
MAXIMIZING THE DOMESTIC BENEFIT AND IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL EXTENSION INVOLVEMENT

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Introduction

Several strategies have been utilized to support the progress of agriculture in developing countries. In 1990 the Polish-American Extension Project (PAEP) was initiated for American Extension specialists and agents to work jointly with Polish Extension counterparts to develop educational programs. Seventy Americans served assignments of six months or more at provincial-level agricultural advisory centers in Poland. The results of this study provide information to organizations and individuals seeking to improve international extension programs and projects through strong domestic involvement and interaction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to document the domestic implications, both positive and negative, as a result of the Polish-American Extension Project (PAEP). Specifically, the study was designed to assess and document the extended involvement of PAEP participants, colleagues, community members, groups and constituents along with continuing interactions with Poland. This was measured as KASA and practice change in terms of international extension, as well as any social-cultural linkages and endeavors that have affected PAEP participants and, in turn, a larger cross-section of Americans.

Methods and Procedures

The primary design was a descriptive case study to systematically describe the domestic implications of the Polish-American Extension Project on participants and near-associates. A mixed-method design was utilized in which a quantitative mail survey was used in conjunction with qualitative methodologies (semi-structured interviews). The preliminary analysis of the survey data provided a foundational basis for the subsequent development of interview questions and analysis of the resulting qualitative data. Typology development was utilized to integrate the quantitative results with the qualitative results.

Findings and Results

The PAEP was an extremely satisfying experience for the participants. Over 89 percent rated the experience highly satisfying to very satisfying depicting strong interest, commitment, and support for their work. Of a possible ten-point satisfaction scale, respondents rated the assignment 9.29 (very positive). Most participants (48%) rated the experience 10 while another 42 percent rated it 9.

Participants derived extensive impact from the experience (8.53 of a ten-point scale). They were able to gain an increased global awareness, appreciation and understanding; improved self-esteem, motivation and reinvigoration; and they gained professionally in the areas of grassroots input, needs analysis, program development and symbiotic relationships with others. Through this international experience, participants perceived that others had also received impact. Of a ten-point scale, participants felt that immediate and extended families had received highly moderate impact (6.79), and colleagues and clientele had received moderate impact (5.20).

A significant amount of communication and interaction occurred during and subsequent to the PAEP, and many people realized benefits from it. People became involved with the participant's international assignment which resulted in increased international interest, awareness and understanding. This helped people maintain a sense of contact with the individual that minimized disregard for the person and their domestic position. The PAEP also precipitated interactions and linkages such as international exchanges, tours, hosting visitors, business endeavors, and the establishment of an international 4-H foundation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The prominence of global issues causes greater need for people to fully comprehend the complexities of an intertwined worldwide society. Extension can play a key visionary leadership capacity to instill international awareness, knowledge and understanding among its clientele. This research has documented the importance of Extension efforts to enhance global knowledge and understanding. The public attained a better global appreciation for Extension's international involvement through those involved in the PAEP. People were able to learn more about another country, its people, and its agriculture.

This study also showed that there is support among the general public to endorse programs that result in linkages among educational providers and businesses. There are numerous contextual benefits that can be derived through cooperation and collaboration among international education providers, businesses and individuals. Cooperative international efforts help foster trade, new technologies and new information between the U.S. and other countries through a spirit of camaraderie and partnership.

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