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Policy Brief | Malawi

Communicating with Farmers Through Social Networks



Project Overview

RESEARCHERS

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PARTNERS

Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
(MoAFS)

SAMPLE

100 villages
6470 people

TIMEFRAME

August 2009–October 2011

THEMES

Agriculture

POLICY & SCALE

Technology Adoption

DONOR SUPPORT

World Bank
Millennium Challenge Corp.
Yale University
University of New South Wales

Can volunteer farmers effectively communicate information about conservation farming and nutrient management to other farmers? Does the social position and gender of these farmers affect their success in disseminating this knowledge?

This evaluation studies the effects of new ways to disseminate knowledge of conservation farming and nutrient management practices via the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) extension staff. We observe that volunteer farmers, trained by MoAFS extension workers, can effectively disseminate knowledge of conservation farming and nutrient management techniques to others in their villages. The largest gains in knowledge and usage took place when these communicators were similar to the average village member and where the communicators were offered moderate, in-kind rewards for good performance.

Context

In support of the Agricultural Development Programme – Support Project (ADP-SP), researchers from several well-known universities and the World Bank joined forces with staff from MoAFS to launch an innovative impact evaluation.

Agricultural production in Malawi is dominated by maize.¹ More than 80 percent of the population's calorie consumption derives from maize, 97 percent of farmers grow maize, and over half of households grow no other crop. Throughout Malawi, maize yields remain remarkably low, and many families struggle to meet their basic consumption needs. At the

1. While the total farm commodity share of production, the area under maize cultivation is still approximately equivalent to that of all other crops combined. (FAO and Harmer 2005).

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