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“Filling gaps and removing traps
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Farm Household Decision Making on Crop Diversity in the Mt. Elgon Region, Uganda: A Participatory System Analysis Approach

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Abstract

Members of farming households in Uganda face the need to decide collectively on the crops they want to produce yearly in order to meet their needs in terms of cash and food. This decision making process is characterised by perceived trade-offs among the existing production possibilities. Decisions are further constrained by land, farm labour and capital. We consider the farm and its household as a socio-ecological system and adopt a constructivist approach. In order to gain insights from households about the decision making process, we use an innovative method of participatory system analysis. With a view to empower farmers with limited writing and reading skills to participate, we used collages, instead of words. A collage elicits data using visual representations and offers vast ways of interpretation. In addition, it has rarely been used on farm household related studies. This study was carried out in two sub-counties which represent the low and mid altitudes of Kapchorwa district in the Mt. Elgon region, Eastern Uganda. The study therefore examines how decisions about crop diversity and the area cultivated for each crop are made at the level of the farming household. The collected data consisted of the source (who makes the decisions) and the reasons (what drives the decisions) for the cropping diversity, the constraints, the trade-offs between cultivation options and cropping activities. The connections between the different elements of decision making were assessed as well. First, we collected narratives from individual interviews which we documented with our own pictures and observations. The subsequent system analysis took place in focus group discussions and made use of the pictures taken during the interviews. This research shows how important it is to involve farmers in participatory research if one aims to target the relevant constraints when formulating policies which influence cropping decisions.

Keywords: Collage, crop diversity, Farm household, Participatory system analysis, Socio-ecological system