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Decoding Farmers and Stakeholders’ Discourses on Conservation Agriculture’s Usefulness in Zambia

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Abstract

Advocative discourses have credited Conservation Agriculture (CA) as a sustainable practice fit for curbing food insecurity and climate change impacts worldwide. Yet, heretic views citing CA’s limitation in solving the escalating food demands and environmental degradation footprints are on the rise. Despite CA’s wide research in SSA, few studies have sought to analyse how these contesting discourses affect the perception of CA usefulness in different contexts. Thus, this study was aimed at investigating the new insights of CA discourses as revealed by Zambian farmers and other stakeholders. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and a review of selected media publications within Lusaka and Central provinces. Using Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA) and Discourse Analysis (DA) techniques, farmers’ and stakeholders’ perspectives of CA were explored via MAXQDA 2020 software to generate categories, codes, and sets. Results revealed unreported discourses as adequate adoption levels, shorter years to CA’s yield stability, CA as the future of farming, and CA as an ancient African farming method. Perceived CA benefits are driven by the awareness, training, and positive socio-economic evaluation of the practice. Hindrances to CA’s utilisation are espoused by conflicting cultural norms, gender gaps, financial and mechanisation constraints. Negative mindset, inadequate agronomic management, overdependence on donor-aid disincentivize CA’s usefulness among Zambian farmers. This implies that, despite the critics and the perceived low adoption, farmers and stakeholders underscored CA’s irrefutable role in yield and soil quality improvement, time-saving and cost-effectiveness, and climate resilience amidst the current erratic rainfall patterns. In order to harness the potential of sustainable agricultural practices like CA, favourable government policies that seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice are indispensable.

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