

The Healthy Beans Project: Participatory Research in Western Kenya

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Abstract

Engaging in participatory research, moving the work of knowledge generation out of the laboratory and into the hands of farmers, is an important way that those involved in agricultural research can contribute to the goal of societal empowerment. This presentation will introduce The Healthy Bean Project, an agricultural research project managed by Cornell University, the University of Nairobi, and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and funded by the United States National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)'s Feed the Future program. The goals of the project are to decrease incidences of soil-borne diseases, increase yields, and improve soil health in bean-farming systems. The project also has an extension/capacity-building focus, with a 4th stated goal being to “build capacity by training participants on how to prepare compost, how to use farm-scale, biochar producing stoves and how to use the resulting biochar and compost to improve soil condition, increase nodulation and N fixation and suppress plant diseases.” This presentation will introduce the Healthy Beans Project's research methodology, share some preliminary results from the first years of field trials, and provide insights on the strengths and challenges inherent in participatory research and the contribution such research makes to the broader goals of societal empowerment.