

Smallholder farmers as a heterogeneous group: Assessing how farmers' perception of their livelihood situation is influenced by intersecting social differences

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Introduction

Problem: The likelihood that farmers adopt innovations depends inter alia on how they view their livelihood system and how they perceive the problem to be solved by the innovation. Their perspectives are influenced by multiple social factors and differ even among farmers that produce under similar conditions.

Aim: Identify social differences responsible for heterogeneity among smallholder farmers in four case study sites (CSS) in Dodoma and Morogoro in Tanzania. Assess how these differences affect farmers' perspectives on 1) available resource bases, 2) livelihood activities, 3) crop priorities and 4) most important problems.

Methods

Participatory situation analysis:

- 58 group sessions using various communication tools, e.g. livelihood analysis, seasonal calendars, net maps and problem trees with 360 female and male farmers of different age and wealth classes.
- 8 participatory role play exercises with 84 participants, including specific sessions for female household heads and peripheral villagers.



♀ Activities
“Woman for woman”:
plaiting hair, selling clothes

Preparation of food:
Local alcohol “pombe”,
pastries, cafeteria

Preferred crops:
millet, maize
groundnuts, sunflower,
hibiscus

♂ Activities
“High capital”: shop, milling
machine, trader;

Skilled labour: carpenter,
butcher, mechanic for
bicycles/motorcycles,
mason, carpenter

Preferred crops:
millet, sorghum
groundnuts, sunflower,
sesame

Figure 3: Example of livelihood activities by gender



Lack of capital and labour - a vicious cycle

‘If there was a drought in the first year, you will get less produce, which won’t be enough either for food or for income up to the next harvest, so you may start either selling or eating the grain that was stored as seeds for the next year. You won’t have money left to buy new seeds, so the first thing would be to undertake wage labour for others, in order to organize food for the family, at the same time organizing money to buy new seeds. So you might then be unable to plant the seeds in time, you might even miss the first rain, and those who are late might face problems. In the end, the next harvest will again be less than expected and since you are urgently in need of money, again, you will just have to sell your harvest to the next best small trader who is taking advantage of your situation and will pay a low price.’

Results

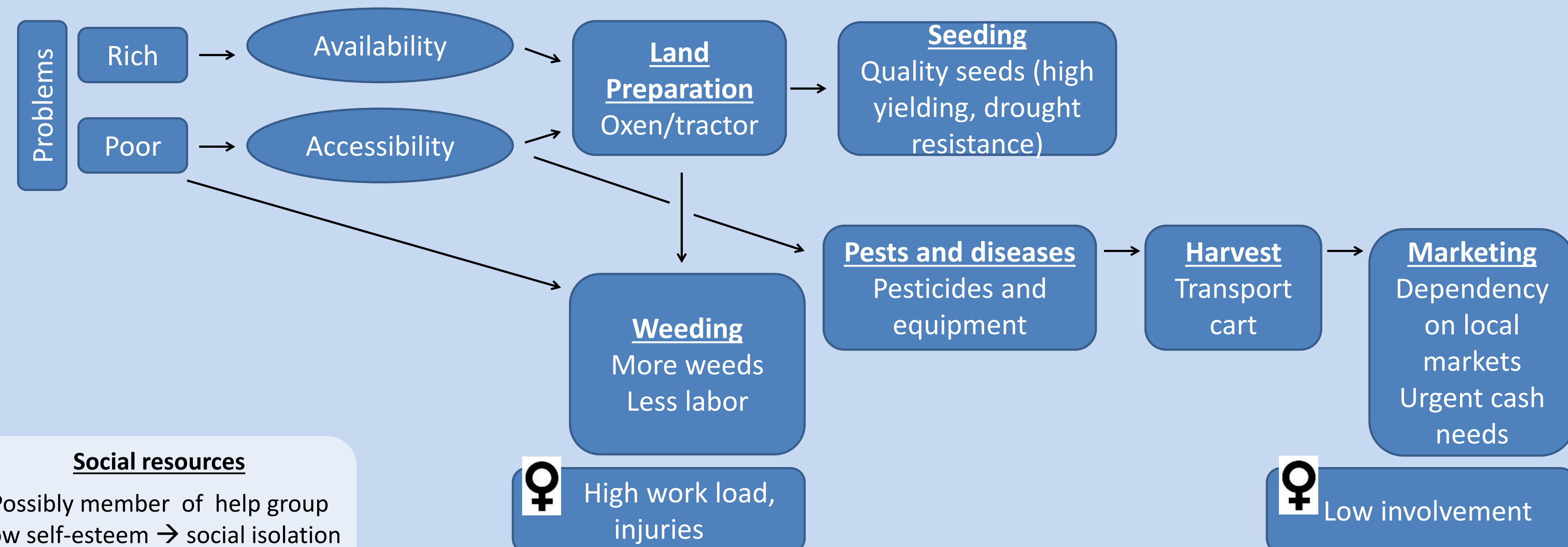


Figure 1: FVC problems differentiated by gender and economic status

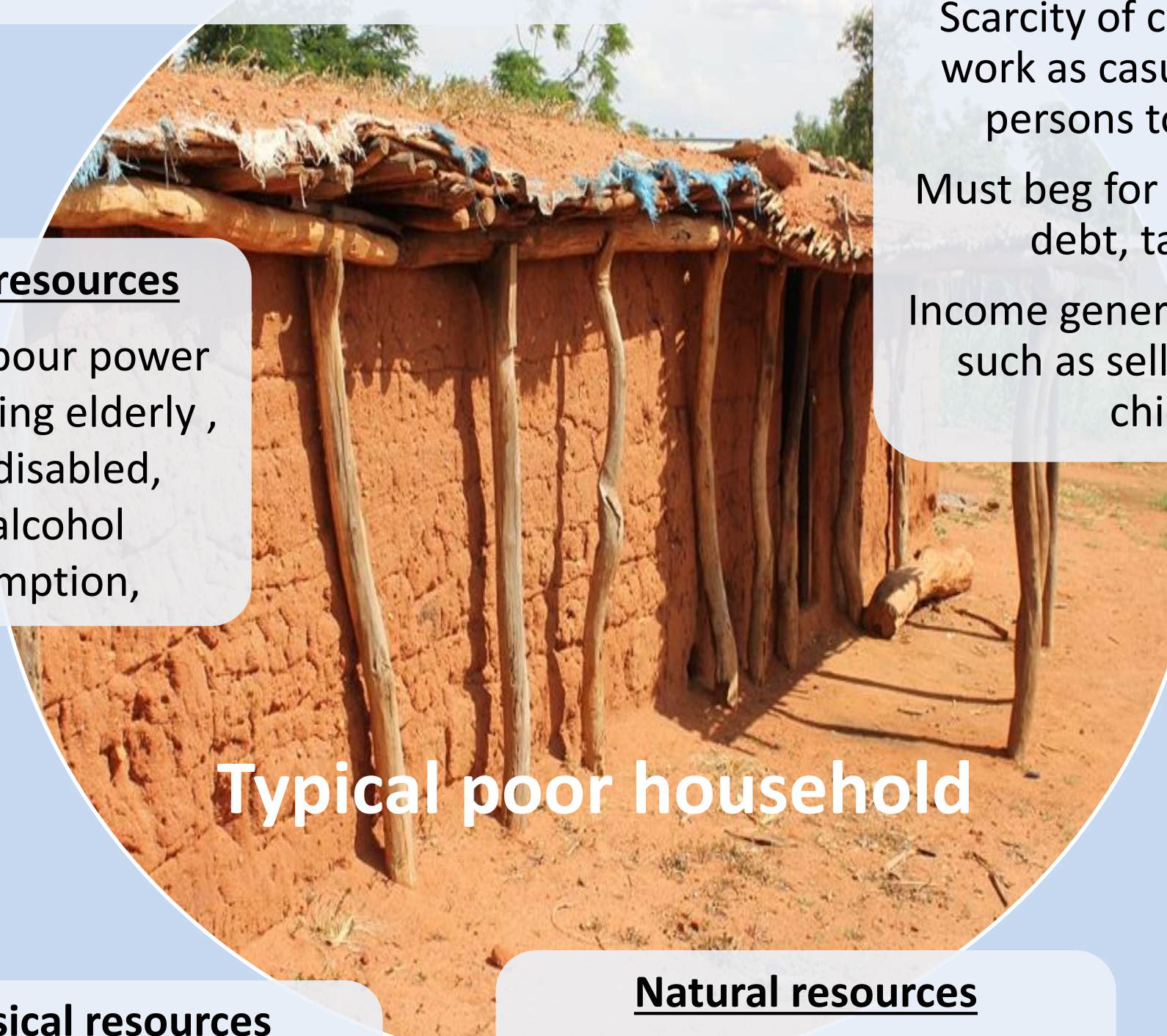
Social resources
Possibly member of help group
Low self-esteem → social isolation
Possibly large family, or living
alone: Elderly people without
children to take care of them
Widowed or divorced women
often expelled by husband’s family

Financial resources
Scarcity of cash and food,
work as casuals for richer
persons to earn cash
Must beg for help; always in
debt, take loans
Income generating activities,
such as selling eggs and
chicken

Human resources
Lack of labour power
due to: Being elderly,
sick or disabled,
high alcohol
consumption,

Physical resources
Own mud house with grass
roof; 2 rooms; traditional
furniture; may not have a
toilet; cook on open fire; no
mosquito net

Natural resources
Possibly own chicken and
some fruit trees
Cultivate up to 1-2 acres of
land with food crops only, up
to 2 hours walking distance



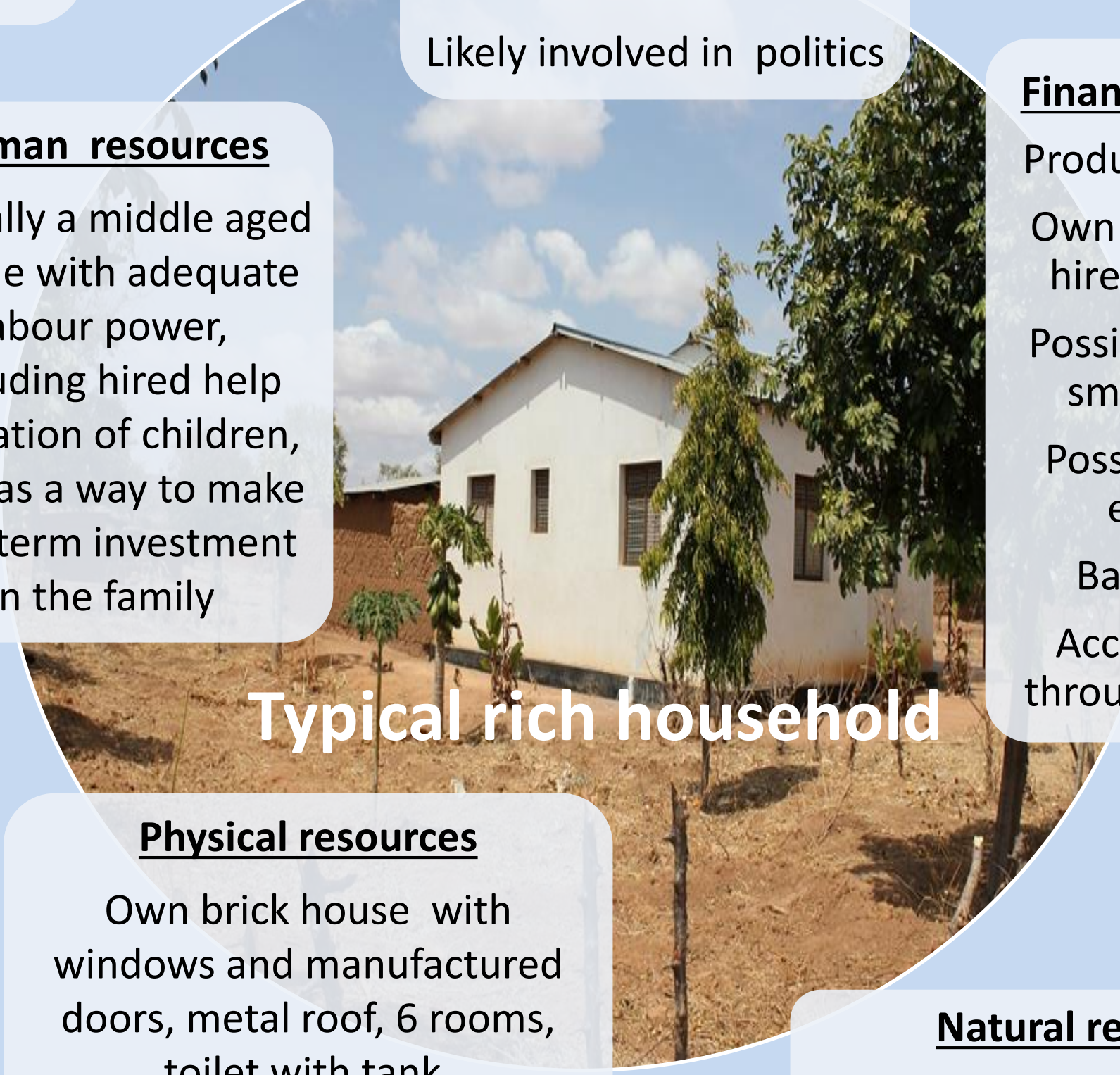
Typical poor household

Social resources
Often married couples
with children
Possibly members of
savings and credit group
Have inheritance rights
to land
Likely involved in politics

Human resources
Typically a middle aged
couple with adequate
labour power,
including hired help
Education of children,
seen as a way to make
long term investment
in the family

Physical resources
Own brick house with
windows and manufactured
doors, metal roof, 6 rooms,
toilet with tank.
Own motorbike and/or car
Fenced yard, can hire tractor
for ploughing

Natural resources
Access to a large area of land
(15-40 acres), to grow cash and
food crops, may also keep
livestock



Typical rich household

Conclusions

- Gender differences intersect with inequalities between wealthier and poorer households, e.g. single female headed-households are likely to be part of poorer groups and have less profitable options for income generation.
- High dependence on crop farming across all CSS highlights that in order to improve livelihoods, innovations need to improve both, food availability and capital situation and especially consider labour constraints of poor farmers.
- There are no “one size fits all” solutions. With diverse resource endowments, livelihood activities and problem situations observed, a plural and inclusive approach is needed for different economic and gender groups to benefit.
- Collaborative design approaches, considering participants’ needs and their room for maneuver, are proposed as a way of increasing the relevance of innovation processes for heterogeneous groups of smallholder farmers.