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WOMEN AND YOUNG FARMERS AS INNOVATORS IN COMMUNITY-DRIVEN AGRO-ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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This paper argues that rural farmers working in the context of the African Farm Family system are innovators who have been generating and adopting various farm practices to produce a range of outputs that meet their well-being needs. These outputs include increase in quantities as well as the qualities of agricultural products that allow them to meet their material, social and spiritual needs (Food for well-being). In this process, women and young farmers are holders of specialized knowledge and skills and need to be specially targeted as innovators. On the other hand formal researcher-innovators have over the years developed innovations based on western science that have contributed to increased production in terms of quantities to feed the world (Food for Feeding and industry). The challenge here is that the formal and indigenous innovators are working from different worldviews perspective with different aspirations in terms of the value of the end products. This explains why it has been difficult to motivate indigenous farmers to adopt or innovate in the western science context. To address the question of how to enhance farmers capacities, especially women and young farmers to innovate, the paper proposes an endogenous approach. This requires that western scientists first learn from indigenous farmers and participate in their experiments with the aim to strengthen the capacities of farmers to innovate to increase productivity to feed the world but also meet their other well-being aspirations. This will happen only when western scientists acknowledge and respect the worldviews of African farmers and be willing to adopt transdisciplinarity in their research approach. An endogenous innovations approach requires that western scientists use a multi-stakeholder approach that ensures that all categories of the family farm labour force – men, women, youth, indigenous institutions, etc as well as all other relevant stakeholders are targets. The paper strongly recommends the Innovations Platform approach that motivates all stakeholders – western and indigenous innovators and all relevant institutions both indigenous and formal to work towards agricultural innovations that produce outcomes that meet the aspirations of all – win-win innovations.

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