

The road ahead for gender-responsive maize breeding

Gender inclusivity through maize breeding: A review of the issues and options for future engagement

Rachel Voss,¹ Jason Donovan,² Pieter Rutsaert,¹ Jill Cairns,³ Mike Olsen¹

¹ International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Kenya

² CIMMYT, Mexico ³ CIMMYT, Zimbabwe

BACKGROUND:

Gender-responsive varietal development is seen as an important path to closing gender gaps in uptake of new maize varieties, which is hoped to reduce inequalities between men and women farmers. As such, maize breeders are urgently seeking evidence of gender-based differences in trait and varietal preferences. Evidence on such differences remains murky, suggesting the need for reflection on the gender and maize breeding research agenda.

FINDINGS:

Our review of research on gender-differentiated crop preferences finds:

- methodological inconsistencies that limit the ability to draw conclusions on gender-based differences in maize preferences
- reliance on methods where women's preferences and needs are detached from context and realities (e.g., choice experiments)
- entrenched but untested assumptions about the gender dynamics of maize production and seed choice
- unresolved operational challenges related to integrating gender into maize breeding pipelines
- an incomplete understanding of men's and women's relative preferences and needs for improved maize varieties

AN AGENDA FOR GENDER & MAIZE RESEARCH:

- 1) Expand methodological approaches to unpack assumptions about men's and women's seed demand, decision-making, and purchasing behaviors:
 - Intrahousehold studies
 - Inclusive farmer-managed trials
 - Field experiments around seed choice
- 2) Identify the relevance of consumer traits (e.g. traits related to processing, cooking, and storage) and, where relevant, develop related breeding targets
- 3) Explore incentive structures for breeders, seed companies, and retailers to orient products and services with gender intentionality



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This work was supported, in part, by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, USAID, FFAR, and other donors through the Accelerating Genetic Gains project, Seed Production Technologies for Africa II project, and the CGIAR Research Programs on Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM) and Maize Agri-Food Systems (MAIZE).

Photo by H. de Groote