



Challenges for Sustainable Land Management through Climate-Smart Agriculture

Andrew Dougill and Lindsay Stringer

University of Leeds, School of Earth & Environment, Leeds, United Kingdom (a.j.dougill@leeds.ac.uk)

There are increasing pushes for agricultural land management to be both sustainable and climate-smart (in terms of increasing productivity, building resilience to climate change and enhancing carbon storage). Climate-smart agriculture initiatives include conservation agriculture, based on minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotation, and agroforestry. Such efforts address key international goals of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), but as yet have not seen widespread uptake.

Based on analyses of different project interventions from across a range of southern African countries, we outline the inter-related challenges that are preventing adoption of climate-smart agriculture initiatives. We then identify routes to building multi-stakeholder partnerships and empowering communities through participatory monitoring with the aim of increasing uptake of such sustainable land management practices. Good practice examples remain largely restricted to local-level project interventions with significant donor (or private-sector) support, aligned to short-term community priorities relating to access to inputs or reduced labour requirements. Scaling-up to district- and national-level initiatives is yet to be widely successful due to problems of: limited policy coherence; a lack of communication between stakeholders at different levels; and limited understanding of long-term benefits associated with changes in agricultural practices.

We outline opportunities associated with improved communication of climate information, empowerment of district-level adaptation planning and diversification of agricultural livelihood strategies as key routes to guide farmers towards more sustainable, and climate-smart, land management practices. Recent experiences in Malawi, which has experienced significant floods and an El Niño drought year in the last two years, are used to empirically illustrate the extent of the remaining challenges in moving from 'win-win' conceptualisations to implementing significant changes in land management practices.