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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Seeing Is Believing

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Abstract

It is well documented in the literature that agrarian systems in the region of South East Asia are undergoing transitions from subsistence agriculture towards market oriented agriculture. The adoption of innovative financial services and technologies by smallholder farmers has emerged as a core element in the quest to sustainable economic growth. The rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) gives promising opportunities to governments and businesses to design services that suit the need of smallholders. In remote areas of Cambodia however, this process appears to be particularly challenging. Some farmers appear to be resistant to innovative and highly benefitting technologies and services, while others are willing to accept them and even act as first movers. While explanations for this difference in behaviour are manifold in the literature, e.g. risk attitudes and loss aversion, we strive to examine a new possible reason: Eyesight. Due to cultural reasons, but also e.g. lack of financial services, awareness, and infrastructure, the rural population in the North-Eastern district of Cambodia, Ratanakiri, seldom wears glasses.

Using a standardised eyesight-test, we recorded the ability to see of 305 smallholder farmers in 2018. We examine the relationship between vision and attendance at agricultural trainings; vision and uptake of formal financial services as well as vision and crop/input portfolio. We expect farmers with low vision to be less likely to diverge from traditional patterns.

If eyesight is a determinant factor, then policies that do not account for the effects of poor vision might not support all farmers equally. In fact, ignoring the importance of eyesight when developing policy implications might cause leaving those most burdened behind, while merely supporting those with less limited resources.

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