

**CIVIL SOCIETY, NEW FARMING TECHNOLOGIES AND
ACCEPTABILITY BY LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE:
A CASE STUDY OF CONSERVATION FARMING PROJECT IN
GOKWE SOUTH DISTRICT IN ZIMBABWE**

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ABSTRACT

The ensuing study dwells on the micro politics embedded in the implementation of conservation farming as a new farming technology to ameliorate the catastrophic effects of incessant droughts as well as the threats posed by climate change in rural Zimbabwe, with particular focus on Gokwe south district. In addition to that it also seeks to elicit the local farmer's perceptions on conservation farming vis-a-vis those espoused by the exponents of the said farming enterprise. It reveals that instead of improving rural livelihoods, conservation farming has been plunged into a battlefield resulting in an ambivalent relationship between the actors involved. Such an ambivalent relationship is relentlessly impinging on the overall acceptability and sustainability of the programme in question despite the much projected merits associated with it in contemporary rural development circles. The paper goes on to argue that unless and until the Civil Society considers conservation farming as a political arena and the subsequent micro politics that emanate from such a political field, the goal of sustainable development will remain a pipeline dream. The panacea to this dilemma therefore rests in the desire to genuinely embrace the principles of "Development from below" or adopting a people centered developmental approach which considers beneficiaries of conservation farming as the real owners of the programme for Sustainable Agriculture. The study was grounded in purely qualitative research and adopted unstructured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and the use of secondary sources of data as the main data soliciting techniques for this study. Norman Long's Actor Oriented Approach was utilised as the analytical framework for the findings made in this study.

Keywords Conservation farming, micro-politics, acceptability, Sustainable Development and Sustainable Agriculture

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

One of the major facets of Zimbabwe's post independence development history has been the emergence of a very vocal and vibrant Civil Society sector, under the banner of poverty alleviation and enhancing food security particularly in rural areas. This proliferation of NGOs followed the real or perceived ineptness of the state and other state actors to achieve the goal of rural development. Subsequently these new players in development perceived themselves as better placed to deal with the aforementioned challenges that confronted the state, with respect to rural development.

With respect to Zimbabwe, Marisa (2008), posits that rural civil society strategies grew in response to the adverse or absent state policies that defend or promote particular interests. The state in this regard was conceived as ineffective and lethargic when it came to rural development interventions. It was rigid and less responsive to local needs and priorities since it followed orthodox approaches which are top down in nature. Helliker, (2008) opines that the greatest advantage of NGOs over the state in rural development is their willingness to experiment and innovate and this is signalled by their involvement in community resources management schemes such as CAMPFIRE where they sought to include the voice of the last person (the very poor) in the management of their natural resources, hoping to cultivate sustainable management of natural resources. Makumbe (2010) argues that the Civil Society in Zimbabwe's facilitation of beneficiary participation in rural development cannot be questioned. This kind of philosophy in development circles or what can be regarded as the post *impasse* development perspective became an in thing in development theory and practice from the 1990s onwards. Despite being a gracious approach, commentators and sceptics started to question the feasibility and desirability of grassroots participation in relation to Civil Society and rural development. This type of participation tended to be cosmetic participation with little or no practical relevance. NGOs tended to revert to the top down approach to development in spite of the gimmick of popular participation culminating in their failure to meet their primary objectives with respect to the development of rural areas.

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with the approach in question, there has been a renewed zest to “genuinely” involve the beneficiaries of development in new agricultural intervention programmes in Zimbabwe. A number of NGOs have adopted a plethora of agricultural intervention projects under the streamer of Participatory development and Conservation farming is one such technology. The proponents of conservation farming are of the conviction that this farming method is an antidote to the production and food security challenges confronting small holder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. Over and above this conservation farming is believed to conserve the soil since emphasis is on minimum or Zero tillage leading to the maintenance of the soil texture as well as the soil structure. It also helps to improve soil fertility, increase its ability to absorb rain water and help in controlling unwanted weeds. In the same vein Makwara (2010) posits that conservation farming entails nil soil disturbances, soil cover maintenance, crop rotation and retention of crop residue, implying it is sustainable. The desire to cuddle the farming method in question has also been given further impetus by the current threat posed by the effects of climate change, because it is the belief of these exponents that this farming method would go a long way in mitigating the effects of climate change. (Gukurume, Nhodo and Dube 2008) This is primarily because maximum productivity is ensured even under minimum rainfall totals, making this farming technology apt in perennially drought prone regions. Coupled with this Non-Governmental Organisations marshalling conservation farming have advocated the production of small grain such as sorghum, rapoko and millet which are also drought resistant. Conservation farming is also believed to be a very cheap and affordable farming practice since emphasis is on harnessing of indigenous resources such as organic fertilizers and seed thereby making it suitable and attractive for the locals who are also assumed to be poor.

The driving force behind the renewed interest in taking such an approach is to mobilise the whole community to fully embrace this method with the aim of ensuring project sustainability and acceptability by the farmers in question. Adopting a community driven project is also believed to enhance project sustainability and acceptability by the local communities since such communities would come to perceive the project as their project as opposed to the outsiders’ project and thereby instilling a sense of project ownership on the part of the locals and ultimately

sustainability and acceptability of it. (see Gukurume, Nhodo and Dube 2010) This type of participation has been described by Cenea (1988) as empowering the community to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage their resources, make decisions and control the activities that affect their lives. Despite the ideals of conservation farming and community participation very little has been done to explain the concept of “Community”. The shortcomings of the principles concerning effective community participation imbued in the phenomenon of conservation farming is the problem that the Civil Society is conceptualizing community as a homogeneous entity whereas villagers might have different interests and perceptions about the farming intervention as livelihood strategy devised to catapult them out of the vicious cycle of poverty and food insecurity quagmire. These interests and perceptions might be overlapping, corresponding or conflicting to each other. Some sceptics have noted that what may be considered as community participation can be also referred to as ‘induced participation’ owing much to the different interests and interpretation by the purported beneficiaries. Hence there is need to pursue this heterogeneity of communities for conservation farming to have meaning for beneficiaries and live up to its billing (see Kamphost et al 2009 }

In spite of this renewed gusto to genuinely involve the locals and the much projected virtues of the aforesaid technology, just like previous NGO programmes, the said programme or approach to development cannot go unchallenged. Taking a people centred approach as its axis; this treatise therefore evaluates the lived realities of Gokwe south small holder farmers, contrasting them with the perceived virtues of conservation farming from an interventionist perspective. It also dwells on the new challenges confronting participatory development in this novel farming practice, unravelling macro and micro politics as well as contradicting perceptions on the said project vis-a-vis project sustainability and acceptability conundrum.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Popular participation or grassroots participation has been fostered as the panacea to the incessant challenges that besieged orthodox approaches to development. It has been applauded by academics, rural development practitioners and NGOs have consequently embraced this “novel” approach to rural development with the aim of

enhancing project, acceptability, sustainability as well as improving food security in drought stricken regions of Zimbabwe like Gokwe South district. In contemporary times, NGOs spearheading “new” forms of agricultural interventions programmes such as conservation farming have refused to be left out in embracing local participation. In spite of this renewed enthusiasm NGOs have continued to “dance on the same spot”. Paradoxically there has been an ambivalent relationship between the NGOs and the beneficiaries of the intervention programmes because every development initiative is replete with politics and power relations. This ambivalent relationship between the smallholder farmers and the NGOs spearheading the said farming technology is inexorably militating against the much heralded virtues and goal of conservation farming, that is improving productivity, profitability, sustainability and food security among poor smallholder farmers in Gokwe South. In the light of this, this paper therefore focuses on the micro and macro politics, the politics of inclusion and exclusion and the contradictions inherent in the conservation farming programme in Gokwe south district, simultaneously considering their implications on acceptability and ultimately, project sustainability.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ❖ To elicit local farmers’ perceptions on conservation farming technology in Gokwe south district
- ❖ To assess the micro politics involved in the planning and implementation of Conservation farming in Gokwe south district
- ❖ To analyse the impact of participation or lack of it on the acceptability and sustainability of the conservation farming programme in Gokwe south District

METHODOLOGY

This research was purely grounded in qualitative methodology. The choice of qualitative methodology was informed by the nature of the study which was explorative in nature, consequently enabling the researchers to capture voices, attitudes, grievances and perceptions towards conservation farming from the farmers' perspective. Qualitative methodology also enabled the researchers to present a valid picture of conservation farming technology as a vehicle for improving the livelihoods of poor rural farmers and the subsequent contradictions embedded in this farming technology, a virtue which could not have been realised through the use of quantitative methodology. Based on qualitative methodology the researchers went on to triangulate a number of research techniques with the goal of construing a holistic and vivid picture of conservation farming and the social cultural dynamics involved in the area in question (see Denzin and Lincoln 2000) In line with qualitative methodology, unstructured interviews were used as the main data gathering technique and was corroborated by Focus Group Discussions, (FGDs) key informant interviews and review of secondary sources of data. These secondary sources of data included farmer magazines, newsletters, pamphlets and flayers published by the NGOs marshalling conservation farming in Gokwe South district. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents for this study and in this case the researchers used their personal judgment to select information rich cases. This task was made easier by the fact that the respondents were insiders, therefore they were known in the community under study, making it easier for them to access relevant respondents. Through this sampling technique the researchers selected a total of thirty respondents for unstructured interviews, with the objective of eliminating a vivid picture of this farming technology in practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Norman Long's Actor oriented approach is the theoretical lens used in the research as the major analytical framework. This perspective is important in the quest for integrating the conflicting perceptions, politics and contradictions of the local communities and the Non Governmental organizations that are prescribing conservation farming practices as the panacea to food security challenges confronting

communities like Gokwe South district This Actor Oriented perspective helps to illuminate the complexity of the relationships between the competing interests of the government, extension workers, the civil society and the smallholder farmers as the beneficiaries of the new farming technologies, that is the villagers in Gokwe south district. Interfaces in rural development occur at points where different and often conflicting and diverging life-worlds of social actors traverse in social situations or arenas in which such interactions become oriented around problems of bridging ,accommodating, segregating or contesting social and cognitive standpoints.(Long 1999) Negotiations at the interface are normally carried out by individuals representing particular interest groups and in this study villagers’ representatives in cahoots with local leadership have emphasized that such intervention programmes be formulated and executed by the beneficiaries as opposed to taking an *etic* approach, while the NGOs in tandem with extension workers operating in Gokwe south district have emphasized the significance of the said farming initiatives as the antidote to the incessant food insecurity challenges in Midlands province in general and Gokwe south district in particular. Thus they have consequently imposed the said farming practices on the villagers culminating ambivalence and conflict of interests between various stakeholders involved. The bone of contention and struggle here is ownership of the programmes This analytical insight is also important in conveying the idea of contested arenas in which actors’ understandings, interests and values are pitched against each other (Long, 1992).In this scenario it thus becomes imperative to counterpoise the voices, grievances, experiences perceptions and practices of all relevant social actors involved in the said farming intervention programme. The concept of “*Interface*” helps in understanding the transformation, production and reproduction of differences in worldviews or cultural paradigms since interface situations often provide a means by which individuals or groups come to define their own cultural and ideological positions vis-a- vis those espousing or typifying opposing views in relations to development programmes.(Nhodo and Gukurume forthcoming) Scott’s (1985) concept of everyday forms of resistance is in tandem with the Actor Oriented Approach making it imperative to triangulate the conceptual frameworks in question in the quest to understand the experiences of Gokwe south smallholder farmers on Conservation farming technology. This theoretical framework is interested in comprehending the causes of smallholder farmers’ rebellion to new

development programmes. The rebellion ought to be understood in the light of peasant systems of values which are irrevocably linked to their subsistence requirements. (Yee 1994) Through such a people centered approach to rural development, it becomes easier to appreciate that inasmuch as proponents of conservation farming may want to exercise hegemony over the smallholder farmers, the farmers owing to their agency engage in counter hegemonic struggles which might not be overt. With regards to previous rural development initiatives, the problem is that inordinate attention has been paid to the rare occurrences of open revolt by the peasants and too little to ordinary, everyday forms of resistance and their symbolic and ideological underpinnings. (Scott 1984) Given this background it becomes imperative to place individual agents in their particular settings as the unit of analysis. In almost all the cases beneficiaries of development's conformity is calculated, not unthinking, and beneath the surface of symbolic and ritual compliance there is an undercurrent of ideological resistance. Given this milieu it is indispensable to understand this ideological undercurrent to understand why farmers resist or accept rural development initiatives.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

FUNDAMENTALS OF CONSERVATION FARMING IN GOKWE SOUTH-THE INTERVENTIONIST PERSPECTIVE

From the outset, it should be noted that the drier areas of southern Africa particularly in Zimbabwe, smallholder farmers experience drought once every two to three years and the situation has been aggravated by the threat brought by climate variability. (see Twomlow et al 2008) Given this background farmers in Gokwe south district have been further plunged into the vicious cycle of poverty since this negative development is impinging on the livelihoods of the said farmers who are also dependent on rain fed agriculture. Relief agencies have thus stepped in to tackle the problem head-on through new farming technologies such as conservation farming which has from an interventionist perspective been inadvertently portrayed as viable option for vulnerable smallholder farmers in drought prone regions such as Gokwe South district in the midlands province of Zimbabwe. Although conservation farming may sound like archaic farming enterprise, it has inevitably been repackaged to suit new conditions with the vital goal of improving productivity, profitability and sustainability among the poor rural farmers albeit in principle It should be noted that

conservation farming is a very colossal farming practice which however comes in a variety of packages. In Gokwe south the precedence has been given to the basin tillage primarily because for Concern International, (The NGO facilitating the farming technology in question) this farming method is presumed to be reliable and cheap to use for the rural farmers who are also alleged to be very poor. Through the basin tillage principle, pre-eminence is therefore on digging of holes or basins, without using the conventional ploughing method. Seed would then be put in these holes together with organic or inorganic fertilisers where applicable. The digging of basins all things being equal is done between August and early October using simple tools such as hoes. It is recommended that the digging of basins be done annually using the same position so as to minimise soil turnover and soil erosion as well as maintaining the soil structure. Maintenance of the soil structure is cherished because this will obviously prevent the soil from growing old, culminating in sustainable agriculture. According to Twomlow and Hove (2006) the primary principle promoted under conservation farming include disturbing the soil as little as possible, performing operations, particularly weeding and planting on time, keeping the soil covered with crop residues as much as possible and mixing and crop rotation. As was observed in this study these principles were the building blocks of conservation farming programme in the area in question.

CONSERVATION FARMING -THE GOKWE SOUTH VARIANT

In as much as conservation farming is said to have yielded desirous results for farmers in a number of areas in Zimbabwe and Sub-Saharan Africa at large, (see Makwara 2008, Twomlow and Hove 2008) it is paradoxically doing very little to enhance the livelihoods and living standards of poor smallholder farmers in Gokwe south. This huge setback can be attributed to an avalanche of factors both internal and external to the area. Consequently, instead of improving food security for the concerned farmers, conservation farming has actually led to a decline in food security. The problem is emanating from the micro politics in the said programme, culminating in an ambivalent relationship that is existing between the exponents of conservation farming technology and the beneficiaries of this technology. It emerged that whilst for the NGOs in question, conservation farming owing to its virtues can be aptly called, *diga udye* (dig and survive) implying that it leads to improved food security, for the

farmers it is regarded as *diga ufe*. (dig and die) Such a negative attitude towards conservation farming is derived from the amount of labour invested into it vis-a-vis the output realised from this rural development venture. It became evident that a lot of labour is required in the digging of basins, mulching, fencing, applying fertilisers and weeding, something these farmers cannot afford at this point in time.

The foregoing challenge with regards to conservation farming in Gokwe South has been exacerbated by the serious short supply of labour for the concerned households. It ought to be noted that the population in Gokwe south is largely comprised of the elderly who are failing to bear the brunt of conservation farming. This population dynamic can be partly attributed to massive labour migration haunting the nation in general and Gokwe South in particular. To add on to this already precarious situation is the belief of the farmers that weeds tend to grow faster in conservation farming plots that have not been tilled, thereby increasing the labour demand for the programme. These farmers are also questioning the idea of merely planting the seed without tilling the land which is also contrary to their traditional farming practices as well as their indigenous knowledge. Moreover this farming method was traditionally a preserve of poor households without adequate draught power to the extent that farmers with enough livestock for draught power do not see the merit of adopting this labour intensive farming technology (see Gukurume et al 2010) Concerning conservation farming programme, it also emerged that the proponents of this programme hurriedly went on to implement it without proper supporting structures as well as strong financial backup for the farmers on the ground. Conservation farming can only live up to its billing whenever financial support is availed to the farmers to purchase inputs such as fertilisers, seed and the much need herbicides which will inexorably go a long way in curbing the abovementioned high labour demand that comes with the said technology. This standpoint can also be corroborated by the statement made by one of the key informants in this study who said, “*Dambudziko riripo nderekuti kana waita zvediga udye unoswera mumunda imomo gore rose pasina kana chimwe chinhu chauchaita*” (The problem is that once you join the conservation farming programme, you have to remain in that plot all year round without doing other duties) Such a development does not auger well with the Gokwe south community which has since adopted livelihood diversification as a strategy for

ameliorating the catastrophic effects of climate change bedeviling Zimbabwe. Given this background the farmers in Gokwe south cannot afford the “luxury” of conservation farming since they need time to sustain other livelihoods options. For these farmers the conventional farming method remains the viable option since it is coupled with the much needed flexibility to pursue other livelihood strategies brick moulding, carpentry, fishing and other related peace jobs.

Another bone of contention between the farmers and the Non Governmental organisations is the prescription of small grain under the banner of conservation farming by the NGOs operating in this area. This emphasis has been influenced by the fact that crops such rapoko, millet and sorghum are drought resistant, and hence harvest is assured in this perennially drought prone region. Over and above this, small grains can also act as mitigation strategy against the detrimental effects of climate change or climate variability which is currently affecting the said region. The enigma however is that the farmers in Gokwe south cherish cotton production which they believe is indispensable since they have a long tradition with this cash crop. It emerged in this study that in Gokwe south cotton has been produced as the major source of income for the concerned villagers, simultaneously enabling them to meet educational requirements for their children, improving food security and health requirements. Given this backdrop, it makes little sense for these farmers to shift to small grain production despite its virtues. To further cement their negative perceptions towards small grains and conservation farming, it was observed in Gokwe south that such crops have been merely produce to feed livestock and beer brewing. Thus instead of boosting Food security in Gokwe south, conservation farming is paradoxically failing to solve the food security conundrum haunting the area under discussion. This sad development has inevitably culminated in the lukewarm acceptance of conservation farming in spite of its promises as a mechanism for hurting these rural farmers out of the vicious cycle of poverty at the same time improving rural livelihoods. These findings point to the significance of micro politics in rural development and how this can ultimately influence the shape and form rural development initiatives can take. Given this scenario rural development can only gloss over such an important element at their own peril. This therefore lends credence

to active participatory development that will go a long way in cuddling such a political dimension of development.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A PEOPLE CENTRED APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

In spite of the political gimmick of grassroots participation under conservation farming as the *sine qua non* to the perennial food insecurity quagmires haunting the Gokwe south district, it emerged to the contrary that the NGOs spearheading conservation farming in this area have failed to genuinely adopt or live up to the principles of participatory development, thereby continuing to dance on the same spot in rural development cycles (see Heliker 2010). Villagers in Gokwe south are increasingly challenging the programme because in their view this conservation farming programme has been imposed on them by the outsider hence has no place in their conceptualisation of community development. This lack of sense of ownership in the conservation farming is relentlessly having unconstructive ramifications on the overall sustainability of the said programme. In line with the observations made by Gukurume et al, (2010) the situation obtaining in Gokwe south is so intricate in the sense that unlike in some rural development intervention programmes where beneficiaries overtly expose their odium of the programme, here they are covertly doing so to the extent that if the case is not cautiously managed it can easily degenerate into a volatile situation. These farmers are utilising what Scott (1985) terms the everyday forms of peasant resistance or more precisely, they are using the power of the weak to manipulate the form and direction of the programme through such acts as sabotaging the programme, simulated ignorance, absenteeism from meetings *inter alia*. In addition to that, it was observed that a certain rapacious section of the farmers is pretending to fully embrace conservation farming but clandestinely revert to the conventional way of farming after appropriating seed and fertiliser from the NGOs for their selfish gains. Sociologically these farmers are merely presenting a front stage to conservation farming and in the absence of the development agents they shrewdly show their resentment of this programme. (also see Goffman 1958) Given this backdrop it remains polemical where conservation farming will be able to achieve its intended objectives, simultaneously ensuring the goal of Sustainable Agriculture and acceptability of the programme by its beneficiaries.

The aforementioned positioned by the farmers with regards to conservation farming is not a novel one or peculiar to Gokwe south district. This is because the history of mankind is in line with our submission that human beings are not blank slates, rather they are historical, rational, knowledgeable, reflexive, and calculative agents, with the capability of defining and redefining any developmental programme until it is acceptable to them. (see Giddens 1984) What these farmers are exhibiting is that they have their own lived realities or lifeworlds that are also affecting the way they perceive or evaluate conservation farming programme. These different lifeworlds also assist to explain why an insignificant number of farmers have accepted conservation farming whilst the majority is rejecting the programme albeit in a covert manner. Given this background it is prudent to argue that unless and until the exponents of conservation farming in Gokwe south adopt a people centered approach, the goal of Sustainable Agriculture will remain a pipeline dream. This approach will also go hand in hand with the principles of Participatory development as well as Long's (2001) Interface Analysis that will simultaneously help to break the said standoff and reconcile the conflicting lifeworlds between the farmers, NGOs, extension workers, politicians, local leadership *inter alia*. An interface in this case is the point at which the diverging interests and perceptions of these social actors towards conservation farming converge. This approach will in due course lead to a holistic and more accommodative version of conservation farming for sustainable Development. This therefore requires the facilitators of conservation farming to return conservation farming to the community and make it a community driven programme. This will obviously go a long way in instilling a sense of ownership to the programme for the concerned farmers. What also ought to be bone in mind is that beneficiaries in any developmental intervention programme meaningfully participate whenever they perceive that programme as their programme and will ultimately manage it in a sustainable manner. The NGOs should also engage in a rigorous conscientisation programme on the significance of conservation farming to smallholder farmers in such perennially drought prone regions. This has been necessitated by the realisation that conservation farming technology has been initiated from the above, following the top-down approach to development, hence the concerned farmers lack knowledge as to how conservation farming can be a vehicle for improving their strained rural

livelihoods. This lack of knowledge is pushing them to continuously hang on to their traditional farming methods as well as cotton production despite the fact that cotton production is no longer a lucrative enterprise owing to soil infertility and the dwindling market for this cash crop in Zimbabwe and the international market. Given this background proper education is ubiquitous and will also go a long way in ensuring the acceptability and sustainability of conservation farming.

One more challenge besieging conservation farming in Gokwe south district is that the NGOs involved erroneously conceptualised Gokwe south as a homogenous entity, thereby balkanising the interests of these farmers in this farming enterprise. Such a porous understanding of community obfuscates the genuine understanding of social reality. We therefore argue that social reality is too complex to be reduced to such a banal analysis. As observed in Gokwe south, the concept in question is proving to be a fluid and polemical one thereby becoming a serious deficiency to the conservation farming practice. This is because as argued elsewhere in this paper, smallholder farmers have different and often conflicting perceptions and interests towards the whole programme. These interests and perceptions in most cases are overlapping, corresponding or conflicting each other thereby presenting a convoluted picture of the conservation farming enterprise. (see Kampost et al) Thus for conservation farming, particularly in Gokwe south to achieve the goal of sustainable development concurrently empowering the concerned farmers, it becomes imperative to capture the heterogeneity of this community as well as the diverging interests of the stakeholders involved. Such an approach will inexorably help to reverse the negative perceptions the farmers currently hold towards the programme since it will accommodate the interests of all relevant actors thereby improving the overall acceptability of this noble farming venture.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing treatise endeavoured to extrapolate the conflicting and contradicting perceptions towards the conservation farming technology in Gokwe south district by different stakeholders involved, revealing the micro and macro politics and its implications on the overall sustainability and acceptability of this farming enterprise. It argues that from an interventionist standpoint, this farming technology in general

has been heralded as a viable option for these vulnerable communities to deal with the detrimental effects of climate change as well as perennial droughts lingering this farming region. On the contrary it posits that the programme has sadly failed to live up to its hype owing to an avalanche of factors, chief among them being, failure by the Civil Society to consider the lived realities of the beneficiaries and ensuring meaningful participation of the grassroots, culminating in an ambivalent acceptance of the said farming technology and in extreme cases an *impasse* to this development instrument. To break this impasse and put conservation farming back on track, it therefore becomes mandatory for the Civil Society to revert to the people centred approach to development and consequently adopt the interface analysis that will also ensure genuine participation of the local farmers, simultaneously ensuring that these social actors are involved at all levels of the programme to ensure acceptability and sustainability of this farming technology.

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