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“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Exploring the Power of Innovative Learning with Farmers for Sustainable and Remunerable Agriculture

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Abstract

New and emerging technologies may have the potential to tremendously improve the future of crop and livestock production in developing countries. However, harnessing the potential of such technologies for food security requires investments in research and development, human capital, infrastructure and knowledge flows.

For the last five years, HORIZONT3000 has been implementing Enabling Rural Innovation in East Africa (ERI EA); a regional rural development project that works through capacity building, knowledge management and strategic partnerships to benefit rural farmers and their communities to enhance and balance their food sovereignty, income security, and sustainable natural resource management. It uses the Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) approach developed in East Africa by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to overcome the linear, top-down model of technology development and market access in agriculture.

In order to further create an enabling environment for agricultural innovation that benefits farmers and university students, since 2016 HORIZONT3000 partnered with Makerere University, Uganda Martyrs University, Sokoine University of Agriculture Tanzania, University of Nairobi Kenya and Bahir Dar University Ethiopia under the International Training on Organic Agriculture (ITCOA). Through this interactive knowledge sharing process together with farmers, students learnt about the working of ERI approach by applying its five key modules of: Participatory Diagnosis, Participatory Market Research, Farmer Participatory Research, Enterprise Development, and Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation. On the other hand, students shared practical knowledge of agro ecosystem health assessment and use of a mobile soil testing kit with farmer groups and field extension staff in Rakai and Tororo districts.

Project annual reports and monitoring reports for 2016/17 showed that shared knowledge and experience led to improved soil and water management practices and as a result, food production volumes (especially cereals and legumes) more than doubled. Obtained knowledge has also been applied in establishing and maintaining simple vegetable gardens around homesteads (kitchen gardens) that further supplement the quality of daily meals consumed rural farming families in the project area. Empowering farmers and the youth with relevant application knowledge will be the best way to tackle the big challenge of food security and nutrition in the twenty first century.

Keywords: Food sovereignty , innovative learning, natural resource management

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