Introduction

- Biological nitrogen fixation (BNF) has been recognised as key in replenishing soil fertility
- Investing on BNF has been justified on the basis that the technology utilises legumes which in turn provides grain protein and improves household food security (Kanonge et al., 2009).
- Despite these benefits, legume production remains low with maize accounting for 60% or more of the cropped area in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia (Mapfumo, 2011).

As a result, there is need to understand how the cultivation of legumes is determined by the social, economic, institutional and biophysical factors.

Objective

- To identify factors that determine Zimbabwean smallholder farmers’ decision to cultivate legumes

Methodology

- Carried out in four districts differentiated by agro-ecological potential and market access

Fig 1: Zimbabwe map showing study sites

- Conducted four focus group discussions per district (2 female and 2 male groups) with 15 participants per group
- Carried out six case studies per district
- Direct observation on case study participants

Results

- Intense production of legumes was recorded in Rusape while other in other districts legume production remains low
- Economic factors like lack of inputs, poor markets and low prices were outlined as major factors inhibiting intensive legume production
- Legume production was higher in Rusape where there is a contract farming scheme for groundnuts and bambara nuts that availed inputs and competitive market prices

Fig 2: Mean area under maize and legume production

Fig 3: Shows factors affecting legume production in each district: (a) economic, (b)socio-cultural and (c) biophysical.

Conclusion

- To increase the area under legume production, efforts should be channeled towards addressing economic factors affecting legume production. Interventions like contract farming that avail inputs and markets should be initiated by both the government and the private sector.

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References
