

### **Introduction:**

This activity introduces a case study of international development and humanitarian aid to participants to consider the ways in which intensity factors impact cross-cultural interactions and collaboration. Participants are introduced to the background of the case study step-by-step, with each step introducing additional insight and nuance into the complexities of the situation.

### **Objectives:**

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Examine “the range of possible perspectives that can be brought to bear on [the] complicated work of international development and humanitarian aid.”
2. Recognize the variety of factors that can influence the intensity of an intercultural experience.

### **Time:**

60 minutes.

### **Group Size:**

Entire group.

### **Materials:**

Beans Don't Have Culture Handout; Optional: Intensity Factors Index (both in [Downloads](#)).

### **Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:**

- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

### **AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**

#### Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

#### Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

#### Curiosity

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.

- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

### **Other Skills:**

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.

### **Activity Instructions:**

1. Pass out the "Beans Don't Have Culture Handout" to each participant (in [Downloads](#)). Instruct participants to read the following information and make note of the words and phrases that stick out to them or that they are curious about by underlining or making a mental note. They will need to pause and answer the questions posed along the way, either in a small group or with the entire group – you as the instructor may choose what fits your group best in this case. You can also decide if you'd like to give participants time to read silently by themselves or to read aloud in the larger group.

### **Background**

Long ago, in a land far, far away, a project was funded by an international aid organization to conduct applied research and outreach to:

- Reduce storage degradation and loss
- Improve the storage and preservation of beans
- Inventory and evaluate local bean varieties
- Determine variables making the beans hard to cook
- Test insect resistance
- Possibly develop a new and better bean

*PAUSE and share:*

- What comes to mind when you read the words "international aid organization?"
- What are your current thoughts about the beans referenced?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

### **The Location**

Wangoa is a (fictitious) tropical country with a complicated colonial history, prolonged intergroup conflict, located in a densely populated mountainous region, where the vast majority of the people live as subsistence agriculturalists. One of the world's poorer countries, the area struggles with deforestation and soil erosion.

There are significant cultural issues at play in Wangoa. They distrust foreigners, as well as each other across ethnic lines. Their values tend to emphasize:

- Social formality
- Honoring hierarchies
- Avoiding uncertainty and risk
- Collectivism along ethnic lines
- Circular and indirect communication patterns

*PAUSE and share:*

- Why do you think the Wangoans might distrust foreigners?
- How do you feel about the way the Wangoans are depicted in this description?
- What is your personal experience with the value emphases listed (if any)? Do you personally identify with any Wangoan values?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

### **The Contractor**

The agriculture faculty of Mid West University (MWU) was selected as the sole contractor for this program. A few of the faculty members had short experiences of less than one year with projects overseas. They had limited knowledge of the local culture, although they were open to learning the history, politics, art, music, and food. Since they didn't realize cultural differences existed, they were less aware of value contrasts, communication styles, thinking patterns, and social interaction patterns. They were internationally known experts on beans, and therefore perceived themselves as going to have a bean experience, not a cultural experience.

*PAUSE and share:*

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- How do you feel about the way the faculty members are depicted in the description?
- How do you think the faculty members envision "a bean experience" to be? What about a "cultural experience?" What do YOU think a "cultural experience" is?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

### **The Case: Putting the "Culture" in Agriculture**

One of the professors conducting the training made a pre-visit to Wangoa to prepare a culture map of the variables that might impact the project. She discovered that not only did the Wangoans have culture, but also that the culture of growing, cooking, tasting, storing, and eating beans was a powerful force to be reckoned with.

The faculty had a three-month preparation for their four-year project in Wangoa, studying intercultural relations, the colonial language, and technology transfer. They met for four hours once a week before their planned departure overseas.

*PAUSE and share:*

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?

- What do you think is meant by "a powerful force to be reckoned with?"
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

Toward the end of the training portion of the program, the Minister of the Interior from Wangoa and his entourage arrived for a project meeting and ceremony. The faculty members were eager to meet the visitors and felt the meeting had gone quite well.

Much to their surprise, the result of the meeting was that the Minister threatened to withdraw the contract. The meeting was videotaped for later review and revealed that the faculty had "humiliated" the Minister in subtle but powerful ways. This visit, and the video, became a turning point in the project, when the experts realized that culture matters.

*PAUSE and share:*

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- Why do you think the discrepancy in evaluation of the meeting between the faculty members and the Minister might have occurred?
- What do you think is meant by "culture matters?"
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

While they now were alert to possible social and cultural barriers to the success of their project, they remained confident of their knowledge of beans, which was, after all, definitively their area of expertise. Only when they arrived in Wangoa did they fully comprehend that beans did indeed have culture, and that there was a great deal they had to learn about beans before they could proceed.

*PAUSE and share:*

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- What do you think is meant by, "area of expertise?" How might this definition shift across historical, socioeconomic, cultural, etc. contexts and different groups?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

### **Discussion**

The identities of the country, the contractor, and the agency have been changed to maintain confidentiality, but this is a true case study of an actual international development project.

Therefore, as you review the following questions, you may approach them from the perspective of any culture with which you are familiar. We are not looking for the “right” solution, but rather to explore the range of possible perspectives that can be brought to bear on this complicated work of international development and humanitarian aid.

2. Ask participants to answer the following questions in a whole or small group discussion.  
**Optional:** Pass out the “Intensity Factors Index” to participants.
  - What actions on the part of the American MWU faculty might have caused the Minister of the Interior and his entourage to feel “humiliated?” How else do you think the Minister and or the Wangoans felt throughout this project?
  - What did the MWU faculty need to know about the culture of beans? Try to imagine all the questions the local population might have about the new beans being introduced.
  - How would you illustrate, either verbally or via images, the progression of the faculty's changes in perception/cultural adjustment?
3. **Optional:** Pass out the “Intensity Factors Index” to participants and ask them to consider how intensity factors impact the faculty members as they implement their program in the Wangoan culture by completing the Intensity Factor Index (see [Downloads](#))\*.

*\*Ask this question only if there is ample time to present the “Intensity Factors Index” to participants (in [Downloads](#)). This is an optional add-on that takes an additional 10-15 minutes. The Intensity Factors is excellent and takes the discussion to another level, particularly because it offers concepts that learners could consider for upcoming adaptation opportunities, e.g., going to college, starting a new job, etc.*