Micronutrient-Rich Beans Enhancing Diets and Livelihoods in Rural Uganda



Improving bean production in Africa has been the Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA)'s goal since its inception in 1996. PABRA works with partners who play different roles in the bean production process, including national bean programs, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, church groups, farmer associations, and community-based organizations.

One partner, with whom it has worked with since 2009, is the Community Enterprises Development Organization (CEDO), an NGO based in south-western Uganda. It disseminates technologies to thousands of bean farmers, using demonstration gardens, and provides practical training in cookery. It also brings together farmer groups who want to improve their agricultural production, food security, and income through cooperative activities and use of improved agricultural practices.

"Working with PABRA has raised our bean production from subsistence farming to cash cropping," says Mrs Rosemary Mayiga, CEDO's program coordinator, when she spoke at a PABRA forum.

She adds, however, that "PABRA and the national program need to encourage not only more communities but also, and more particularly, women—the bulk of bean producers—to use these new technologies. That way, production can increase across the country."

PABRA's nutrition program is working in partnership with CEDO and the Ugandan National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO). The three partners reach out to vulnerable communities to provide micronutrient-rich beans, address malnutrition, and improve health. In the first year, CEDO produced almost 60 metric tons of beans rich in protein, iron, and zinc, and, with PABRA's help, supplied part of that production to the World Food Program and Concern International–Uganda.

The three-way partnership not only benefits external markets, but also the farmers it reaches. About 85% of farmers involved also receive, for multiplication, small quantities of seed of the micronutrient-rich beans produced by NARO. Results so far indicate improved community diets, as well as increased production. That is, communities, who had previously eaten beans 2 or 3 times a week, can now include beans in their diets 4 to 6 times a week. Concomitantly, daily consumption of food groups also increased from 1 or 2 to 3 or 4. In addition, sales of surplus beans to local markets are supplementing household incomes.

More than 2000 farmers of the 350 farmer groups belonging to CEDO produce seeds, especially bean seed, as their primary cash crop. PABRA is now reaching more and more farmers with improved technologies to enhance their seed production e.g. integrated pest and disease management methods. The alliance also provides capacity building in seed

production, encourages use of micronutrient-rich beans, and offers practical training on development of tasty and nutritious bean recipes.

Martha Nyagaya, PABRA's nutrition specialist in eastern Africa, says, "Within the region, CEDO has demonstrated that working with organized farmer groups can increase the value of beans, both as a food crop and source of farmer livelihood." She adds, "This is an example of the impact PABRA hopes to bring to poor communities, both rural and urban."

In seeking to improve crops, CEDO also works with other partners, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries; the Crop Protection Department; the National Seed Certification Service; and the private sector.

Uganda, as a whole, has made strides in ensuring that micronutrient-rich beans reach markets to serve as a source of protein, iron, and zinc for the rural and urban poor. Other achievements include the development of bean flour mixes suitable for weaning small children, two recipe books, and 14 food baskets to vary cooking methods for beans, which diversify the meals prepared and consumed with beans.



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