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## Using Role-Play to Investigate How Gender and Socio-Economic Factors Influence Farmers’ Selection of Innovations

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### Abstract

The likelihood that smallholder farmers adopt innovations depends *inter alia* on their view of their problem and resource situation, and on their assessment of the innovation in relation to the various forms of capital and capabilities needed to implement it. Farmers’ views and assessments are in turn influenced by multiple cultural and socio-economic factors that will differ even among farmers that live and produce under similar ecological conditions.

Within a transdisciplinary research project focused on improving household food security in Tanzania, we aim to assess how social-economic factors, including gender, affect farmers’ decisions to adopt different innovations.

A participatory scenario building (PSB) methodology was designed, integrating role play as a core activity. Fieldwork was undertaken with three farmer groups in the Dodoma and Morogoro regions of Tanzania between January and April 2015. The PSB activity involved 8–10 days working with each group to explore farmers’ perspectives on the potential challenges and benefits of different innovations. The role play activity was deployed in order to assist farmers in enacting social difference; in making explicit their perceptions about how gender and socio-economic factors could come to matter in terms of the potential pathways and outcomes of different innovation options.

This paper highlights how farmers portrayed the implications of factors including gender, age and marital and economic status, in relation to the feasibility and usefulness of different innovations. Results show that these social differences affect the time, energy and various capitals available to farmers and thereby influence the choices made in terms of innovation selection. The performance of these issues during the role-plays had importance for everyday material realities of the participating farmers, as they influenced their decisions on which innovations to select for adoption.

After critically evaluating the methodology deployed, we argue that in innovation processes, efforts need to be made to consider the social heterogeneity of smallholder farmers in order for innovations to be workable and relevant to the respective sub-group(s) of farmers.

**Keywords:** Farmer groups, gender, innovations, participatory action research, role-play, scenario building, social difference