



Tropentag, September 16-18, 2026, hybrid conference

“Towards multi-functional agro-ecosystems
promoting climate resilient futures”

Gendered seeking behaviour of plant health advisory services in kenya

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Abstract

Plant health clinics are demand-driven initiatives that provide farmers with plant health advisory services (PHASs) to reduce pre- and post-harvest losses from pests and diseases, thereby increasing food production. This study aimed to assess the determinants of PHAS-seeking behaviour among smallholder tomato farmers, with a focus on gender-disaggregated data for both male and female farmers. Data on self-reported estimates of PHAS-seeking behaviour were collected through a multistage sampling procedure, using a pre-tested, electronically designed semi-structured questionnaire administered to 385 smallholder tomato farmers in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to assess PHAS-seeking behaviour in general. In addition, gender differences in PHAS-seeking behaviour were analysed using multigroup analysis (MGA) within the PLS-SEM framework. Overall, the results indicated that attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and motivation significantly influence tomato farmers' intentions to seek these services. Perceived behavioural control also had a significant effect on actual service-seeking behaviour. However, intentions to seek PHASs did not significantly translate into actual behaviour, suggesting that tomato farmers' intentions are unlikely to lead to action. Multigroup analysis results revealed no significant difference in PHAS-seeking intentions between male and female tomato farmers, likely due to similarities in attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and motivation. Nonetheless, a significant difference was observed in actual service-seeking behaviour, with male farmers more likely to act on their intentions than their female counterparts. These findings underscore the need for policies that advance evidence-based demonstrations, nudge behaviour, expand female extension staff, and scale digital advisory platforms. Moreover, sensitisation and awareness campaigns would encourage actual service-seeking behaviour among farmers.

Keywords: Kenya, plant health advisory services, plant health clinics, pls-multigroup analysis, seeking behaviour