Small Budget Programming Has Benefits

Grant Wood
University of Saskatchewan
grant.wood@usask.ca

Debra Rasmussen
AgriTeam Canada
drasmussen@agriteam.ca

Delgermaa Chuluunbaatar
University of Saskatchewan

The breakdown of the Socialist system and collective farms in Mongolia, coinciding with the collapse of Soviet Union markets and input sources, had a devastating impact on Mongolian agriculture. Years of intensive tillage on fragile lands had resulted in widespread erosion. Grain production in Mongolia plummeted and land was abandoned. Some early techniques of reduced tillage had been copied from North America in the 1970s and 1980s, but deep, frequent tillage was common and minimum tillage systems were not understood or practiced. The Mongolian government and farm leaders placed a high priority on changing crop production and soil management practices and requested assistance from Canada. Funding was secured through the Canadian International Development Agency’s Industrial Cooperation (CIDA INC) program. The project was implemented through a partnership between the Mongolian Farmer and Flour Producers’ Association and AgriTeam Canada, Flexi-coil, NewField Seeds, Bourgault Industries, the University of Saskatchewan, Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute, and the Saskatchewan Trade Export Partnership. Minimum tillage technology and education were introduced to Mongolia, agri-business relationships were established, and a long-term linkage was formalized between universities.

Purpose

Several valuable lessons were learned from this project. Because the budget was small and restricted, project coordinators had to rely heavily on Mongolian inputs and expertise. This proved extremely successful in helping with the adoption and diffusion of minimum tillage technology. This poster will share the lessons learned.

Information To Be Shared

Five lessons were learned from this project: (1) face-to-face dialogue is important at the proposal stage; (2) farmer involvement in participatory on-farm research and demonstration has benefits; (3) use local NGO’s where applicable; (4) foreign partners should facilitate rather than direct; and (5) involve the private sector whenever possible.

(1) Colleagues from developing countries must feel comfortable jointly establishing project and research priorities in order to ensure the activities are applicable to their needs. This is best achieved through face-to-face dialogue. (2) Farmers supplied the land, fertilizer, seed and labour as funds could not be used to purchase materials or equipment. Farmers were eager to learn as their resources were at stake. (3) Local NGO’s are often well connected to the community and can save coordinators an enormous amount of time responding to logistical and administrative details, while providing local knowledge and cultural understanding. (4) A great deal of expertise and experience can be found in the developing country. Help facilitate the blending of new knowledge/technology with existing expertise and experience. (5) Involving local farmers and foreign firms keeps the project focused on achieving immediate economic benefit to the project beneficiaries: farmers. Project planning and reporting is simplified and decision making is faster and more responsive.

Conclusion and Educational Importance

Small budgets force program coordinators to rely more heavily on local partners, which increases motivation and thus enhances the adoption and diffusion of new technologies. This information will benefit any organization involved in international development projects.