

Creating space for smallholder farmer innovation: Reflections from Australian researchers

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Abstract

An agricultural research for development project on the East India Plateau provides the context for reflecting on the conduct of research, the creation of learning opportunities, scaling out of research results, and monitoring research impact. What appears at one level as research into rice agronomy actually has profound implications for climate resilient agriculture, nutrition security and the empowerment of women. It is clear the most important outcome of our research is the development of human beings rather than the development of agricultural technology or agricultural systems. Despite often extreme disadvantage, our women research farmers have frequently demonstrated individually and collectively that they have the capacity to transform their lives. The process of engaging them in research appears to hold the key to unlocking their latent capacity for independent innovation. Our research practice continues to evolve in light of this new understanding.

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