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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Impact of Crop Production Strategies on Household Food Security and Welfare in Malawi’s Central Region

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Abstract

Policy, its transition and various stakeholders’ interests shape agriculture in Malawi. More recently, these influences are directed towards diversification, resulting in a shift away from tobacco and cotton production for export and towards production of food crops for consumption and local sale (such as groundnut and soya bean). Despite the external incentives, resources available to farmers largely influence production strategies - this is especially the case for the majority of resource poor farming households in Malawi, which are below the poverty line. For these households resource management plays a key role in securing their food supply and welfare. However, limited land access, soil fertility, agro-inputs, market channels, technology and information act as barriers to increased productivity. The paper explores the importance of land allocation for export and food crop production, and its impact on food security. The household data were selected from a cross-sectional longitudinal survey (n=195) conducted in three districts in Malawi’s Central Region - Lilongwe, Michinji and Salima from 2010–2013. The study finds evidence of positive relationship between production strategies, food security (measured through household diet diversity score — HDDS) and welfare (measured through wealth groups). Households that cultivate export cash crops have higher HDDS, and have higher welfare levels as opposed to households growing food crops. Further research needs to comprehensively examine strategies’ efficiency by addressing the differences between production and market risks (e.g. price and transaction costs) that both strategies face, and explore how those risks influence income levels and expenditure allocation of rural households.

Keywords: Food security, households, Malawi, production strategies, welfare