Introduction

• When it comes to agroforestry, the role of the head of the household in decision making at household level has not been documented well.

• Increasingly, the traditional assumption that the senior male of the household functions as the household head and primary decision maker is being questioned.

• Increased understanding of household level decision making in relation to tree planting activities is needed to improve the effectiveness of agroforestry policies and projects.

• This study aims to (i) identify which household members are the decision maker(s) for various agricultural activities including tree planting; and (ii) evaluate the outcomes of household decision making by the head, the spouse, or joint decision making, in terms of actual trees planted by farming households in two rural districts in Malawi.

Methods

• A household survey was administered to 135 married household heads in two rural districts in Malawi:

1. The northern district Mzimba, with mostly patrilineral kinship, where households reside in the village of the husband and the husband holds the land titles.

2. The southern district Chiradzulu, with mostly matrilineral kinship, where households reside in the village of the wife and the wife holds the land titles.

• Multinomial regression analyses were used to test the association of gender and kinship with who was the household decision maker and negative binomial regression analyses were used to see if the density of planted trees was associated with the decision maker on tree planting and tree management, kinship and gender.

Results

• The head of the household was most often the main decision maker for the various agricultural activities, while joint decision making by the husband and wife was also common (Table 1).

• Tree planting and tree management are different from other agricultural activities in that the percentage of cases where the household head decides independently was higher, and consequently joint decision making was lower.

• Decisions in relation to tree planting and management were made more often by the household head in patrilineral households, whereas joint decision making was more common in matrilineral households. In addition, decision making on tree planting was done more often by the household head in male-headed households than in female-headed households, where these decisions were more likely to be made jointly by the husband and wife together.

Conclusions

• The findings of this study demonstrate that the assumption that the household head is the sole decision maker is flawed and an oversimplification of reality.

• No clear pattern of household decision making emerged from our data on the various agricultural activities, which indicates that decision making is a complex process and cannot be reduced to a simple model.

• Gender of the household head and kinship affected who was the main decision maker within the household, and this in turn affected the density of trees planted by the household.

• Tree planting and management seem to be considered as mainly the responsibility of men in our study areas; however, it was also clear that joint decision makers with regards to tree planting and management were more successful in terms of the numbers of trees planted on their land.

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