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Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors Affecting the Adoption of
Integrated Soil Fertility Management Technologies in Emuhaya
Division, Vihiga District - Kenya

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Abstract

This study has examined the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on the adoption of Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) technologies in Emuhaya Division of Vihiga District, western Kenya. It has specifically delved into the impact of land and labour resources as well as income and how gender roles influence the adoption of the ISFM technologies. The level of involvement of local agricultural institutions in the study area in providing related information has also been investigated into.

The data for the study was gathered through observation of the farming activities of 57 households in the study area and in-depth interviews with key informants of formal agricultural institutions therein. A checklist was also used to ensure that the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the informants were duly captured. The information appearing in the checklist was screened and analysis done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while the recorded information gained from the observation and in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysis done thematically as stipulated under the specific study objectives.

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The study findings have generally established that the adoption of soil fertility management options in Emuhaya has been greatly influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors. The operationalisation of these factors was found to be in turn determined by conditions both within and outside the study context. It has also emerged that these socio-economic, cultural and gender factors act more interactively than singly to shape the direction of adoption of the soil fertility management technologies.

The scarcity of land for farming and absence of adequate labour plausibly emerged as twin factors greatly undermining the adoption of the ISFM technologies in Emuhaya. This is to the extent that most households own less than an acre of land on which they practice farming. The labour problem is largely due to the fact that a majority of the people engaged on farming are women who bear a disproportionate burden the households' tasks due to massive out-migration by men and young people in search of non-farming employment opportunities.

The lack of adequate land was particularly found to have worked against the adoption of the plant-based technologies such as improved fallows through use of mucuna as the people of Emuhaya thought it unreasonable to put the meagre acre of their land into growing non-food crops though these would ultimately enrich the soil. However, most of them, had an accurate knowledge of their soils' fertility and infertility.

Low income of the people involved in farming was also found to be another drawback for the ISFM adoption. This is due to the high prevalence of poverty in the area. Attempts to salvage this situation are made uncertain by the scarcity of financial service provision institutions from which farmers could acquire loans to boost their activities.

There is need to include the effects of low amount of land owned by the farmer, availability of labour resources, income and gender perspectives in the planning and implementation of the programme if it is to be more responsive to the needs of the beneficiaries. It is also recommended that development agencies' approach should be oriented towards laying emphasis on socio-economic and cultural factors upon which rural community are founded in designing soil fertility management interventions. The study also suggests that the government should put in place policies that support adoption of agricultural approaches and a more equal distribution of fixed assets, such as land.