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# Barriers to Uptake of Conservation Agriculture in southern Africa: Multi-level Analyses from Malawi

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Conservation agriculture is a key set of actions within the growing body of climate-smart agriculture activities being advocated and rolled out across much of the developing world. Conservation agriculture has purported benefits for environmental quality, food security and the sustained delivery of ecosystem services. In this paper, new multi-level analyses are presented, assessing the current barriers to adoption of conservation agriculture practices in Malawi. Despite significant donor initiatives that have targeted conservation agriculture projects, uptake rates remain low. This paper synthesises studies from across 3 levels in Malawi: i.) national level- drawing on policy analysis, interviews and a multi-stakeholder workshop; ii.) district level - via assessments of development plans and District Office and extension service support, and; iii) local level – through data gained during community / household level studies in Dedza District that have gained significant donor support for conservation agriculture as a component of climate smart agriculture initiatives.
The national level multi-stakeholder Conservation Agriculture workshop identified three areas requiring collaborative research and outlined routes for the empowerment of the National Conservation Agriculture Task Force to advance uptake of conservation agriculture and deliver associated benefits in terms of agricultural development, climate adaptation and mitigation. District level analyses highlight that whilst District Development Plans are now checked against climate change adaptation and mitigation criteria, capacity and knowledge limitations exist at the District level, preventing project interventions from being successfully up-scaled. Community level assessments highlight the need for increased community participation at the project-design phase and identify a pressing requirement for conservation agriculture planning processes (in particular those driven by investments in climate-smart agriculture) to better accommodate, and respond to, the differentiated needs of marginalised groups (e.g. poor, elderly, carers). We identify good practices that can be used to design, plan and implement conservation agriculture projects such that the multiple benefits can be realised. We further outline changes to multi-level policy and institutional arrangements to facilitate greater adoption of conservation agriculture in Malawi, noting the vital importance of District-level institutions and amendments and capacity building required within agricultural extension services. We highlight the need for capacity building and support to ensure conservation agriculture's multiple benefits are realised more widely as a route towards sustainable land management.