



Introduction:

This is a simulation designed to explore the question of whether beans have culture. It uses a fictitious context and interaction that is loosely based on a case study from an actual international development project. As a participant, you will either play an active role in a cross-cultural encounter or play the role of observer.

Background:

Wangoa is a tropical country with a complicated colonial history, prolonged intergroup conflict, and a mountainous landscape where the majority of the people live as subsistence agriculturalists. One of the world's poorest countries, Wangoa struggles with deforestation and soil erosion. Beans, whose local cultivation predates colonization, are a staple and a key source of protein, but their production has fallen off in recent years.

Recognizing the value of beans for Wangoans, an international aid organization has funded a 4-year project to conduct applied research and outreach. The Wangoan Bean Project, as it is called, will:

- Inventory and evaluate local bean varieties
- Test insect resistance
- Enhance fertilization to increase yield
- Possibly develop a new and better bean

Given its expertise and success with other bean-related projects, the agriculture faculty of Mid West University (MWU) was selected as the sole contractor for the Wangoan Bean Project. Members of the research team have done stints on other projects outside the United States but have little knowledge of Wangoa. They expect cultural differences, and in the 4-hour weekly meetings they hold in the months before their first team visit, the group studies up on Wangoan history, politics, art, music, and food. They also learn something about intercultural relations, acquire survival skills in the official language (a colonial one), and brush up on technology transfer.

One of the team leaders makes a pre-visit to Wangoa to understand variables that might affect the project, and, with the help of international aid organizations in the country, identifies a starting location for the project – a particular community of bean experts who have faced several years of poor harvests.

The Wangoan Bean Experts and the MWU Bean Experts meet for the first time at a school in the Wangoan Bean Experts' community. Thanks to the fact that several Wangoans Bean Experts get by in English, language is not much of a barrier, and the two groups can converse freely about the Wangoan Bean Project.