

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE NEWSLETTER



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Aggregated Marketing for Small Scale Farmers

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INTRODUCTION

Smallholder farmers often fail to receive optimum prices and income in the marketplace. Marketing for small scale farmers is hindered by their small volumes, lack of bargaining power, poor infrastructure, high transaction costs, poor storage, lack of access to information, and lack of supportive policies.

Collective marketing, when a group of farmers aggregate their produce together, can help achieve economies of scale along agricultural value chains. Aggregation can be initiated by farmer groups, buyers, or other market intermediaries. Small volumes produced by individual farmers can be bulked into lots that can readily and economically be transported, sorted, processed, and stored by processors, wholesalers, exporters and retailers.



Kenyan farmers weigh produce ready for bulking and sale.

BENEFITS OF AGGREGATION

- Access to better markets.
- Increased bargaining power.
- Cost saving (e.g. greater efficiency of transport and storage)
- Improved information sharing and service delivery.

FACILITATING MARKET AGGREGATION IN THE SCALING UP CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (SUCA) PROJECT

From 2015 to 2021 farmers who participated in SUCA were empowered to form aggregation groups and sell their grain and legume crops (sorghum, maize, pigeon pea and mung bean/green gram) at much higher prices. Through this program, 454 self-selected aggregation groups were formed in Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia. To support farmers in collective marketing and instill enthusiasm for aggregation, the following trainings and exercises were facilitated:



A SUCA aggregation group works through a marketing exercise.

1. **Market mapping** helps farmers to understand the volumes and prices of products moving through and around their community. Market maps help farmers identify key marketing channels they can use which have the greatest commercial potential for them.
2. **Market calendars or seasonal analysis** help farmers to understand the impact that supply and demand have on prices. Farmers are able to discuss and identify the months at which crops and/or livestock have better prices and plan their sales to take advantage of this.
3. **Gross margin analyses** (GMAs) help farmers to analyze the costs of producing particular crops against the income realized by selling. Through this activity, farmers identify ways to maximize profit by increasing their sale price or reducing their costs of production. By conducting GMAs for several crops and/or livestock, they identify which product is the most profitable for them to aggregate and sell. Next, they prepare an action plan to take advantage of the best opportunities they have identified for increasing profits.
4. **Collaboration and aggregation.** Through this exercise, farmers understand the benefits of collective selling and make decisions on what products and volumes they will aggregate.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT FROM SUCA

- Encourage farmers to make their own strategies and decisions. The role of an NGO Partner is to facilitate these activities, not to lead them.
- Good market information and linkages to marketing platforms is critical.
- Allocate sufficient time for aggregation groups to build capacity in marketing skills.
- Organise business to business (B2B) sessions. Help aggregation groups talk directly with buyers after which the group decides who to sell to.
- Promote aggregation together with post-harvest storage technologies for improved product quality and better timing of sales.
- Good record keeping is essential.

- Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) complement marketing activities as they enable investments and provide a second income which helps farmers wait for the optimum time to sell produce.

RESOURCES DEVELOPED AND AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

Videos which describe the above approach are available at: <https://foodgrainsbank.ca/ca-videos>. The ALTA team is working on an updated farmer training manual for collective marketing. Contact us if you are interested in a copy.



PICS bags, or other hermetic storage technologies, allow farmers to store grain for sale when prices have increased.

CA-Plus: Addressing Food Security Needs While Improving Long-Term Soil Health

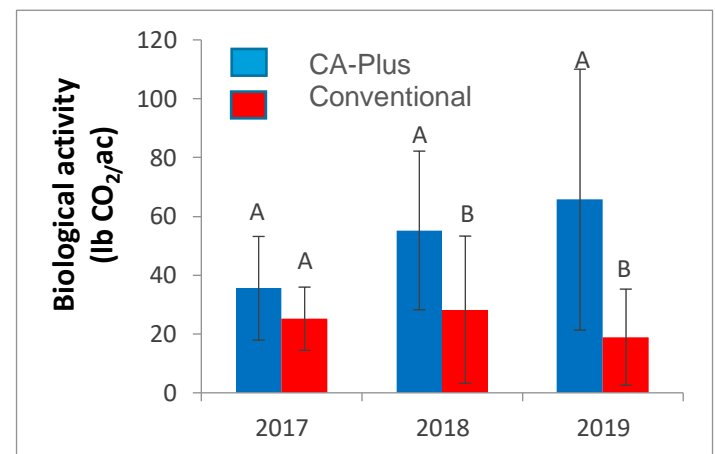
Neil Rowe Miller, Agriculture and Livelihoods Technical Advisor for Eastern Africa

For the past ten years, CFGB-supported programming in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has increasingly promoted the use of Conservation Agriculture (CA) practices. The three CA principles of minimizing soil disturbance, maximizing soil cover, and diversifying crops through rotation and intercropping have become central to the extension message of most of our food security programming. These principles provide important long-term soil health benefits including increases in soil organic matter content, increased soil biological activity and reduction of soil erosion.

One challenge we have faced, however, is that the three CA principles *by themselves* often result in small or no yield increases in the short term. This experience is supported by many formal research studies which have found that benefits often accrue after several years of CA implementation on a given field.

Most small-scale farmers, however, can't wait several years to experience increased yields. They need to feed their families and sell crops pay for other household expenses. A farming method which provides long-term benefits, but not short-term returns, will rarely motivate them to change their current practices.

For this reason, it is essential to combine CA promotion with other good agricultural practices which bring quicker returns. A [recent study from southern Africa](#) identified 11 such practices which enhanced the effectiveness of CA. In our experience, three of these good agricultural practices are particularly helpful:



Soil health, including biological activity, increases over years of CA-Plus implementation. Source: *SUCA Soil Health Report, data from farmers' fields in Muranga, Kenya.*

- **Improved soil fertility management** through use of manure, fertilizer and/or cover crops. [Some proponents](#) argue that soil fertility enhancement should be included as an essential 4th CA principle.
- **Precision planting** including careful seed placement, optimum plant population, and optimum planting times.
- **Improved varieties** may include stress-tolerant cultivars, early-maturing varieties or crops with enhance nutrition.



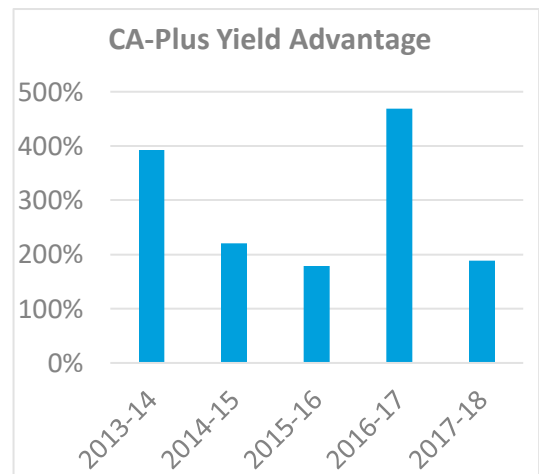
The complementary good agronomic practices promoted by a given project will vary with each agricultural context. Identifying which practices to promote should involve farmer experimentation and community dialogue to discover which practices provide the greatest short-term increases in yield and/or food quality, thus helping farmers to feed their families *now* while waiting for the long-term benefits of CA to accrue over time.

By combining CA principles with improved soil fertility management, including farmyard manure and cover crops, Shonga Shona and Satuki Shambale of Zala, Ethiopia, increased their maize yields by 29% in the first year, while building long-term soil health.

WE REFER TO THE PRACTICE OF COMBINING CA PRINCIPLES WITH OTHER GOOD AGRONOMIC PRACTICES AS “CA-PLUS.”

Since CA-Plus approaches combine the long-term benefits of CA with short-term yield increases, farmers can benefit in the first season of adoption rather than needing to wait several years for CA to improve soils and increase yields. In addition, the benefits of CA are enhanced when combined with other practices which produce larger plants and more crop biomass to serve as soil cover. And conversely, CA techniques like soil cover can enhance plants’ response to soil fertility amendments, since plants under moisture stress will be unable to take advantage of improved soil nutrients.

Because of these multiple benefits, CA-Plus uptake by small-scale farmers tends to be much more rapid than uptake of pure CA alone. In fact, several projects which we support struggled to get farmers excited about pure CA promotion. Once they shifted to a CA-Plus approach, farmer enthusiasm and adoption rates increased significantly. In 2020, we estimate that 67,000 small-scale farmers in SSA adopted CA-Plus as a direct result of CFGB-supported training, and another 15,000+ adopted “spontaneously” after seeing the successes of those who were trained.



Average CA-Plus yields compared with conventional practices in CFGB-supported programming in sub-Saharan Africa.

AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

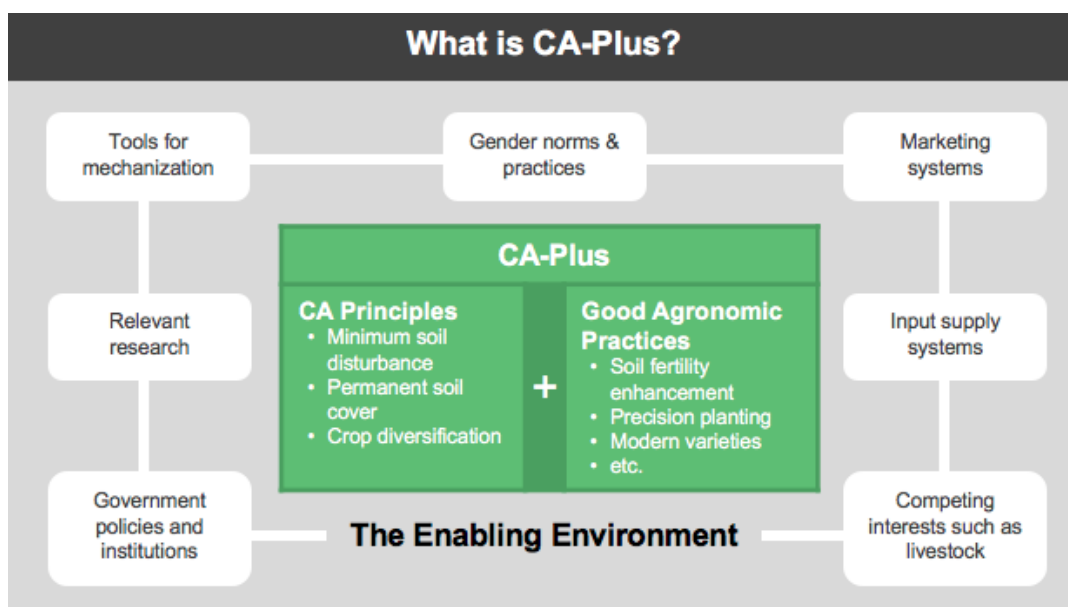
In addition to the good agronomic practices that contribute to CA-Plus, other factors will affect the extent to which CA-Plus is taken up by farmers in a community. These factors may include the presence or lack of supportive government policies and institutions, gender dynamics, market opportunities, the availability of inputs, tools for mechanization, competing demands from other interests such as livestock, etc.

The influence of these factors on CA-Plus uptake naturally leads projects to want to diversify into activities such as advocacy, gender discussions, marketing, and livestock management. Care should be taken, however, to avoid incorporating too much complexity at the outset of a project. Projects which try include too much complexity in the initial years, often struggle to implement each activity with excellence. A more effective approach is to add these other elements incrementally, focusing the first project cycle on CA-Plus promotion, then adding other activities once an enthusiastic CA-Plus movement has begun.



In 2018, after seeing the impact of CA-Plus in projects of CFGB Partners, the Head Minister of Agriculture of Ethiopia announced that CA would be promoted by the extension systems of five Regions of the country.

An incremental, staged strategy like this also leads to much more successful impact within the broader, enabling environment. Our greatest CA advocacy successes have, for example, occurred where we took government officials and academics to visit communities which had enthusiastically taken up CA-Plus and improved their food security. Marketing efforts are most successful when farmers have increased production enough to meet their food security needs and now have an excess to sale. Input suppliers are attracted to communities where farmers are productive and have the means to purchase outside products. Livestock needs are most easily addressed once human food security is achieved, and excess biomass can be produced to feed animals. Thus, while activities which impact the enabling environment support the uptake of CA-Plus, they also benefit from its positive impact on the production and sustainability of a farming community.



Partner Profile: Association des Eglises Baptistes au Rwanda (AEBR)

Jean Twilingiyumukiza, Agriculture and Livelihoods Technical Advisor for Central and West Africa

The Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda (AEBR) is a faith-based organization founded in 1967 and made of 199 churches and 171 Chapels. AEBR is a CFGB partner through the Canadian Baptist ministries (CBM).

Since 2008, AEBR began implementing a Five-year food security project in eastern Rwanda after a prolonged and severe drought. The project focused on distributing drought-tolerant crops, such as pineapple and cassava, and small ruminants to affected communities in order to multiply household assets. The project also promoted agroforestry as a way of protecting soils against erosion and increasing green vegetation. The second phase of the project (2013-2016) introduced Conservation Agriculture (CA) to restore soil health and increase food production. A third phase, which started in 2017, expanded the CA promotion using a lead farmer and farmers' group extension methodology.

The project worked amongst 1,329 households from four communities in Kirehe, and resulted in improved production of maize, beans, banana and cassava. Goats and pigs provided by the project also helped the communities to improve their diet, generate income, and produce quality compost for farming. The use of green manure cover crops species such as jackbean, pigeon peas, cowpeas and velvetbean enriched soils in nitrogen and provided good mulch materials as they can continue growing despite drought. Malnutrition among children was reportedly reduced by having kitchen gardens with different types of legumes.

Based on the experience and lessons learnt from the project in Kirehe, AEBR along with CBM/CFGFB, are planning to begin a similar food security project this year targeting 1,200 households in four communities within Ngoma District. In addition to building the capacities of farmers in CA-Plus, the project also intends to build alliances for influencing policy/advocacy as a new focus to broaden awareness, support and adoption of CA-Plus beyond the project's geographical scope to Rwanda as a whole.



AEBR project participants showing significant yield increase of cassava to the Sector Agronomist during a field day in Gahara-Kirehe

ALTA Travel Schedules

Lilian Zheke

5-15 October, 2021

Arba Minch-Zala, Ethiopia

Country level workshop and Team building

2-10 November, 2021

Tete, Mozambique

Evaluation and Situation assessment

23-30 November, 2021

Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Familiarization with HERD projects

2-9 December 2021

Mpata, Malawi

CA adoption Assessment

Jean Twilingiyumukiza

5-15 October, 2021

Arba Minch-Zala, Ethiopia

Country level workshop, Partner visit and Team building

20-25 October, 2021

Goma, DR Congo

Situational Assessment Training Workshop for CBCA

1-6 November, 2021

Ruhango, Bugesera, Kayonza and Bugesera, Rwanda

Follow up visit with RAB to Research Sites

22-26 November 2021

Rubavu, Rwanda

Master Training—Session four for Rwanda Partners

6-10 December, 2021

Oronkua & Ouaga, Burkina Faso

Project visit and team building for new staff

John Kimathi Mbae

25th to 29th October, 2021

Nebbi- Uganda

Uganda country level workshop (Tearfund and CFGP Partners)

30th October to 4th November, 2021

Soroti- Uganda

Visit to COU-TEDDO- Tearfund Partner

8th to 12th November, 2021

Makueni- Kenya

Visit to UDO for field visit & Training

22nd to 26th November, 2021

Embu- Kenya

ACC&S training of Staff and field visits

Neil Rowe Miller

5-15 October, 2021

Arba Minch and Zala, Ethiopia

Country level workshop, Partner visit and Team building

25th to 29th October, 2021

Nebbi- Uganda

Uganda country-level Partner workshop

30th October to 4th November, 2021

Nebbi- Uganda

Visit to COU-Nebbi

13th to 18th December, 2021

Debre Markos, Ethiopia

Visit to MSCFSD