

January 20, 2018

Dear Dr. Wood and Ms. Vasquez,

I have now received reports from two reviewers regarding your manuscript, “Microplots and food security: encouraging replication studies of policy relevant research,” (*Manuscript Number 2355; Discussion Paper Number 2017-71*).

Based on the feedback I have received, I am inviting you to submit a revision. Your revision should address the individual points raised by each of the reviewers, and you should include a separate document that provides a point-by-point response to each of the reviewer’s comments. You are not required to do everything the reviewers say, but if you disagree with a recommendation, you should state your reason. A successful revision will also address the following:

1) While not mentioned by the two reviewers, I have to confess that I found the replication plan difficult to follow, no doubt because I am not familiar with the paper by Santos et al. (2014). However, your general reader will also not be familiar with that paper, and your replication paper should be, at least mostly, self-contained. Accordingly, I would greatly reduce the parameters that you discuss in your replication plan, taking more time to explain them and how you plan to analyze them. For example, on page 4, you state that “the first two stages intend to examine if the results are reproducible.” Which results? Give a small number of examples of results that you will be examining for reproducibility. Be specific. Similarly, you state “...our robustness checks will re-examine the influence of providing a microplot on household: 1) perceived land tenure security, ii) likelihood of access credit for agriculture, iii) use of improved inputs, and iv) women’s likelihood to be involved in important food and agriculture decision. If possible, we will also explore impact level effects of the program on food security. This analysis will also allow us to investigate if these results are sensitive to varying hunger measurements and the methodologies used in the original publication.” The large number of things that you mention is overwhelming, at least to me. Further, I am no wiser after reading this about what exactly you plan to do. Better to focus on just one or two parameters, as examples, and then discuss in depth how you plan to operationalize “re-examining the influence of providing a microplot” and “investigate if these results are sensitive to varying hunger measurements and the methodologies used in the original publication.” Discuss fewer parameters, but be more detailed about what exactly you would do.

2) I also would like to see more discussion about what you will be looking for in your replication analysis. Would you focus on the size of the coefficients? On their statistical significance? Suppose a key coefficient is small but statistically significant in your replication. How would you interpret that? Again, be specific about what you will be looking for.

3) Finally, I would like you to be a little more courageous when it comes to interpreting your results. You state on page 8, “...our interpretation of the results of the replication process does not focus on arguing a “success” or “failure” to replicate the original study, instead we aim to deepen the research dialogue by simply reporting our findings and how do they strengthen or weaken the main takeaways of the original article.” While I am sympathetic to not being forced into a binary conclusion about replication “success” or “failure,” it would still be valuable for you to explicate what kind of results would “strengthen” or “weaken” the

results of the original article. Would you focus on effect sizes? On statistical significance? The discussion on page 7 mentions the use of sub-samples. This reduces power, making it more likely that you would produce insignificant estimates. How would you trade-off the benefit from using sub-samples versus the cost of reduced power? I understand that there is no single, right answer here. But a recognition of the trade-off, and sharing your wisdom gleaned from doing and overseeing replications at 3ie for many years, would be very valuable to other researchers.

A revision that satisfactorily addresses the points above, as well as responding to the individual reviewers' concerns, is likely to result in a favourable publication decision.

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to *Economics: The Open-Access, Open-Assessment E-Journal*. I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely,

W. Robert Reed
Co-Editor, *Economics E-Journal*