

*OVERSEAS TECHNICAL COOPERATION IMPACT STUDY:  
AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL,  
ORGANIZATIONAL AND COMMUNITY ATTITUDES,  
BEHAVIORS AND SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENTS*

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this evaluation was to document the impact of overseas technical assignments on the individuals involved, and on the organizations and communities from which they are based. The population involved in this investigation were the group of extension professionals who participated in the *Polish-American Extension Project*, and their county and state extension units and communities/clientele.

The *Polish-American Extension Project (PAEP)* began in 1990 and ended in 1996 with a primary objective of improving the structure of Polish agriculture with the goal of increasing agricultural production efficiency and improving rural quality of life (Yeutter in Bahn, 1997). The project was established as a joint educational project of the United States Department of Agriculture's Extension Service (USDA-ES) and the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Food Economy's (MAFE) Agricultural Advisory Service. Between 1990 and 1995, more than 100 American Extension professionals representing 31 land grant universities traveled to Poland to work in this project. Over the period of the project, 70 Extension professionals representing 26 states served one or more six-month assignments as advisors. This group and their states/communities became the population for this study.

The Polish-American Extension Project was selected as the study focus for several reasons. This project was successful and serves as an exemplary overseas technical assistance program. Bahn (1997) found overwhelming success of this project in meeting its objectives in Poland in his follow-up evaluative study of program impact. The provincial level project created a foundation for a progressive Extension system in Poland by changing the mentality of Extension workers and clientele. The project stressed agricultural economic and market education and led to positive growth in clientele through changes generated within the Polish Extension system.

Due to the success of this project in Poland, it may serve as a model for similar technical assistance projects in the future. There are many anecdotal reports of the domestic impacts and implications of this undertaking for U.S. professionals. The documentation of these impacts has important implications for the future of international cooperation projects that would be lost without this study. Thus the purpose of this study was to document the impacts of the PAEP on the U.S. participants and their organizations and communities.

### Purpose of the Project

The primary objective of the Polish-American Extension Project (PAEP) was to improve the structure of Polish agriculture with a goal of increasing agricultural production efficiency and improving rural quality of life (Yeutter in Bahn, 1997). There were three focusing factors of this international assistance effort for the Polish Extension System:

- Development of Extension organizational and methodological skills to plan and implement educational programs that were client derived.
- Building understanding of economic principles and development of skills necessary for management, marketing and agribusiness development.
- Targeting of assistance to the local provincial level rather than the ministerial or national level to assure local emphasis and applicability (Bahn, 1997).

Participants of the five-year Polish-American Extension Project consisted of Extension agents and specialists from the United States who were placed in provincial-level agricultural Extension offices (ODRs) for assignments lasting six months. Although assignments were originally designated as six-month assignments, fifteen participants chose to stay on for successive six-month terms for a total duration of one year, and two participants stayed for 18 months. Team members worked collaboratively with Polish Extension counterparts in one of Poland's 49 provincial ODR offices to plan, design, develop, implement and evaluate Extension programming. A personal hands-on approach was emphasized for attaining the educational objectives of the project (Bahn, 1997; Ragland, 1993, 1995).

Because the nature of the project focused on improved agricultural productivity, the majority of participants were chosen to represent agriculture and farm management expertise. Extension field-experienced agents were often paired with campus-based specialists and the team provided expertise on farm management, agricultural technologies and Extension methodologies. However as the project unfolded, a wider variety of extension expertise was found to be useful. U.S. staff with expertise in other Extension program areas such as 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and community development were recruited to provide assistance as determined via localized needs assessments.

Team members were housed either within rural communities or in ODR rooms or apartments. This enabled the U.S. Extension participants to become involved with a wide variety of people from the local community apart from the ODR work environment.

### Public Perceptions of Foreign Assistance

Numerous studies and surveys have been conducted in the U.S. to learn more about public thinking and sentiment regarding international assistance. A number of United States citizens are reported to question involvement with foreign nations and people. Such an isolationist view of the world is reflected in feelings that the U.S. has enough domestic problems and situations that should be addressed, and not enough time or resources are devoted to these causes. Many contend that the resources, time and effort spent globally could be better spent at home. In actuality, the United States spends the least percent of gross national product of all highly developed countries for international development projects (Holsti, 1996).

Many surveys have found a consistent pattern in which the lesser-educated segments of the public were also the least likely to support an active international role for the U.S. Conversely, higher education is strongly correlated with support for cooperative internationalism (Holsti, 1996). These findings serve to justify the notion that the more one understands and is aware of international issues the greater one will realize the need for global involvement and cooperation.

### Agricultural Benefits from Development

United States farmers, like other citizens, question what they gain from international development efforts and assistance. To many agricultural producers, these efforts simply add competitive supply to the worldwide market causing further deterioration of commodity prices. Farmers also have a need to understand the ramifications of cooperative international development assistance. Numerous authors have documented the positive effects of development for increased world trade and enhanced U.S. exports.

Hunger does not build commercial markets; neither does population growth by itself. Purchasing power builds markets. When poor people get more income, the first thing they do is spend it to upgrade their diets. Large numbers of hungry people without purchasing power aren't a commercial market; they're just large numbers of hungry people. The key to rapid broad-based income growth in most poor countries is success in agriculture fostered by agricultural development assistance. (Paarlberg, 1991, p. 10)

Exports generate over half of the gross national product for United States agriculture. Developing countries account for about half of all of United States agricultural exports, and this is progressing the quickest in the developing countries with the most rapid growth in per capita income (Bissell, 1991). Although most of these countries are expanding their agricultural output at a rapid rate, the demand for more and better food is outstripping their production capacity. These countries are becoming middle-class countries that can afford the luxury of being cash export markets with the U.S. and other developed countries. Eastern Europe and many former Soviet states are another potential market for U.S. exports.

According to Baize (1991), it is perfect reasoning to combine international agricultural trade and development assistance, since international trade policies are directly linked to national growth. With adequate maturation, "countries could grow what they could produce most efficiently and export their surpluses to other nations with different comparative advantages. In turn, countries could import what they could not produce efficiently" (Baize, 1991, p. 17). Approaching agricultural development in such a way would provide the world with an abundance of affordable food and fiber as well as to foster productivity and cooperation among countries.

As noted by Schumacher (1998), another advantage of cooperative development programs is the tremendous advantage it provides for agricultural research. The United States has been able to hold down agricultural production costs through research and improved technologies such as better varieties of crops. Cooperative arrangements are necessary to keep these doors open for research and development. Many crops grown in the United States, such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and many others depend on foreign sources of germplasm; "germplasm from which to select desirable characteristics such as dwarf stature, resistance to insect pests and diseases, day-length insensitivity and high yield potential" (Bissell, 1991, p. 3). These germplasm resources are only available through cooperative efforts.

Much of the agricultural development assistance work from USAID, USDA and others focuses on increased agricultural production, nutritional intervention and improved living conditions that increase the income of the poor and expand the availability and consumption of food (Bissell, 1991). Within this mission, agriculture is a perfect form of assistance from the U.S. The United States is a world leader in agricultural, biological, technological and economic research and education. Through these cooperative development activities, countries acquire knowledge of and positive identification with U.S. institutions, products and trade (Lipton & Manchester, 1992; Le Heron, 1993; Weber & Poley, 1990).

### Development Cooperation

In recognizing the disconnect between a public perception questioning development assistance and the realities of the social, economic and security benefits of development assistance, a rethinking of the format of development assistance was proposed. This basic paradigm shift was acknowledged in the report, New Challenges New Opportunities: U.S. Cooperation for International Growth and Development in the 1990's (Smuckler, Berg & Gordon, 1988). Within this new development cooperation model of assistance a number of guidelines were proposed to ensure “cooperation,” “sustainable development” and “mutual benefit” with international endeavors.

1. Programs and projects need to be established for a long-term perspective. Much of the work and educational need within developing countries cannot be thoroughly addressed with short-term projects. The authors note that for “advanced situations we need to encourage long-term linkages and networks.” These efforts will go a long way to assure high levels of success, educational impact and return benefit to the educational provider.

2. International programs and development cooperation should include and involve people from all levels: public, private and volunteers. This also means heterogeneous involvement from the United States and abroad in development and implementation. This broad-based approach helps to assure success by involving more groups and ideas in order for a sense of ownership to be established and sustained.

3. Programs should be designed with flexibility to meet the diverse needs of the intended audience, and projects should work in ways that would “strengthen the growth of pluralism” in developing nations. This translates into involvement of numerous non-government organizations, private-sector entities and other pertinent units as appropriate in planning and implementing cooperative programs. Other points made include: programs should be both “bilateral and multilateral” depending upon the actual needs and circumstances; and programs need to reflect a strong “commitment for cooperation for development.” As programs are developed, the U.S. should involve and include all stakeholders in planning, developing and implementing international programs and projects.

A number of authors have written about mutual cooperation and mutual benefit from international programs and projects. Reciprocity must be considered as international programs are planned and implemented. Each partner should expect results that will be capable of serving their own best interests (Smuckler, Berg & Gordon, 1988; Schuh, Kellogg & Paarlberg, 1987; Lavery & Schuh, 1991; Moore, 1987; Mook, 1994a, 1994b).

These principles of broad-based involvement, flexibility in programming and strong linkages with stakeholders were all fundamental elements of the PAEP. Thus this project can be considered one of the first large-scale technical assistance projects in the “development cooperation” mode.