Recognize the problem
Thrips ("Vithiripi" in Swahili) are very small and thin insect pests (1.5 mm long). They are light grey-greenish, but difficult to see. Thrips cause tiny scars on leaves and fruits. Damaged leaves become papery and may curl and drop prematurely. Thrips usually attack during the flowering stage of tomatoes.

Background
Thrips pierce leaves and soak liquid out of plants. Therefore plants loose more water than normal and cannot growth well. Thrips’ skin surface is soft and fatty and can be dissolved by soap. Thrips pupate in the soil.

Management
To prevent this pest problem:
• Plough to expose pupated thrips to predators.
• Avoid planting tomatoes after onions (a host of thrips).
• Plant Marigold (Tagetes) plants around field because their yellow flowers can attract thrips away from tomatoes.
• Irrigate regularly to reduce susceptibility of plants to thrips damage.

When 5 to 10 plants per small <0.25 ha field are infected (look in flowers and on fruits), then consider action:
• Botanical based on nimbecidine (e.g. Neem extract) can be used max 3 times. Start spraying 15 days after transplanting (2.5-3 litres/ha or 50-60 ml/20 litres water) (or 25 to 50 g neem seed cake or powder/litre water).
• Avoid spraying other than above-mentioned pesticides, because heavy thrips infestation usually only occurs late in the cropping cycle. In this period, chemical sprays can poison the tomatoes that are ready for harvesting. At least a 28 day pre-harvest interval is needed.

Scientific name(s) > Thripidae

When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.