

From Adoption Potential to Transformative Learning around Conservation Agriculture in Burkina Faso

LORENZ PROBST¹, HYCENH TIM NDAH², PAULO RODRIGUES³, GOTTLIEB BASCH³, KALIFA COULIBALY⁴, JOHANNES SCHULER⁵

¹*University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Centre for Development Research (CDR), Austria*

²*University of Hohenheim, Inst. of Social Sciences in Agriculture, Germany*

³*Universidade de Évora, Instituto de Ciências Agrárias E Ambientais Mediterrânicas (UE/ICAAM), Portugal*

⁴*Université Polytechnique de Bobo Dioulasso, Institut du Développement Rural (UPB - IDR), Burkina Faso*

⁵*Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Inst. of Socio-Economics, Germany*

Despite the substantial support of donors and development agencies, Conservation Agriculture (CA) has not moved from an invention to an innovation stage in sub-Saharan Africa. The results of the common strategy to transfer the technology from science through donors to farms in a top down manner have been disappointing (with Burkina Faso being a typical case). To make things worse, assessing the actual levels of adoption has been problematic due to the biases and weaknesses of the applied methods - including the Qualitative expert Assessment Tool for CA adoption in Africa (QAToCA). However, to promote sustainable farming pathways such as CA, we still see a need for methods that help to understand and foster transitions in agricultural practices. The purpose of this work is thus to design an approach that combines current insights in learning theory and practice. The starting point of the process is an assessment of the agro-ecosystem health of the farming system of interest, by exploring the social, economic and ecological characteristics of the system. Second, to create space for social learning, we apply participatory stakeholder mapping to make the roles, values, interests, and capabilities of the different stakeholders explicit. Third, the stakeholders jointly work on a historical timeline of CA promotion to identify key events, drivers and constraints of the innovation process. Then, to support individual experience, dialogue and different ways of learning, the stakeholders together create non-scripted, non-edited videos of their perspectives on challenges in the farming system. These videos are then screened in a multi-stakeholder meeting to stimulate the discussion on the innovation potential of CA. Discussions are structured by the framework of QAToCA. The results of all exercises feed into a proposal for an improved promotion of CA. We tested the approach in a farming community in Koumbia, Burkina Faso. The described learning elements helped to moderate the expert bias and rigidity of QAToCA. As a learning outcome, the results underlined that CA uptake will depend on the adaptation to the local conditions (e.g. competition over crop residue exacerbated by free-grazing) in order become a viable agricultural system.

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Contact Address: Lorenz Probst, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Centre for Development Research (CDR), Gregor Mendel-Strasse 33, 1180 Vienna, Austria, e-mail: lorenz.probst@boku.ac.at