1ST ACCA
AFRICA CONGRESS ON CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE

The first Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture

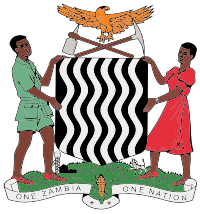
18th - 21st March 2014, Lusaka- Zambia

Event Summary

Convened by

African Conservation Tillage Network

and



Republic of Zambia

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Background

According to the United Nations (UN) global population is projected, by 2013 basis, to increase by 33% to 9 billion people by 2050. Africa's population is projected to increase by 115% from 1.1 to 2.39 billion, within the same period; thus requiring a similar increase in food production. While worldwide hunger has decreased by 132 million people in the last 20 years, it has increased by 64 million (from 175 to 239 million) in Africa over the same period. Africa is a net importer of food, having imported, for instance, 43 million tons of food worth US$ 50 billion in 2011. These figures point to the bitter reality that urgent efforts are needed to transform agricultural production on the continent, in line with the CAADP framework to which African governments have pledged their support.

Sub-Saharan Africa is largely characterised by smallholder subsistence farming and pastoralism, with perennial food shortages and generally low financial resource endowment. This miserable scenario has been exacerbated by recurrent droughts and occasional floods which are part of the larger climate variability and change phenomenon, and which has not spared the rest of Africa. The net result has been relatively degraded, fragile and unproductive ecosystems that demand innovative and sustainable natural resource management interventions to restore and improve productivity.

Congress Overview

It is against this background that the African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT) and the Government of the Republic of Zambia, in collaboration with partners hosted the 1st Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture (IACCA) from 18th to 21st March 2014 at the Intercontinental Hotel, Lusaka, Zambia. Foundation sponsors were the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Platinum and Gold sponsors were Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), International Centre for Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Partners include the Conservation Farming Unit (CFU), Golden Valley Agricultural Research Trust (GART), French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), European Union (EU) and New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

The theme of the congress was “Conservation Agriculture (CA): Building Entrepreneurship and Resilient Farming Systems”. The aim of the Congress was to share and expose experiences and lessons and facilitate alliances to unblock hindrances to expanded and scaled-up adoption of conservation agriculture especially among the smallholder farming systems and related industry in Africa.

Congress Objectives and Expected Outputs

The broad objectives of the Congress were:
1. To facilitate sharing of information and experiences focusing on lessons learned with regard to the contribution of CA to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), sustaining CA practices in smallholder farmers, identification of key issues in the development, promotion and adoption of CA in commercial and subsistence farming, and links and roles of CA to other global initiatives related to natural resource management (NRM) and rural development;
2. To showcase policy interventions that have supported and facilitated adoption of CA
3. To examine and learn from initiatives, including business/entrepreneurship models, unblocking and accelerating adoption and practicing of CA

Six (6) outputs were envisaged, namely:

1. Information/data/experiences and lessons highlighting issues and circumstances that enhance or hinder effective CA dissemination and adoption
2. Increased awareness and interest in CA even among non-agricultural stakeholders
3. Statement highlighting principal issues and areas of concern in widespread promotion/adoption of CA worldwide
4. Motivated Congress participants ready to play their roles in the development and promotion of sustainable NRM linked to high yields
5. Access to information that would help in future contacts and partnerships in promotions of CA
6. Establishment of a permanent continental CA knowledge hub to facilitate networking and information sharing

Congress Theme and Sub-Themes

The Congress' theme was "Conservation Agriculture: Building entrepreneurship and resilient farming systems" with the following sub-themes:
1. Growing more with less – the future of sustainable intensification
2. Weather proofing agriculture – the adaption of farming practices to address climatic variability and change
3. Conservation Agriculture for sustained wealth creation – unlocking barriers to entrepreneurship along the value chains
4. Food sovereignty – integrated CA-based systems and family farms
5. Effective research, inclusive of socio-economic challenges, targeting strategies for enhanced CA adoption
6. Harnessing the power of collaboration – networking, partnerships and communities of practice
7. Increasing CA adoption – how innovative technology, approaches and infrastructure support and policies can drive greater adoption of CA systems in Africa

The Congress aimed at putting a spotlight on experiences and lessons from interventions and practices e.g., political, policy, technical and financing that have worked in triggering and enhancing sustained adoption and expansion of CA. It was also intended to contribute to enhancing the promotion and adoption of CA as a way to improve farm productivity, improve resilience in the ecosystems, and optimise both short and long term productive-ability of the land-water systems. Adoption of CA by a critical mass of farmers is desirable in realising the core mitigation-adaptation benefits of farming in the face of climate change and variability.

Congress Organisation

The Congress had a broad-based 30 members Steering Committee; a 7-member Secretariat; a 13-member Technical and Programme Task Team; Finance and Resource Mobilisation Committee; Communications, Media and Advocacy Committee; and a Logistics and Congress Operations Committee operating from Lusaka. Another team was the 10-member Awards Committee, assigned the task of advertising for nominations of awardees and the eventual selection of the winners based on an agreed criteria. The Secretariat was privileged to have at its disposal the services of the ACT professional members and friends from within Africa and beyond, to review the submitted papers and posters. The ACT Board provided oversight to the congress by approving holding of the event and the subsequent roadmap.

Opening

The Congress was officially opened by Hon. Robert Sichinga, Minister for Trade, Commerce and Industry, and outgoing Minister for Agriculture and Livestock. Other dignitaries who spoke included Rudo Makunike (NEPAD Representative), Eng. Saidi Mkomwa (ACT Executive Secretary), Manyewu Mutamba (SACAU Representative), Rune Skinneback (Charge d'Affaires EU Delegation to Zambia), Arve Ofstad (Norwegian Ambassador to Zambia), George Okech (FAO Representative in Zambia) and Dr. Mclay Kanyangarara (COMESA Representative). The Congress was officially closed by Hon. Luxon Kazabu (MP) Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Livestock. The Congress brought together 414 delegates from 42 African and other countries of the world. They included 93 women (23%) and came from NGOs and Extension workers (24%); Researchers and the Academia (22%); Smallholder CA Farmers (20%); Media (12%); Development partners (8%); National Governments (8%); and Private-Public CA Investors.

Farmers' Forum

Unlike scientific CA symposiums, the 1ACCA was focused on how to scale-up CA to reach and benefit not thousands but millions of farmers in Africa and the majority smallholders in particular. This agenda required a different approach - speak to and with the farmers, rather than speaking about farmers. Putting “farmers first” and at “the centre” of all congress discussions was meant to set the agenda such that all other workshops take into how they are addressed. The farmers' forum was purposefully scheduled in the initial sessions of the congress and moderated by Edward Chuma (ACT Board and Institute for People, Innovation and Change in Organizations (PICOTEAM)) and Dr. John K. Mutunga (Chief Executive Officer, Kenya National Farmers' Federation). Speakers at the forum were smallholder farmers from North Africa (Morocco); Eastern Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) and Southern Africa (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

In another dimensions, the farmers of Zambia, had the opportunity to showcase their technologies, innovations, practices and products as they hosted the delegates to their CA field sites during the field visits. Farmers appreciated the opportunity to be heard at such high level forums. Other participants emphasised the need to be farmer-smart in programming, and the need to work with farmers on the ground where they work and where knowledge is created. This approach was hailed as the beginning of a new generation of farmer-smart programmes to take everyone where we want to be.

Mid-Congress Field Visit

The objective of the mid-Congress field visit was to expose the participants to the diversity of Zambian farming systems in general, but more specifically, CA technologies and practices. This was in recognition of the fact that most CA farmers had adopted and even modified specific components (principles) of CA to suit their farm-specific circumstances. Having gone through the Congress sub-theme keynote presentations and the first session of the sub-theme based parallel presentations within the first two days; the field visit provided an opportunity for the participants to have a hands-on experience of CA principles and practices.

Congress organisers had developed an elaborate, day-long, six-route programme (refer to table 2) that took the participants to the East, West, North and South of Lusaka, within about 100 km radius. More details on the field visit sites is available at http://www.africacacongress.org/field-trips

Congress papers and book

A total of 90 papers were submitted for the Congress in response to the call for papers and guidelines released by the Secretariat. Of those submitted, 69 were thematic while 21 were in different forms as keynote papers. They were sent to pre-selected reviewers, with two reviewers per paper.

The condensed papers book - containing 3-page summaries of all papers reviewed and accepted for presentation at the congress - was meant to provide delegates with a concise record of all papers and assist them follow congress presentations and discussions. Some 400 copies were printed and distributed to participants during the congress. The book contains 47 thematic papers, 4 keynote papers and 15 poster presentations and can be accessed through the 1ACCA website at http://www.africacacongress.org/presentations/book-of-condensed-papers

Side Events

Three side events were held to cater for special interest group issues namely:
1. How to scale up CA to benefit millions of smallholder farmers: convened by Ms Rudo Makunike of NEPAD
2. Making CA Ever Green: convened by Dr Dennis Garrity, UN Ambassador for the Drylands
3. Prospects of smallholder conservation agriculture farming: convened and facilitated by Emanuel Sakala (MOAL Zambia), Isaiah Nyagumbo (CIMMYT Harare), and Sepo Marongwe (MOAL Zimbabwe).

Outcomes of the Side Events are presented in the congress proceedings. Extracts are presented here as follows:

How to scale up CA to benefit millions of smallholder farmers?

There is need to increase inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration and networking amongst all CA players to exploit complementarities, value-addition and ensure proper information is given to stakeholders – particularly with inclusion of the media. Gender should be mainstreamed in CA rather than giving it lip-service for funding and cheap publicity. Likewise, there is need to re-think critically about mechanization in smallholder CA. This includes access to credit and subsidy facilities for appropriate and affordable machinery and equipment and their maintenance.

Making CA Ever Green.

There is need to bring Agroforestry (AF) and CA together and work to integrate trees into CA systems since trees can dramatically increase soil fertility and crop production, regenerate the land, and buffer agriculture to climate change. There is also need to better harmonize the technical messages and recommendations being promoted in CA and CA with trees. This demands a stronger cadre of trainers in CA and CA with trees necessitating the launch of a Certification Program for CA trainers that would enhance the professionalism of CA training.

Prospects of smallholder CA.

Smallholder farmers acknowledged that CA is a very promising technology for increasing productivity but stressed the need for policy support, addressing of market issues and increasing access to relevant CA literature. It was also noted that the main drivers of CA adoption, among the farmers, include low productivity, recurrent drought, need for soil and water conservation in mountainous areas, and high cost of production in conventional systems. Participants reported several challenges facing smallholder CA systems particularly during transition phase that require policy support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Documented impact and the feedback from practicing CA farmers and scientists across Africa confirmed that CA is set to become a cornerstone in transforming the way farming is done in Africa and a major contributor to achieving CAADP's goal 6% annual growth in the agricultural sector which employs 80% of Africa's rural population (ACT, 2014). CA increases soil productivity and induces resilience to climate change and variability, convert marginal semi-arids (of up to 400 mm rainfall) into grain baskets without the need for costly irrigation investments. This attribute gives CA an edge for it to be adopted by millions of smallholder farmers in Africa affordably and swiftly.

At the end of the Congress, a 1ACCA Lusaka Declaration was drawn, adopted and promulgated as a part of the closing ceremony. Participants declared that Africa should strive to have 25 million farmers adopt CA by the year 2015 – abbreviated as the 25 by 25 Lusaka CA Declaration available in English, French and Portuguese at http://www.africacacongress.org

Acknowledgements

We take this opportunity to thank our foundation sponsors the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) whose investment to support and financial resources have enabled this Congress to take place. We thank our Platinum and Gold sponsors: Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), International Centre for Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA); Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); and the Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA).

The congress success is owing to the dedication and volunteering spirit of the members and friends of the African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT). The partnerships with French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), European Union (EU) and New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) were vital. From the International Steering Committee and the Congress Secretariat, through the four Task Teams, namely, Technical and Programme; Finance and Resource Mobilisation; Communication, Media and Advocacy; and Logistics and Congress Operations, to the Help Desk, the teams performed their roles with a rare sense of commitment and dedication. We extend our sincere appreciation to all for their invaluable support. The support by Martin Bwalya (Congress Chairperson); Joseph Mureithi (Chair Technical and Programme Team); Lewis Hove (Chair Resource Mobilisation Team), Joyce MulilaMiti (Chair Communications, Media and Advocacy Team) and Emmanuel Sakala (Chair Logistics and Congress Operations Committee) deserve special mention.

The choice of Zambia, the country with the highest population of smallholder farmers practicing CA in Africa provided a great opportunity to explore the application of CA practices and principles for both food security and supporting a growth agenda. The support provided by the host Zambian Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the lead CA institutions – Conservation Farming Unit (CFU) and Golden Valley Agricultural Research Institute (GART) is genuinely appreciated.

The IACCA Secretariat engaged the services of several consultants including Newmark Group as Event Manager for the well-handled logistical issues; and Mr. George Karanja, the Technical Consultant to oversee review of congress papers and compilation of proceedings.

The Congress Secretariat coordinated very well efforts of the Task Teams, Consultants, Development partners and the farming community. Special thanks to the Secretariat members Philip Wanjohi, Janet Achora, Herbert Mwanza, Sepo Marongwe, Simon Lugandu and Patrice Djamen. The CA Awards and Nominations committee led by Collins Nkatiko worked independently and diligently to advertise and scrutinise the continental CA awardees for 2014 in the categories of: The CA Challenge Award; Media Award; Upcoming CA Farmer Award; and CA Champions Award. The ACT congress helpdesk composed of Weldone Mutai, Monica Buyu, Alice Gatheru, Bridget Mupeti, Peter Kuria, Martin Kimeu and Kennedy Otieno handled the behind-the-scenes logistical challenges expertly.

The African Conservation Tillage Network Board under the able leadership of Reynolds Shula provided oversight to the Congress Secretariat. Their stewardship role is acknowledged.

Notes

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