

TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A POSITIVE INTERNATIONAL EXTENSION EXPERIENCE

Daney G. Jackson

Associate Vice President

Associate Dean

Director

Penn State Extension

217 Ag Admin

University Park, PA 16802

djackson@psu.edu

(814) 863-3438

fax (814) 863-7905

John Boateng

The Pennsylvania State University

Abstract

This paper presents ten recommendations for extension professionals who are working with international programs. It is intended to encourage extension educators to assess as many aspects of international work as possible as they develop opportunities. The importance of working in the international arena is crucial for the development of local industries which compete in a global economy and to our country which desperately needs to develop positive relationships with citizens of other countries.

Introduction

This paper presents ten recommendations for extension professionals who are working with international programs. A major transformation in recent years is the activities of agricultural extension and research organizations. Whether they are international, regional or national in scope, they are now widely seen as functioning within the auspices of governments, non-governmental and private organizations. The way these function may be competitive, complimentary or repetitive depending on particular set of conditions and contexts. The relationships between international and national agricultural institutions can be described as interactive where the foreign institution profoundly affects the strength and capacity of national organizations through the sharing of expertise and technology transfer. It is expected that extension professionals who work with international programs be incensed to behave and perform in a particular manner in order to achieve their set goals.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to encourage educators to assess as many aspects of international work as possible as they develop opportunities. This will be most useful for professionals in the United States, but it may also inform an international colleague about the objectives of US professional's international work.

Theoretical Base

The world is becoming more and more interconnected with each passing day. It is estimated that the world's population would exceed 8 billion by the year 2025 (World Bank, 1997). The challenge to world agriculture is therefore massive. Most of the future corresponding increases in food production to match increasing world population must come from biological yield increases alone and not from area expansion or increased intensification through irrigation (Petit, 1998). Production on existing land will need to double because new lands are marginal and environmentally fragile as irrigation projects have become increasingly expensive (Petit, 1998). The challenge is therefore to sustain the production of a more diversified, storable and transportable food supply to a globalize world with expanding urban population. This calls for expanded investments in agricultural extension, research and technology development. The United States Cooperative Extension Service must continue to provide strong leadership in the area of international agricultural extension work to meet the objectives of the global, national and family food security. Food security in the rest of the world including developing and poor nations will translate into a more secured local economy.

Methodology

In designing this presentation, the major author interviewed several international and local service organizations and professionals to determine areas of knowledge and skills sought by these organizations when they hire new professionals or areas of knowledge and skills that have made the professionals successful in their work. Experiences accumulated by the authors, over the years in international agricultural extension helped to prepare this paper. Working with affiliated county and state offices as well as affiliated universities and corporative extension offices within the United States and abroad in countries like Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, helped the authors to develop the paper. A number of extension journals and publications were also reviewed and the contents were shared.

Recommendations

A. Extension Professionals as educators

Extension professionals should think of themselves as educators first. Extension professionals often get put in the role of subject matter experts and can work to solve problems without adding increased capacity for people to address their own needs. It's important that extension professionals think of ourselves as educators in Business Development, Community Development and Educational development along with our expert roles in agriculture, natural resources or other technical roles.

Subject Matter Experts The subject matter expert (SME) is the individual who has the highest level of expertise in performing a specialized job, task or skill within the organization. He is the professional with in-depth knowledge of the subject that others need to be educated about. The SME plays a critical role in defining business needs because of the fact that he has special, in-depth knowledge of a subject of business area that enhances the team's understanding. The SME has a role to envision new business processes and applications that operate or behaves differently from existing ones. SME participate in business development and modeling of, community development and educational development. In order to make the education effort successful, SME should incorporate their knowledge and skills right at the planning and research phase of any international development effort. As educators their involvement at the planning

and research phase is vital to help get the facts right. At the technical validation of proposal phase, SME can educate or provide input to help make sure that the interpretation of information by project beneficiaries, stakeholders and other project staff remain in consonance with that of their own. SME involvement is determined by the size, structures and processes as well as the type of educational program or courseware being developed (Clark, 1998). As a result SME who feel the desire to learn about a training program should be given the opportunity to become more involved if it aligns with the organization's needs.

Educators in Business Development The business development educator (BDE) serves as the contact for external partners and internal groups within the Cooperative Extension Service. His or her responsibility is to identify, negotiate and manage relationships with technology and stakeholders whose objectives, interests, products and services complement that of the cooperative extension service. The business development educator must strategize to identify, prioritize and pursue new and existing opportunities with stakeholders. The role requires the ability to quickly understand new technologies and business models and able to evaluate their relevance to the vision of the cooperative extension service. The business development educator will be expected to generate original ideas and initiatives that are based on existing and prospective stakeholder strengths and availability in order to make the effort beneficial to the cooperative extension service and the needs of the groups served by the business development. The BDE must interact closely with industry leaders in the education field. He must play an integral role in the success of the cooperative extension service internationally.

Community Development Educator The community development educator works to provide or initiate free or low-cost assistance in building local assets to mitigate social issues or problems and to develop strong and sustainable community networks (Skinner, 1997; Popple, 1995; Mayo, 1994).

The community development educator works with community based organizations in rural and disadvantaged regions that have some capacity to carry out community development activity as well as have the support from the community to do so. The community development educator must have the following skills:

- Understand and use social planning in the target community
- Capable of linking social and economic planning
- Must be capable of building partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders and project beneficiaries
- Ability to use social indicators for social change
- Ability to incorporate population health approach into creating healthy communities
- Ability to carry out investigation to obtain background information and materials related to community development issues

Education leadership Effective education leadership improves community learning (McConnell, 1996 Barr et al, 1996). High quality international leaders in educational developments make their mark by:

- Setting clear directions and pursuing well defined problems that everyone understands,
- Establishing high expectations and using data to track their progress and performance; and by developing community people,
- Providing them with the necessary support and training to succeed.

- Ensuring that the entire range of incentives in the community supports the education effort (DeVita, 2003).

In formal administrative roles, the greater the challenge to the education effort, the bigger the impact of the education leadership on community learning (Leithwood et al, 2003)

B. Being inclusive and considerate.

Coworkers won't be thrilled about having work dumped on them while an educator is away. It's important that the educator arrange for coverage of their responsibilities well before you are to be away. County Commissioners and elected officials, clientele and others may require some education on why your international work is important. It should not be taken for granted that others are supportive.

Getting needed support Most Deans and Directors are supportive of faculty and staff getting involved in international work. They are strongly supportive of the organization having a role in international work. However, with the financial issues and changing programmatic and staffing issues facing Extension and Colleges today it is probably not on their top 3 or 4 things to accomplish.

Communicating your program information Inform Directors about projects and accomplishments. Look for opportunities to get them "on the ground" to see the work in action. Help them understand how the project brings positive recognition to their programs and their organization.

Include research and resident education in your project. Look for research opportunities and opportunities to publish jointly with collaborators. International experience is extremely valuable for students. Students have much to gain and much to offer most projects. Student recruiting for both undergrad and graduate students is always important.

Incorporating diversity into your work Include immigrant populations in programs and presentations. Use what you learn to build bridges of cultural understanding in local communities and throughout the state.

Sharing your knowledge and experiences Share knowledge, expertise and experiences with other organizations and agencies who are engaged in international work. Trade missions to other countries are a good example.

C. Including diversity and multicultural learning in your objectives

Being exposed to new cultures can be a broadening experience. Including this as a formal objective with planned activity and reflection can add much to the participant's personal and professional growth. Strengthening people's capacity to determine their values and priorities and to act on these is the basis of development. Eade (1997) shows how the development efforts of agencies such as Oxfam were linked into certain fundamental beliefs of local people. For example, that all people have the right to an equitable share in the world's resources and to be the authors of their own development and that denial of such rights is at the heart of poverty and suffering. There are some advantages in restricting the notion of community development to approaches that dwells on cultivation of local democracy, mutual aid, local networks and communal coherence. To be truly effective, multicultural education must be part of the

community improvement efforts. Such an agenda, require a great deal of planning, collaboration, implementation strategies and evaluation.

D. Engage as proposal reviewer

Extension professionals interested in international work should volunteer as proposal reviewers for other projects. This experience will help to generate ideas and develop stronger future proposals. Significant attention has been given in the United States and U.K about Putnam's arguments about social capital in the U.S and the impact this have had on people's health, education and happiness (Putnam, 2000). At the same time Putnam's argument has encouraged some important debates within academic and policy circles such as about lifelong learning (Tett, 2006) and social capital concerning what a deepening social capital might mean in terms of work in communities. Far from the demise of bowling alone, engaging oneself as proposal reviewer of other projects in the extension "community" will indeed help to generate new ideas and strengthen future proposals.

E. Identifying local benefits to your programs

Identify the local benefit to programs and your clientele. Commissioners and clientele may value the "good work" done in other countries. However, they may not see it as their responsibility to support County Educators who work in international projects. Look for opportunities to take clientele and commissioners along on international assignments. Like nothing else, direct exposure to potential partners and competitors can help them to understand the global impacts on their communities and businesses.

F. Connecting with ECOP

The extension professionals with interest in international work should connect with ECOP (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy) through Directors and Committees. It's important for the system to understand the breadth and depth of our international work. This step is important to keeping international programs on the collective mind of the organization. Provide opportunities for ECOP to support international work.

G. Framing your message appropriately

When returning to normal responsibilities, frame the messages to the audience. Local clientele don't want to hear about "vacations" and all the exciting things a professional saw or did nor do they want to see "vacation pictures". Professionals must be conscious of how their comments are perceived. It's essential that the benefits of the work to that audience be communicated clearly and early in presentations or conversations.

H. Commitment to scholarly outputs

Ensure there are scholarly outputs from the project. It is the professional's responsibility to communicate what was learned with others in the profession. There are many outlets for this type of work, including journal articles, fact sheets and conference presentations.

I. Building relationships

The need for international extension work has never been greater. Extension professionals have much to offer and much to learn. The solution to many problems can be found through building of relationships. Building those relationships and sharing the training and experience a

professional has to offer and absorbing all that can be learned should be the reasons why extension professionals work internationally. In building relationships, the international extension work seeks to achieve the following results:

- Expand agricultural productivity and profitability
- Enrich knowledge and management skills
- Promote more effective agricultural extension programs and projects
- Assess and evaluate the feasibility and economic performance of different extension systems
- Enable communities to develop and institute solutions to issues they face.

To achieve the above, Cooperative Extension offices across the length and breadth of the United States are developing extension systems that are more responsive to the demands of communities abroad and better able to provide needed information and technologies that have practical application. In addition, the improvement of information networks and distance education programs will enable people working in rural areas to have better access to all types of information on markets and production.

J. Having a strong local backing

Professionals must keep the importance of support at home in the front of our minds. Conducting quality international programs is only possible if there are very strong programs in our states and counties and the resulting political and financial support to sustain the organization.

Conclusion

Agricultural extension organizations within countries have traditionally taken lead in generating innovation and diffusing information through the agricultural sector. Reduction in public funding has affected many countries in the world. This has necessitated the increased need of international extension effort to contribute to national development objectives. It is sufficient to recognize that international and national efforts at agricultural extension have complementary mandates and distinctly different resources that give each of them a comparative advantage in carrying out vital interventions to ensure food security. The development of effective linkages and other mechanisms for improving collaboration between international and local/national efforts at extension will be of mutual benefit and enhance the ability of extension professionals to respond to the needs of farmers, families, communities and the society at large.

Educational Importance, Implications, and Application

Theses ten suggestions can be the difference between professional success and the loss of credibility among funders and professional colleagues. Too often educators discuss international work as “trips” which often mean “vacation” to county commissioners, legislators and professionals who must cover their responsibilities while they are out of town. The importance of working in the international arena is critically important to our industries which compete in a global economy and to our country which desperately needs to develop positive relationships with citizens of other countries.

References

- Barr, A. Hamilton, R. and Purcell, R. 1996. *Learning for Change. Community education and Community Development*, London: Community Development Foundation. 202 pages.
- Clark D. 1998. Role of the SME. Postings to the TRDEV-L discussion. Updated June 26, 1999. [Http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/sme.html](http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/sme.html) (accessed Feb. 15 2006)
- DeVita M.C. 2004. Taking Stock in Education Leadership: How does it really matter. In Leithwood K, Louis K.S., Anderson S. and Wahlstrom K. 2004: *How leadership influences student learning*. CAREI, OISEUT and The Wallace Foundation.
- Eade, D. 1997. *Capacity Building. An approach to people-centered development*, Oxford: Oxfam. 199 pages.
- Leithwood K, Louis K.S., Anderson S. and Wahlstrom K. 2004: *How leadership influences student learning*. CAREI, OISEUT and The Wallace Foundation.
- Mayo, M. 1994. *Communities and Caring. The mixed economy of welfare*, London: Macmillan. 242 + viii pages.
- McConnell, C. ed. 1996. Community Education. The making of an empowering profession, Edinburgh: *Scottish Community Education Council*. 372 + Viii pages.
- Petit, M. J. Alex, G.E., Blackburn H., Collins, W., Doyle, J.J., Freed, R.D., Heidhues F., Lele, U.J., Persley, G.J., D'Orfeuil H.A. R. 1996. *The emergence of global agricultural system, The role of the agricultural research and extension group, Report 1*. The World Bank, Washington D.C.
- Popple K. 1995. *Analyzing Community Work. Its theory and practice*, Buckingham: Open University Press. 131+ x pages.
- Putnam, R. D. 2000. *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American community*, New York: Simon and Schuster. 540 pages.
- Skinner, S. 1997. *Building Community Strengths. A resource book on capacity building*, London: Community Development Foundation. 150 pages.
- Tett, L. 2006. *Community Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press. 96 pages.
- The World Bank, 1997. Rural Development: From Vision to Action. *Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Studies and Monographs, Series 12*, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.