

# The Conservation Agriculture for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (CA for SARD) Project

## What is conservation agriculture?

Conservation agriculture (CA) refers to an inter-acting and complimentary set of agricultural practices and concepts. Despite regional differences in the mix and emphasis of the different specific components making up CA practices and which depend on agro-climatic zones, availability of farm power options, farming system types, inputs, skills, etc., the three basic principles which are always present are:

- minimal soil disturbance (no-tillage/reduced tillage);
- permanent soil cover (cover crops and associated residues or mulches);
- suitable and diversified crop rotations/associations.

## How can conservation agriculture contribute to SARD?

In addition to fostering environmental sustainability through soil and water conservation, conservation agriculture can contribute to the social and economic pillars of SARD through:

- reducing the workload and time spent for agricultural production therefore enabling livelihood diversification and business development and freeing time for other activities such as education, family care, community development and political empowerment;
- stabilizing crop yields, especially through reducing drought sensitivity and dependence upon price-fluctuating purchased fertilizer inputs;
- increasing production and agricultural earnings;
- enhancing crop biodiversity and diversifying food intakes;
- fostering the development of secure livelihoods for other rural actors such as rural artisans and small entrepreneurs.

## The CA for SARD Project

The *Conservation Agriculture for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (CA for SARD Project)* aims at facilitating and accelerating the adoption of profitable conservation agriculture practices by small farmers in at least three districts of Tanzania and Kenya. The project is being funded by the German Ministry of Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMVEL).

It is intended that this project build on ongoing CA pilot activities in both target countries. The long term objective is to contribute to improved food security and rural livelihoods and to build a foundation for the expansion of conservation agriculture to contribute to SARD.

The project adheres to the three basic principles of CA, and uses participatory extension approaches to introduce the concept. FAO has had good experiences with farmer field schools (FFS) in both countries. FFS emphasise farmer-driven and farmer-first methodologies. The project expects to operate in a total of 84 FFS in seven districts of the two countries. Approximately 2,000 farmers were directly involved in project activities as of mid-2006.

One of the challenges for the project is to combine this participatory methodology with a fairly clear technical farming concept. Another is to involve not only farmers, extension staff and researchers but also, and most importantly, the private sector. In the long run, the private sector rather than the project itself will need to insure that the necessary agricultural inputs and services, specialized CA tools (hand jab planters, direct seeders and knife rollers) and farm power will be available to farmers wishing to practice CA.



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## About the CA for SARD Project

 CA for SARD in Kenya

and Tanzania

- Promoting CA through Farmer Field Schools
- Upscaling CA through Farmer Field Schools in Kenya and Tanzania