forum

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Extension Education Abroad: An Adventure in Human Sharing. It's interesting to watch program trends over time as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) picks a selected problem from among the many world concerns and tries to use the resources required to achieve certain goals and objectives. While it's naive to think that USAID assistance abroad is unrelated to American political and economic interests, it's important to understand that the needs addressed by the development projects are both real and oftentimes critical.

Of importance to Extension faculty is the fact that development assistance programs in food production and human nutrition are being designed to meet the needs of the poor majority. American universities are becoming increasingly involved in the development assistance activities and the land-grant universities are among those best equipped to deal with world problems of such magnitude.

The technical aspects of world food and nutrition concerns will certainly be studied by agriculture, home management, and food science faculty across America, with increasing frequency and urgency. Seminars will convene and contract proposals will become standard practice on the university scene.

However, the central problem remains to be addressed. There are no concerns of world scope, whether related to agriculture, nutrition, energy, basic education, health, population, or environment, that will be resolved in laboratories, seminars, or formal classrooms. Nor will they be resolved in the ministries of governments abroad. The overriding global problems will only be resolved by a grass-roots commitment of unprecendented scale, guided and directed by strong governments.

Vital to such a vast grass-roots commitment is Extension education. Many countries that are developing economically, and trying to manage primary or limited resources, are plagued with a poverty-stricken majority, illiteracy, malnutrition, disease, strong sex roles, high rates of population growth, and dominant cultural traditions. It's not reasonable

to assume that these problems can be solved without sharing relevant information and the responsibility for resolution with the victims or practitioners of the problems.

This sharing can't currently be done through formal education, and shouldn't be done by force. *It can be done through Extension education.* The basic model of central government cooperating with universities, who in turn cooperate with local leadership, can apply to major development problems if foreign governments are willing.

The concept of well-prepared, sensitive Extension faculty being assigned to work with and train foreign national Extension workers has been tested and can work. Practical information, the results of research, and other inputs can be restated in colloquial or common terms, and, be shared informally with grass-roots populations, wherever they are . . . especially familiar subjects like agriculture, family living, youth organization, and community resource development.

Probability indicates that a greater role for select Extension faculty, at home or abroad, will come from international human need. Extension, which dealt with human need and concern so successfully across our land, can play a role in dealing with the same kinds of concerns worldwide. However, it's vital to understand that this *cannot* and *will not* be simple, and won't be achieved merely by transposing people, shop-worn practices, canned ideas, and buzz words from here to there. *It can only be done through increased knowledge, sensitivities, and competencies.*

Central to this forum so far are its adjectives. They have not been added as color nor used as filler. Words like concerned, selected, real, critical, human, poor, world, and vital aren't simply words to be read (or omitted), but to be sensed and understood. Terms like grass-roots, poverty-stricken, well-prepared, sensitive, realistic, and colloquial are fundamental to the whole idea of human sharing.

Perhaps the most important prerequisite for the international Extensionist is the ability to learn from people supposedly less-educated or less-informed than the Extensionist him/herself. Effective observation and listening are vital to this kind of learning, and preconceived notions don't enhance the probability of success. Custom and tradition have survived the test of centuries and oftentimes strongly support their own continuance. Many American values, systems, schemes, and concepts aren't applicable to foreign populations and problems because of vast differences that must be discovered . . . mutually discovered.

American Extension personnel abroad will expect responses, results, changes, and successes that may not be forthcoming. That's a signal to try again or try something different. *Mostly, it signals a time to ask more questions and listen to the answers.* Agents in agriculture, for example, may seek mechanization and the associated efficiency. Caution must be exercised and appropriate technology considered, but always after studying the cost of efficiency.

Cost here doesn't mean that a dollar's worth of gasoline or 20 cents worth of electricity can offset 2 man-days of energy. It means that, *basic to man's survival in the emerging countries are human purpose, productivity, and dignity.* If those are sacrificed for 20 cents worth of electricity, the cost of efficiency is very, very high! In international involvements the worth of every human being should be foremost in mind

Likewise, Extension education, and development assistance projects in general, must deal with basics. Basic food, energy supply, shelter, education, health, and basic population management must be the objectives of development. Gone are the days when America could dream of giving birth to little Americas. The world now faces questions of sheer survival! Frills must be sacrificed, put out of mind. The Western world has unleashed a devastating monster among the peoples of the emerging nations by creating unnecessary materialistic wants and expectations that drain personal and national wealth. Focus must center on basic need.

Books have been written and library shelves filled with information on adult, continuing, informal, and Extension education. Few volumes have dealt with the application of the discipline in third-world settings. Many of these materials can certainly be used, many more can be adapted, and even more have yet to be written. *The world Extensionist must learn before he/she teaches.* World development needs Extension education. American Extension educators will be welcomed on the world scene, and *America would do well to assure that those educators are sensitive, committed, and capable of human sharing.*

The Forum is a place for **Journal** readers to express their feelings on any topic they think is important to Extension. Don't make it longer than one double-spaced page. Send to George Blume, editor, Cooperative Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061.