

**CENTRE FOR PROMOTION OF CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (CEPROCA)**  
**PO BOX 13 NSO BUI DIVISION**  
**NW PROVINCE CAMEROON**  
**Tel: 762 72 17/782 34 54**  
**Email: [ceproca@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ceproca@yahoo.co.uk)**

**REPORT OF THE LAUNCHING OF THE  
CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE PROJECT  
FOR THE BUI HIGHLANDS  
December 10, 2005.**



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## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to each and everyone who in one way or another contributed to the success of this event. In particular we would like to thank the entire administration of Kumbo especially the SDO and Lord Mayor for their encouragement and moral support.

The event could not have taken place if we were not offered a hall. In this light we like to thank the manager of the Nso Area Cooperative Union for allowing us to use their facilities.

The staff of MINADER particularly the delegate and chief of Community Development made it possible for us to distribute invitations to the farmers. Without them turn out would not have been what it was.

We salute the courage of our innovative farmers. Specially, we wish to thank Reverend Sister Lawrence Sui of the Franciscan Sisters Shisong who gave us their valuable farmland for the demonstration farm that served the Shisong community. Through her many farmers have been exposed to the practice of conservation agriculture.

The managers of PRIMA and AMITY banks Kumbo responded to our appeal for financial support. On behalf of the pilot conservation agriculture practitioners in Bui we wish to thank them immensely for their gesture. Many more farmer events shall be coming up in the days ahead and we hope our elites, councils, parliamentarians, development organizations shall emulate their example.

To all the above we say the beginning is always difficult and that we have just begun a thousand mile journey and that there will be no turning back. Before we realize agriculture in Bui shall be sustainable economically, socially and ecologically.

## **Introduction:**

The Bui Highlands in the North West Province have been witnessing serious problems of land degradation and falling soil fertility due to conventional farming. It is characterized by the construction of ridges/beds. The ridge making process consists of clearing, stacking of cleared debris in rows and covering them with soil. In some cases farm debris are partially covered with soil and a fire is made to burn it. This exposes the soil to the sun, rain and wind. This combined with the hilly nature of the region accelerates erosion leading to soil fertility loss. This way of farming is unsustainable ecologically, economically and socially and has resulted in poverty, rural exodus, and social conflict. It is one of the major causes of biodiversity loss through deforestation.

Conservation agriculture is the practice of sowing without tillage and covering the soil with cover crops or mulch. It is based on reduced or completely zero mechanical tillage, soil cover and excessive crop rotations. In conservation agriculture, the composition, structure and natural biodiversity of the soil is kept in tact as much as possible. Conservation agriculture avoids the burning of plant residues. In this practice, the farmers are asked to keep away their hoes, ploughs and other tillage implements. The soil is never allowed to lie bare. It is protected at all times with crop residue such as leaves and thrash from previous crops or with suitable arable crops.

## **History**

In the early 70s farmers in the American continents started experiencing enormous problems of soil erosion and degradation. Researchers and farmers responded by developing new farming techniques the most successful of which was Conservation Agriculture. Significant efforts have been made to disseminate this technology through the organization of regional and international conferences. In 2001 there was the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress On Conservation Agriculture in Madrid-Spain. In 2003, the Brazilian delegation to this congress organized the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress in Brazil. In like manner the African delegates to Brazilian congress organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> one in October 2005 in Nairobi-Kenya. Introduction of Conservation Agriculture in Cameroon dates back to January 1, 2004 through a pilot project financed by GATE/GTZ and implemented by the Limbe Botanic Garden in collaboration with the Provincial Service of Agriculture, South West through the National Agriculture Research

and Extension Programme (PNVRA). Elsewhere in Cameroon the Centre For Promotion Of CA (CEPROCA) has been piloting its introduction in the Bui Highlands. Over the past two years CEPROCA has been sensitizing producer groups in the Bui Highlands on the advantages of adopting conservation agriculture as a sustainable farming practice from the environmental, economic and social perspective. During this time more than 1000 farmers and farmer delegates have been sensitized on a man to man basis. At the level of technical support over thirty demonstration farms have been established.

### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the launching were to:

1. Formally introduce CEPROCA to relevant stakeholders in the Bui Highlands
2. Share the results of pilot trials with farmers and other stakeholders
3. Seek public support for conservation agriculture implementation in the Bui Highlands
4. Discuss the implementation strategy with farmers, partners and other stakeholders in the agricultural and environmental domains

### **Expected results**

- i. Local awareness of the public, private, civil society and non governmental organizations on Conservation Agriculture raised
- ii. Groundwork for further dissemination of Conservation Agriculture techniques laid.

### **Expected Output**

The major out put of the launching was the to develop an action plan which demonstrates that participants are sufficiently motivated to each play their role in the development and promotion of Conservation Agriculture as a means obtaining high yields through sustainable natural resource management.

### **Presentations**

The launching started with opening prayers by Reverend Sister Lawrencia Sui of the Franciscan Sisters Shisong. This was followed by an introduction of CEPROCA team and the organisation. After the arrival of the representatives of the Senior Divisional Officer for Bui and that of the Lord Mayor of the Kumbo Urban Council there was the singing of the National anthem. The welcome address was then read by the representative of the Mayor of the Kumbo Urban

Council followed by the opening address by the representative of the Senior Divisional Officer. The two officials followed the presentations and debates on the practice of Conservation Agriculture as well as the strategy to promote Conservation Agriculture in the Bui Highlands.

Mr Fonba Eric presented CEPROCA. CEPROCA he said is a common initiative group run by volunteers. The main focus of the organisation is agricultural extension and environmental protection. It has as mission to improve the well-being of farming-dependent communities, reduce poverty and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources through the extension of innovative farming technologies. Concerning its services, CEPROCA offers extension in urban and rural agriculture using conservation agriculture techniques. It also trains farmers on income generating activities like bee keeping, market gardening and horticulture. It has expertise in crop valuation and also carries out training in aquaculture.

Its membership is open to farmers and professionals who are willing to work on voluntary bases. It is presently run by 13 volunteers. It derives its funds from:

- Membership dues
- Donations and
- Fundraising through proposal writing

The next session was on the practice of conservation agriculture presented by the group leader Wirsiy Eric. He had prepared a power point presentation to show concrete examples of Conservation Agriculture in other parts of Cameroon. Because of the absence of electricity this could not be done. Because there were many people during the launching who had neither been sensitized nor exposed to the concepts of Conservation Agriculture (CA) he took time to explain what it was all about and the reason behind its development. He highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of CA and talked on legislation in Europe meant to promote the principles. CA practitioners he said offer environmental services that have been recognized and appropriate legislation made to compensate them for that. CA for instance contributes to the reduction of global warming as it reduces the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> released in the atmosphere.

The last session still by the same person was on the strategy to promote CA in the Bui Highlands. Since CEPROCA focuses its activities on technical support there is need for private economic operators to take advantage of the emerging demand of agricultural inputs particularly agrochemicals. At the level of technical support CEPROCA was lacking in man power both numerically and qualitatively. The need for other civil society organisations to join in the race

was necessary. The participation of the government of Cameroon through the extension programme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development would hasten the scaling up of the technology. The participation of the institute of agronomic research for development would ensure the delivery of timely solutions to problems likely to arise with the introduction of a new technology. Experience elsewhere show that conversion to conservation agriculture requires tools most farmers are not presently using and which are relatively costly. There is the need for elites, local councils and government of Cameroon to assist farmers acquire these equipment. If no support is forth coming from the mentioned sources then the farmers would have to rely on themselves. The introduction of a “Tool-Hire-To Buy Scheme” will enable farmers own the tools required for the transition. When a farmer has paid the same amount for hiring a tool that he would have used to buy the tool he will become the owner

### **Farmer testimonies**

The presentations were followed by testimonies from early adopters of the technology. These were Reverend Sister Lawrencia Sui and Mama Veronica Wola. They narrated experiences of doubt, good yields, cost effectiveness, less labour input and difficulties in seeding through untilled soil.

According to Reverend Sister Lawrencia Sui, farmers in the Shisong area regarded her as being crazy when they realised she had planted her second season beans in untilled land. Many women visited her to enquire why she decided to waste valuable seed in an untilled farm. She always responded by saying if really this was madness then it is normal for ‘madness’ in the area was always associated to the Reverend Sisters. Madness in this sense refers to testing of innovations or the introduction of new ideas contrary to the customs of the people. Because of delays from the CEPROCA team planting could not be done on time and her colleagues kept on asking why she was waiting to cultivate. After planting there was good germination. Then the women took their turn in the madness. Women going to the farm would stop by, put down their baskets and watch in admiration how beans was growing in untilled soil through crop residues. Her crop was even acknowledged to be healthier than that in neighbouring farms where tillage had been done. The madness now died down and dialogue set in. Farmers then started asking her how they could practice this type of farming. She was very attentive during the launching listening most of the time and only asking obvious questions. Like many others who attended the launching she left with basic knowledge on the practice of conservation agriculture.

From the economic point of view Sister Lawrencia says CA farming is cheaper. She normally spent FCFA 7000 to clear her farm and about FCFA 22000 for the hoeing. This sum up to FCFA29000. She uses free labour for the planting. Using CA technique she needed just FCFA12000 for the weed killer. Planting too was free. The difference in the two methods is FCFA17000. We could not conclude because she is yet to harvest her crop before noting if there were any significant changes in the yield. The difference in yield she said would not be significant and if not of the delay in planting there could have even been an increase.

In addition to her missionary work we could see she would be assuming an agricultural extension role if CEPROCA does not take steps to salvage the situation. Sister runs a garden where she grows vegetables for her community. After the presentation on the negative impacts on conventional agriculture on the environment she could trace the source of the problems they encountered in their fish pond. The pond was filled with mud from neighbouring farms through erosion. The high cost of draining mud from the pond coupled with theft forced them to abandon their fish project. If CA were already adopted in the area there would be no such problem.

Mama Veronica Wola who was sensitized like many other farmers in her area did not have the resources to invest in conservation agriculture. However she was not selfish with her knowledge. She introduced the idea to a rich cattle farmer who rushed to the Jakiri market, bought the weed killers and used CA techniques in the cultivation of his bean crop. During harvesting she said Aladji and the children spent extended periods in his farmer harvesting the crop and that instead of the 2 ½ bags Aladji normally gets, this time he harvested 3 ½ bags. Aladji has been so pleased he promised to buy Mama Veronica a litre of palm oil in appreciation of the knowledge she passed onto to him.

Mama Veronica is one of those farmers who have never absented themselves from the series of sensitization and training workshops organized by CEPROCA. She falls in the category of small scale farmers CEPROCA is seeking funding to support.

### **Field visit**

A photography session preceded field visit. Prior to field visit the administration left to attend to other duty calls. The field visit was in one of the pilot trials at Shisong. There was an interactive session in the field and participants were able to link theory to practice. Many questions came up and were debated upon. The farm owner indicated that despite the benefits of conservation farming it was

very difficult to plant due to the fact there was no tillage. The resource persons explained that this was very normal and that with time this would disappear. Participants asked to know how possible it would be for them to plant in case the vegetation cover was too thick. In response it was said that there exist manual and animal drawn equipment capable of planting under such conditions. Since the practice is still being introduced in Cameroon such equipment is lacking but would be made available if policy makers make appropriate legislation in favour of conservation agriculture. The contribution of Cameroon scientist in the development of tools that would suit our local conditions is very important in this.

Another question came up when it was said that in conservation farming farmers cannot sow their crops on the same date as those practicing conventional agriculture. This is particularly true during planting at the beginning of the rainy season. This is because they must wait for weed seeds to germinate as the common weed killers act only through plant foliage.

Some farmers said they always left potato seeds in the soil after harvest and that since the common weed killers cannot differentiate between crops and weeds it would destroy their potato crops when it germinates together with the weeds. The only solution was for the farmers not to leave seeds in the farm but to harvest all and plant at the same time.

Participants asked to know if it was possible to plant and harvest maize without weeding as with short cycle pulses like beans. The answer was that in the South western part of Cameroon where this technology was first tested farmers did not need to weed after sowing. This may not be the case in the Bui Highlands as maize takes much longer to mature. Participants then asked if they would have to weed using the hoe as is the common practice. The answer was no. If you till at one time and do not till at another you are not practicing CA. If weed problems arose farmers could use herbicides if they sowed their crops in lines. This was quite a difficult concept to digest. The package seemed heavy at this level. However, it was summarised that the interested farmers would be involved in a process of participatory technology development during which time they would be making mistakes and learning from them.

It was emphasized that the practice of CA is more successful in monoculture systems. It is however not a problem if farmers associate crops with similar life cycles like beans and potatoes on their farms. In addition maize could be part of the association. The bean and potato crop would smother the soil suppressing

weed growth. After harvest smaller dosages of weed killers could be applied to control weeds if they were beyond the economic threshold level. Farmers were called upon to be patient and to try on portions of their farms. The results would be shared during exchange visits that shall be organized in the course of the next cropping season. Farms using traditional/conventional farming techniques adjacent to the demonstration farm were visited. The soil on these farms was bare and the crop of low quality compared to the one on the demonstration farm. Weed growth was higher on the tilled farm than on the demonstration farm.

The field visit ended with interviews conducted by Fai Cassian of the “Farmers Voice”. The mayor of the Nkor Rural Council invited CEPROCA to make a presentation on the practice of CA to farmers in his municipality on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2005. The participants left for their respective destinations happy they had learnt some thing new.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Welcome Address**

Address presented by the first deputy mayor for the Kumbo Urban Council

The Senior Divisional Officer Bui;  
Councilors;  
All protocol respected;  
Ladies and gentlemen;

I have the honour to welcome you all for the launching of the Conservation Agriculture Project for the Bui Highlands.

Agriculture remains the main economic activity of the people of Bui Division. It is manual and basically subsistent. In recent years our farmers have been witnessing serious problems of land degradation and falling soil fertility. This has resulted in declining production levels and rural poverty. Every year farmers abandon their farms in search of fertile ones elsewhere.

Some of our valuable land is now degraded and some farmers are converting it into fuel wood plantations. Large plantations of eucalyptus are now found where formerly there was farmland. These plantations have aggravated environmental problems in the Bui as they have led to the disappearance of many streams.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The last 50 years have witnessed some significant evolution in agriculture in Bui. After slash and burn tilling was promoted. Tillage was on the flat and encouraged severe erosion. Ridge construction was seen as the way out of the problem. Its introduction was resented by the farmers. The traditional council was used to force farmers to construct them. Defaulters were fined heavily. The practice of flat tillage however has been eradicated.

Today ridge making is practiced all over the Bui Division. Male labour is mainly for clearing while the arduous task of ridging is reserved for our women. This activity takes a lot of time and energy and keeps the women exposed to the sun and rain for long hours. This has an adverse effect on their health.

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Today the Centre For Promotion of Conservation Agriculture is proposing and alternative form of farming know as Conservation Agriculture. It has been tried elsewhere in Cameroon and found successful. Preliminary results of the trials carried out with pilot farmers in Bui Division indicate that this way of farming can work for us here in Bui Division.

We shall today listen to presentations on the practice of conservation agriculture, visit some trial farms and draw a strategy for the extension of these farming techniques in Bui Division. I wish you all good deliberations. Once more you are welcome to this launching ceremony

Long live the Republic of Cameroon

Long live the Kumbo Urban Council

Long Live The Centre For Promotion Of Conservation Agriculture

Long Live Conservation Agriculture

## **Appendix 2: Official Opening Address**

Address presented by the 1st assistant to the Senior Divisional Officer Bui Division

The Mayor Kumbo Urban Council;

Divisional Delegates;

All protocol respected;

Dear participants;

Ladies and gentlemen;

It is with immense pleasure that I wish, on behalf of the organizers, to heartily welcome you all to this launching of the Conservation Agriculture Project for the Bui Highlands.

Today we are all meeting in a town that has that a very important part as far as food production is concerned. Being pioneers in the introduction of Conservation Agriculture technology much is awaited from you during today's launching. The Bui farmers as well as farmers all over the province are in eager expectation of the strategy you shall put in place for the extension of Conservation Agriculture in Bui Division.

The relevance of this project need not be over-emphasized considering the commitment of the Cameroon government in the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that World Leaders agreed on at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Your conclusions shall undoubtedly provide a pathway for the attainment of these goals as far as the eradication of hunger and ensuring the sustainability of our environment are concerned.

Cameroon has the responsibility to reduce by 50% by year 2015 the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger. This objective is attainable provided efforts like the present initiative are promoted at the grassroots levels. In South Africa we accepted to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country's policies and programs in order to reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Conservation agriculture provides a promising option to reverse the loss of environmental resources. I therefore call on you all to make your contributions towards the scaling up of this innovative practice that has brought about prosperity and improvements in nutrition in many homes elsewhere in Cameroon.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

On this note I declare open the launching of the Conservation Agriculture Project for the Bui Highlands.

Long live the Republic of Cameroon

Long Live The Centre For Promotion Of Conservation Agriculture

Long Live Conservation Agriculture

### **Appendix 3: Launching programme**

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| <b>Time</b>           | <b>Activity</b>  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>8H00 to 9H00</b>   | <b>Arrival and registration of participants</b>  |
| <b>9H30</b>           | <b>Arrival of the Lord Mayor of the Kumbo Urban Council</b>                                |
| <b>10H00</b>          | <b>Arrival of the Senior Divisional Officer for Bui and singing of the National Anthem</b> |
| <b>10H00 to 10H05</b> | <b>Welcome address by the Lord Mayor Of the Kumbo Urban Council</b>                        |
| <b>10H05 to 10H10</b> | <b>Official opening address by the Senior Divisional Officer Bui.</b>                      |
| <b>10H10 to 10H20</b> | <b>Introduction of CEPROCA and CA team for Bui</b>   |
| <b>10H20 to 10H40</b> | <b>Presentation on the practice of CA</b>  |
| <b>10H40 to 11H10</b> | <b>Debates/intervention by partners</b>  |
| <b>11H10 to 11H20</b> | <b>Strategy for the introduction of CA in the Bui Highlands</b>                            |
| <b>11H20 to 11H40</b> | <b>Support for CA in Europe/CA in Africa</b>   |
| <b>11H40 to 12H00</b> | <b>Debates/intervention by partners</b>  |
| <b>12H00 to 12H30</b> | <b>Departure to Shisong</b>  |
| <b>12H30 to 13H00</b> | <b>Visit of CA demonstration farm/Interactive session</b>                                  |
| <b>13H00 to 14H00</b> | <b>Coffee break/lunch (optional)</b>   |
| <b>14H00</b>          | <b>Closing remarks &amp; departure of participants</b>                                     |

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#### Appendix 4: Financial Report

The sum of FCFA 490,000 was previewed for the event. This money was expected to come in through fundraising. However barely FCFA 95700 was raised and spent as per table 2

**Table 1: Amount Previewed: FCFA490,000**

| Item                               | No of units | Unit cost | Total cost     |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| Vehicle hire                       | 1           | 100,000   | 100,000        |
| Projector (hire)                   | 3           | 30,000    | 90,000         |
| Press coverage (Farmer Voice/CRTV) | 1           | 100,000   | 100,000        |
| Coffee break                       | 100         | 1,000     | 100,000        |
| Hand outs                          | 100         | 500       | 50,000         |
| Preparation                        | 1           | 50,000    | 50,000         |
| <b>Total</b>                       |             |           | <b>490,000</b> |

#### Amount realised and spent:

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| - Donations (I)  | 25000         |
| - Donations (II) | 65300         |
| - Registration   | 5400          |
| - <b>Total</b>   | <b>95,700</b> |

**Table 2: Actual amount realised.**

| Item                  | No of units | Unit cost | Total cost    |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| Vehicle hire          | 1           | 5,000     | 5,000         |
| Projector (hire)      | 1           | 25,000    | 25,000        |
| Computer (hire)       | 1           | 5,000     | 5,000         |
| Press coverage        | 1           | 5,000     | 5,000         |
| Refreshment (CEPROCA) | 1           | 3,700     | 3,700         |
| Preparation           | 1           | 52,000    | 52,000        |
| <b>Total</b>          |             |           | <b>95,700</b> |