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“Reconcile land system changes  
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## Fostering innovation upscale through social learning and gender-responsive theory of change: lessons from interfaces project

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### Abstract

Globally, land is degrading at an unprecedented rate. Africa experiences about 6 percent increase in land degradation annually, impacting farm yields, food security and biodiversity. The consequences of land degradation are exacerbated by climate change. Resultantly, significant investments have been made by national governments and development partners in agricultural research and innovation intending to increase food production in Africa. The evidence shows that innovations have been effective at improving agricultural productivity. However, there is low uptake of knowledge and innovations among smallholder farmers due to socio-cultural and contextual barriers, and limited inclusion of diverse relevant stakeholders in the innovation development process. Fostering innovation upscale requires the active participation of diverse stakeholders. The present study answers the research question – how do we foster co-learning and co-creation among diverse stakeholders for innovation upscale and presents the lessons from two years of engagement with stakeholders of the participatory learning platform established in northern Ghana under the INTERFACES project. Our approach is rooted in social learning, gender responsive and knowledge decolonisation. As a first step, we established a participatory learning platform (PLP) to catalyze learning and reflection among stakeholders from science-policy-practice towards knowledge and innovations uptake, upscale and out-scale. We relied on series of stakeholder workshops and interviews to co-develop context-specific gender responsive theories of change to serve as conceptual frames for ongoing learning and reflection on agricultural innovations and sustainable land management (SLM). The lessons show that engaging diverse stakeholders through social learning allowed deep reflections - seeing their real world from others' perspectives and better reframing of contextual challenges, leading to the development of gender responsive theories of change. The developed theories of change offer essential contextual insights to field researchers and innovation teams in ensuring that innovations meet the needs, preferences and priorities of stakeholders. Similarly, collective ownership of the learning process and trust building positioned stakeholders to take up and upscale SLM innovations within and beyond their networks. From the lessons learned, further studies on agricultural innovations and development should prioritise engaging diverse local stakeholders as a first step towards the development of context-specific agricultural innovations.

**Keywords:** Co-development, Gender responsive, Participatory learning platforms, Sustainable land management, Theories of change