

CONCLUSIONS

Following are a summary of the findings of this evaluation study.

1. The technical cooperation model of development assistance operationalized in the Polish-American Extension Project (PAEP) can be considered an appropriate and dynamic model that indeed produced benefits for both Poland and the U.S.
2. The Polish-American Extension Project was successful in having strong and positive impacts on U.S. participants, families, near-associates, their Extension organizations and their communities.
3. The 70 participants in the PAEP were mature and experienced Extension professionals from both county and campus based locations.
4. The PAEP participants were highly motivated and interested in international activities, but had little international experience.
5. The Extension county units of the PAEP participants had limited prior international exposure.
6. The Extension roles assigned in Poland were similar to their roles in the U.S.
7. Participants found it relatively easy, although challenging, to work in Poland.
8. Participants were extremely satisfied with their work in Poland.
9. Participants felt that they were successful in their work in Poland.
10. Participants were generally satisfied with the level of support received for taking the international assignment, however they felt that their families, friends and clientele were more supportive than their Extension colleagues and the Extension organization.
11. Participants felt both positive and negative pressures within their Extension organizations and high degrees of ambivalence.
12. Participants were highly supportive of the international dimension in Extension; more highly supportive than a comparison group of county agents surveyed in 1986.
13. Awareness and visibility for the international assignment was variable, more likely limited to near associates, and dependent on self-initiation.
14. Participants and organizational colleagues were satisfied with the moderate level of interaction and communication while on assignment, but reported that communications could have been improved.
15. Although county offices accommodated very well in managing in the absence of the participant, issues of coverage or program backfill were of concern to everyone.
16. There were unanimous feelings and extremely high ratings for the impact of the experience on participants, personally and professionally. These impacts included changes in knowledge, attitudes, perspectives and behaviors. They and their colleagues recognized

significant changes in their demeanor and performance. The experience was viewed as an important time of reflection and perspective-taking.

17. Participants perceived the international experience created positive influences on their stature in the organization and community.

18. Participants were slightly disappointed in the reactions of peers and coworkers, labeling them as being indifferent.

19. Participants were also disappointed in that it was not readily apparent that their experiences in Poland were taken into account in performance appraisal.

20. Participants and spouses noted the impact of the experience as being stressful but very positive for their families.

21. Participants indicated that they would consider another international assignment and would clearly want to involve their families.

22. Participants took extensive steps to integrate the experience into subsequent Extension programming through presentations, the sharing and development of materials, individual counseling and creating linkages between the U.S. and Poland.

23. An amazing high level of interaction with Polish people and organizations continues today.

24. Over 15,000 citizens in communities throughout the U.S. benefited from increased awareness and knowledge of Poland and conditions of life and agriculture in Poland as a result of post-participation presentations.

25. Citizens and community leaders were extremely supportive of the international project and of Extension's role in it.

26. Over 500 linkages between U.S. and Polish interests were established by participants. These linkages were important personal experiences whereby citizens gained knowledge and appreciation for international involvements.

27. Participants in linkages reported very positive views about their interactions and about the learning value of their experiences.

28. Based on three rating scales, citizens and professionals in Extension are extremely supportive of international involvements for USDA, Universities and citizens. Only coworkers differed in having slightly lower ratings for the importance of international cooperative assistance involvements for USDA and Universities.

Recommendations

It has been acknowledged that the PAEP has had tremendous impacts on the U.S. Extension system and the local communities from which participants were based. The following recommendations attempt to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the project and the systems involved so as to improve future projects of this nature and to strengthen the international dimension within Extension. These recommendations were voiced in many different ways by the participants and interviewees contacted.

Structure of International Technical Assistance Programs

The technical cooperation model which has expectations and strategies to ensure mutual benefits is appropriate in the Extension setting and should be applied in future international projects. In fact, this model is a natural for Extension as the embeddedness of Extension personnel in their communities creates access for widespread educational and economic benefits.

The experience from PAEP suggests the following strengths:

1. That the six month assignment (with opportunities for extension) is an appropriate period of time.
2. National recruitment within the Land Grant System that brings professionals together from diverse locations and backgrounds is valued by both participants and hosts.
3. Orientation, such as was provided in Washington D.C. and Warsaw for both participants and family members is necessary and useful.
4. The management style employed in the PAEP that encouraged autonomy and flexibility was appreciated.
5. The project benefited from strong linkages and access to the U.S. Embassy in Poland, other U.S. Agencies and public and private organizations. These relationships removed barriers and mobilized resources in support of the project.
6. The continuation of positions and benefits within Extension during the assignment was essential to accessing participation.
7. The potential for this model to have a positive impact beyond the immediate participants, to U.S. coworkers and audiences is extensive.

The project and model could be strengthened by the following:

1. The impact of the model in the U.S. could have been strengthened with clear expectations and guidance for communications and interactions with local communities during the assignment. Local offices could benefit from briefings or orientation about their role in supporting interactions and visibility in the community.
2. Preparations for reentry could be strengthened. New found knowledge and experiences need to be recognized and integrated into ongoing roles. Plans for sharing and dissemination should be developed with broad input from local interests.
3. Communications and logistics from USDA could be improved. The partnership between USDA and the Land Grant System needs to be strengthened to insure adequate support for the recruitment, transition and follow-up activities that facilitate benefits to local communities.
4. More open system-wide announcements of opportunities, greater lead time for personal and professional preparation, including the identification of backfill arrangements, more timely acknowledgment of assignments and access to travel documents and clearer understandings of shared responsibilities all could improve the transitions and ultimately the working relationships that influence a strong supportive climate for international programming.

5. Financial support that is actually available for state and local program support is critical for sustaining enthusiasm and participation.

State Extension Organizations: Structures and Practices to Support Internationalization

The Land Grant System is a unique and valuable resource for International cooperation efforts and to bringing international knowledge and information back to communities in the U.S.

1. Extension personnel are embedded in communities across the landscape and thus can readily involve the public in international educational activities.
2. The PAEP experience showed that even Extension professionals with limited international experience could be successful in accomplishing project objectives in Poland and in impacting positively on their state and local organizations and publics.
3. Participants themselves gained valuable experiences that changed knowledge, attitudes, skills and perspectives, deepened appreciation for the basic values and principles of Extension work and helped individuals recognize the uniqueness of the U.S. Extension model.
4. The participation of county staff in an international project generated interest, acceptance and enthusiasm within the Extension organization for further professional involvements in international activities. Participation in PAEP often stimulated interest in international programs among volunteers and community members as well.
5. Participants gained increased credibility and esteem in the eyes of clientele. They became role models and resources for local communities who used their expertise and experiences to expand international awareness, appreciation and linkages.

The experience of the PAEP project also suggests that the state and county Extension organizations were not as prepared as would be desired in supporting the smooth and effective mobilization of international assignments.

1. Greater clarity of expectations and roles was needed between USDA and State Extension organizations.
2. Institutional and organizational development for the international dimension in Extension is needed
3. International assignments for Extension county and campus staff should be continued and increased.
4. A broad range of expertise is available in Extension that is not always used in the international arena. Opportunities should be created for professionals with expertise in family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth work, community development, tourism, small and home based business development and others.
5. Opportunities for in-service and professional development in the areas of international trade and development would be useful in developing the international competencies of Extension staff.
6. Clarity of mission, structure and operational procedures within Extension for international programming would improve morale and enlarge participation.

7. Factors should be built-in for performance and professional growth from international assignments.

Family Involvement and Support

The PAEP project made provisions so that family members could accompany participants during the assignments. The value of their participation in the PAEP project may have been underestimated or overlooked. Families served important support functions in Poland and were primary contacts to extend information and linkages to local communities.

1. Family members contributed directly to the success of the PAEP project by serving as volunteer teachers, community spokespersons and support systems for PAEP participants.

2. Family members, because of their ties to local schools, churches and other community organizations, served as primary conduits for the sharing of information about life in Poland and in creating linkages between Polish and U.S. interests.

3. Some elements of the PAEP project that could be improved to support and facilitate family involvement include:

4. Access to language instruction and greater information on Polish culture, customs and daily living conditions.

5. Assistance in locating housing, schooling and other services.

6. Access to translators for family business needs.

7. Inclusion of family members in in-country staff meetings and activities.

8. Financial support for transportation and living expenses of family members.

Summary

The Polish-American Extension Project can be considered a success in both building a client-driven, market-oriented Agricultural Advisory Service in Poland and in strengthening the international interests and competencies of personnel and clientele of the U.S. Extension system. In an era of technical cooperation, all parties involved in technical assistance should reap benefits. For the U.S., those benefits included:

1. Extension staff from 26 states with new knowledge, attitudes and perspectives that raised their status and functioning within Extension and within their communities.

2. Family members with new skills and commitments to international involvements.

3. Extension organizations with greater experience in interacting with international colleagues and in recognizing the importance of an international dimension for Extension.

4. Community members with increased enthusiasm for international interaction and increased awareness and support for an international dimension within Extension and among citizens and government agencies, in general.

The model of sending subject matter specialists and county Extension agents on international assignments that closely parallel their roles in the U.S. proved very effective. U.S. personnel felt comfortable with their assignments and perceived that they were able to contribute to the goals of the project in Poland. They also recognized benefits to themselves, their family members and their colleagues. Participants actively integrated their Polish experiences into their work with communities and clientele upon their return. Numerous presentations, linkages, and educational messages were developed to extend the experience to the U.S. A high level of interaction with Poland continues and at least 15,000 citizens in communities throughout the U.S. have increased their knowledge of Poland as a result. Citizens and community leaders were found to be extremely supportive of an international dimension for Extension and welcomed interactions with Polish guests and connections. Over 500 linkages between U.S. and Polish interests emerged, many with lasting impacts on those involved. Both citizens and professionals in the Extension organization reported high levels of support for international involvements for agencies such as the USDA, for universities and for citizens.