FACTORS INFLUENCING SMALLHOLDER WEEDING PRACTICES: ASSESSMENT OF FARMERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR WEEDING IN SOUTHERN MALAWI

A.M. Z. Chamango¹, H.R. Mloza-Banda, J.M. Ritchie, and G.K. Nyirenda

ABSTRACT
A study was conducted in Matapwata Extension Planning Area (EPA) of Blantyre Shire Highlands in Southern Malawi to determine factors governing smallholder farmer decision-making for weed control. The farming system in this area is maize-based and incorporates Phaseolus vulgaris (common beans) and Cajanus cajan (pigeon peas) as the main pulse and legume intercrops. A questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of thirty farmers encompassing both male- and female-headed households. Farmer decision-making for weed control emerged as a complex process depending on biophysical, economic, and social factors. The survey highlighted crop vigour and inorganic fertilizers (34.4%), food security (20.9%), household labour availability (19.7%) and sickness (15.6%) as the main determinants of farmer decision-making for weed control. The study also revealed that over time, farmers have developed alternative weeding practices in response to recurrent or changing natural and socio-economic circumstances.

¹ ICRISAT, Chitedze Agricultural Research Station, P.O. Box 158, Lilongwe, Malawi