the joint implementation of F-SAMA at sub-regional and regional levels.

Participants to Webinar 9 are therefore HAMES from the 48 SSA countries; representatives of the RECs (EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC); AUC as Chair of the meeting; with FAO and ACT attending as facilitators.

These webinars and discussion forums are being organized by the African Union (https://au.int/), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (www.fao.org) and African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT) (www.act-africa.org).

The Webinar will be held in English and French and will be open to all HAMES from Africa, but not open to the public. Participating HAMES will need to register in advance at the AfricaMechanize website at: www.africamechanize.org