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“Reconcile land system changes  
with planetary health”

## Living labs and citizen science approaches: empowering communities in research aimed at driving societal change

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### Abstract

Living labs and citizen science approaches provide a platform for researchers to empower communities in research aimed at driving societal change. In adopting these approaches, researchers explicitly engage with context-specific knowledge and centre community voices in research processes which inform the development of policy and intervention strategies underpinning the transformation of socio-technical and socio-ecological systems. There is, however, a knowledge gap as regards the role that living labs and citizen science approaches are playing as regards empowering communities, facilitating knowledge co-production, and promoting social learning in East Africa.

This study explores the impact of a living lab and citizen science research project known as the Prosperity Co-Laboratory (PROCOL) Africa. PROCOL is a project that is being implemented by the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at University College London in close collaboration with local partners and aims to broaden the discussion of what constitutes prosperity in East Africa. This study was undertaken in 7 counties in Kenya, with data collected through key informant interviews with 15 citizen scientists and 130 farmers.

The results of this study indicate that citizen science and living lab approach has empowered communities across the 7 counties. The citizen scientists involved in the project have engaged in data collection, participated in research design, provided research feedback, and actively facilitate multi-directional dialogue with and between members of their communities. Having received agricultural production-related training, citizen scientists have gained status within their communities and an additional source of livelihood as extension service providers, while communities have benefited from knowledge exchange related crop and livestock production, environmental conservation and management, community engagement, and household nutrition. By facilitating the establishment of a platform for information sharing and social learning, the project has successfully contributed to broadening the discussion of what constitutes prosperity in East Africa while empowering communities in a research process aimed at driving societal change.

**Keywords:** Co-creation, co-learning, Kenya, living labs

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