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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
6432 People

TIMELINE
August 2009–October 2011

THEMES
Agriculture

POLICY & GALS
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 communication was 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 caloric 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. "Maize Production in Malawi." *World Bank*. The World Bank, n.d. www.worldbank.org. Accessed 10/10/2013.

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