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SOIL HEALTH TRAININGS: WORKING WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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Content: Challenges to soil are manifold: erosion and nutrient depletion are but two of these. Optimizing natural resource use towards increased sustainability is key, but why should farmers invest in participating in scientific projects? Often, a central motive is the possibility to access additional information about their resources that can supplement the knowledge farmers already possess, e.g. traditional ecological knowledge. Besides building capacities, increasing the resilience and profitability of existing crop-livestock systems can be a driver.

Here we report experiences from several soil health trainings (SHTs) we held under diverse circumstances in the last years. Some have taken place in the Global South in the framework of development research projects, others have been implemented in the Global North as stand-alone training programmes. While we have held SHTs exclusively for farmers, we have also implemented SHTs for a mixed audience of farmers, extension agents, representatives of NGOs, governments and the private sector, as well as fellow researchers.

Demands on the scientists and the training contents are highly diverse, yet the main aim is the same: providing (missing) information that can be integrated by participants with already established knowledge and that will, hopefully, facilitate implementation of techniques and measures for more sustainable natural resource use, e.g. in soil management.

Irrespective of the specific audience, such trainings face common challenges: (i) to determine which analyses will be most useful to the respective audience, (ii) to adapt appropriate methods of analysis to the different field conditions and to apply those, and (iii) to take into account the needs and capabilities of the audience so as to tailor training material and contents to the participants.

For some of these trainings, we have used video to document contents and supplement workshop material, to serve as teaching aid in class and to allow for communication of central issues to a wider audience beyond the actual participants of the SHTs. In our experience, SHTs can spark meaningful exchange between different stakeholder groups on appropriate methods for rendering resource use more sustainable and on safeguarding resources for generations to come.

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