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“Solidarity in a competing world —
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Institutional Learning in Conservation Agriculture Innovation: Evidence from Iran, Uganda and Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Conservation agriculture has been proposed as a strategy of sustainable intensification that can mitigate the effects of climate change and reverse land degradation. It has been introduced in a variety of countries spanning different agro-ecological zones such as Iran, Uganda, and Burkina Faso.

In Iran, Government interventions have promoted conservation agriculture mainly for sustainable management of soil and water. This intervention also leads to reduction in costs of production and increases productivity in dry lands and irrigated land. In Uganda and Burkina Faso, although in line with governmental policies, conservation agriculture has been promoted mainly by NGOs, development partners and research for development organisations.

Despite the differences in agro-ecological, social and economic environment, the adoption record of conservation agriculture remains weak in all of the studied regions. Much of earlier research and projects on conservation agriculture have targeted adoption barriers at a farm level. However, from an innovation systems point of view, we hypothesise that underlying institutional patterns, interests of different stakeholders and systemic constraints play a critical role in the innovation of conservation agriculture. We contrast preliminary findings from case studies in Iran, Uganda, and Burkina Faso to explore this hypothesis. Our methods include literature review, key informant interviews, and stakeholder mapping.

We conclude that the institutions, policy processes and promotion strategies related to conservation agriculture are site specific – the capacity to innovate conservation agriculture, however, is constrained by a lack of interaction and collaboration among stakeholders and their institutions in all sites. We thus suggest that interventions should shift their priorities towards facilitating institutional learning processes that first of all make the interests and constraints of different stakeholders transparent and explicit.

Keywords: Burkina Faso, conservation agriculture, innovation, institutional learning, Iran, Uganda