

PDABD418

Summary of U.S. Field Trip

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ZIMMAN Evaluation Team

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This report presents a summary of site visits by two Zimbabwean evaluators and one U.S. contractor to a selected number of U.S. universities and the Institute for International Education in New York in conjunction with an evaluation of the Zimbabwe Manpower Development Project I (ZIMMAN) being undertaken by AID and the Government of Zimbabwe. The evaluation team was specifically asked to ~~to~~ evaluate the appropriateness of training activities at U.S. universities for ZIMMAN participants, as well as IIE's implementation responsibilities.

Particular areas to be addressed in this part of the evaluation include the adequacy of support services being provided to participants by their training institutions; participants' contact with IIE and other students from Zimbabwe; monitoring of participants' performance; participants' assessment of their overall training experience and its appropriateness; and the effectiveness of IIE's administrative implementation. Other special concerns include the number of women grantees and involvement of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Because of the brevity of the trip for the Zimbabwean team members and the small number of training institutions to be visited, it was decided to develop a written questionnaire to be mailed to all Zimbabwean participants currently in training, which would correspond to the questionnaire being developed for the returned participants in Zimbabwe. Findings from this survey will provide a more systematic assessment of the implementation and appropriateness of participants' programs than was possible through the team's brief site visits. Guidelines for interviews with university administrators and IIE were also developed. (See Attachment A for guidelines and questionnaires.)

The following presents a summary of discussions with IIE project staff in New York, as well as with several university administrators (three foreign student advisors and three academic advisors) and eleven students at six training institutions (i.e., American University, Howard University, Michigan State University, University of Wisconsin at Madison, the Polytechnic University of New York, and New York University). IIE had also prepared a set of materials to supplement the discussion at their office in New York.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The ZIMMAN project is administered by IIE in New York with a project office in Harare. In addition, IIE has six regional field offices which assist the New York office in managing participants' programs. While IIE/NY is primarily responsible for overall program administration, including the placement and monitoring of participants, financial and program decisions are made by the field office in Harare. The New York Office provides participants with various support services, including an orientation upon their arrival and an annual workshop for all grantees. In addition, the New York office arranges study tours and short courses for technical grantees under the project.

To date, 178 participants have been sponsored for academic training under the project (173 in U.S. programs, and five in third country programs). Of this total, 63 participants are currently in training at 51 different U.S. universities. Most academic participants are pursuing graduate degrees (51), although there are still a number in undergraduate programs (11). Of those currently in training, 25% are female; and 6% are attending HBCUs. A total of 272 technical participants have been sponsored by the project to date (205 in U.S. programs, and 67 in third country programs). (See Attachment B.)

● Placement. A special Division of IIE is responsible for participants' placement in academic programs, based on the description of their study objectives in the IIE application form (see Attachment C). Four application submissions are made for each long-term participant, who is given the choice among institutions where he/she has been accepted. IIE sends a description of the university and course offerings to assist participants in making their selection.

● Orientation. IIE arranges for all participants to be met at the airport by a volunteer from the International Student Services organization in New York. The orientation provided to academic participants by IIE includes a discussion of the placement process and the role of IIE in administering their programs. Participants are given an award letter in which the conditions of their training programs are outlined in detail, which are carefully reviewed with each participant. The letter includes information on the duration of the fellowship and training objective; visa and immigration regulations; U.S. tax information; employment restrictions; financial provisions (e.g., living expenses, insurance, tuition and fees, allowances); communications with IIE; required reports (transcripts, academic program reports, and final report); restrictions on dependents; and circumstances that may result in a termination of the fellowship. (See sample letter in Attachment D.)

Short-term technical participants are also given an orientation to their programs and the role of IIE. An information packet is prepared for these participants, including a map and their itinerary, a list of contacts, and helpful hints regarding travel and flight reservations, hotel practices, tipping, and taxis. All participants are also escorted to a bank to cash their checks and obtain travelers' checks.

- Monitoring. IIE requires academic participants to submit their transcripts and a program report on their academic status with comments by their academic advisors at the end of each semester. They are also required to submit a final program report before returning to Zimbabwe, covering their plans for employment, as well as an overall assessment of the non-academic aspects of their programs. (See sample reporting forms in Attachment E.) IIE ensures these reporting requirements by withholding participants' maintenance allowance until they comply. Participants are also asked to check in with the IIE office in Harare upon their return. One incentive is the offer of an enrollment in a professional association of participants' choice within thirty days of completing their program. Only four participants (2% of the total sponsored) have not returned to Zimbabwe as planned. These include two women who have married and remained in the United States, and two whose whereabouts are unknown.

- Contact with IIE. IIE's regional field representatives facilitate communication between participants' and IIE's New York Office which, in turn, is in frequent contact with the project office in Harare. Until recently, IIE's field representatives would visit most grantees on an annual basis in conjunction with their visits to Fulbright Fellows under the USIA program. However, this function has been discontinued, and ZIMMAN grantees are visited at their training site only for serious problems. IIE also publishes a biannual newsletter which contains the names and training institutions of new participants under the project, as well as other information on the status of the project and events in Zimbabwe (see newsletters in Attachment F).

- Contact with Other Zimbabwe Students. IIE organizes an annual workshop for all ZIMMAN participants to provide them with an opportunity to renew contacts with each other, to meet new grantees, to exchange knowledge in their respective fields, and to keep current with developments in Zimbabwe (see workshop programs and evaluation in Attachment G). This also gives IIE a chance to solicit feedback on participants' programs and their adjustment to their new environments. A Committee of Zimbabwean Students has been organized, primarily as a vehicle for coordinating these annual workshops, but also to represent the interests of ZIMMAN participants to IIE. The biannual newsletter announcing the arrival and location of participants under the project is one way of facilitating greater contact among ZIMMAN participants.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

- Program Management. IIE reports that implementation problems have gradually subsided as the project has matured. This was attributed, in part, to the gradual increase of graduate and more professional participants. The first wave of ZIMMAN participants consisted mostly of undergraduates who were hastily selected at the start of the project. From IIE's perspective, they tended to have many more adjustment problems than graduate students, especially in relation to feelings of isolation at U.S. campuses; financial problems due to misunderstandings regarding their overall budget; poor academic performance; and unfocused training objectives. The decreasing incidence of problems was also attributed to improved management operations in general, and in better selection and orientation procedures in particular.

- Placement. IIE has experienced some difficulties with late placements due to late nominations and/or slow GOZ clearance procedures. IIE needs at least 60 days advance notice to place a participant in a university program. This pattern was also mentioned in discussions with several participants who reported delayed departures from Harare for a variety of reasons. While several participants missed their orientations and the beginning of the program, one was placed in the spring term which disrupted the sequence of her core courses. All felt that their late arrivals caused unnecessary adjustment difficulties.

- Contact Between IIE and Participants. There were problems reported by several participants with the system of using field representatives which was considered an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. This has been acknowledged by IIE project staff who proposed dispensing with this system in the next phase of the project. Several participants also expressed interest in having more contact with other students from Zimbabwe during the course of their program. The recently-formed Zimbabwe Student Committee might look into ways to encourage and facilitate increased contact.

- Orientation. The need for a better orientation was mentioned by some participants, although every training institution visited offers a special orientation for foreign students in addition to a general student orientation at the beginning of the school year. As mentioned above, some participants miss these due to delayed departures from Harare. Although several participants suggested that Zimbabwe students should provide new students with orientation services on a more formal basis, this may be difficult as ZIMMAN participants are spread out at 51 universities. This issue might be addressed at the annual IIE workshop.

- Academic and Social Adjustment. Discussions with several academic and foreign student advisors suggested that Zimbabwean students are well-adjusted with few notable problems. Their English language ability was also noted to be more than adequate.

IIE confirmed that ZIMMAN participants generally have high scores on the TOEFL test. Finding adequate housing and financial difficulties were cited by various university administrators as the most frequent problems encountered by foreign students on their campuses. This was confirmed in discussions with participants who mentioned problems in finding adequate housing within their financial means. Although monthly stipends and other costs for AID participants have been calculated by AID/Washington, this is especially a problem for students at campuses with no subsidized housing. Campus housing is also often unavailable to foreign students for several reasons: priority is usually given to undergraduates, and the available space is oversubscribed.

● Internships/Professional Conferences. The desire for more practical training and opportunities for professional interaction was mentioned by several participants. IIE explained that graduate participants are allowed one professional conference a year, and undergraduates may attend one conference during the course of their program. It is the participant's responsibility to propose which annual conference he/she would like to attend. Also, the provision of post-degree internships is possible under the project, but this has to be proposed by the participant and approved by the project office in Harare.

- Home-based Research. Whether a participant may conduct research in Zimbabwe in fulfillment of program requirements depends on the university and/or academic advisor. This has to be worked out between the participant and the university, and approved by the project office in Harare. There have been a number of cases where a participant has finished the degree after returning to Zimbabwe through correspondence or other arrangements with the university.

- Professional Exams. The sitting for professional licensing exams which are offered only once or twice a year may be problematic for some participants who have already finished their programs. It may also be difficult to make arrangements for holding these exams in Harare. It was suggested that USIA may be able to facilitate special licensing exams, or that these participants be given internships after completing their programs in the meantime. Potential problems of this kind could easily be identified in advance and considered in planning participants' programs.

- HBCUs. IIE makes efforts to place participants in appropriate HBCUs. However, participants ultimately have a choice in institutions to which they have been accepted and often choose the better known institution. HBCUs are often less widely known. IIE maintains that the approximately 6% of ZIMMAN participants who have studied at HBCUs have been satisfied with the quality of their programs. IIE also reported that costs at HBCUs are relatively less than other universities.

In sum, the IIE Office seems to be doing a good job in placing participants and responding to their needs. The universities visited all had well-established support services for foreign students, including newsletters, social activities, and foreign student associations. Zimbabwe students, in particular, seem to be adjusting well, both socially and academically. The proportion of women grantees is above the agency-wide standard of 20%, although the proportion of placements in HBCUs needs to be increased from 6% to at least 10%.

Based on this brief review, issues which should be further explored during the second part of the evaluation in Zimbabwe include the pattern of late selection/departures, especially the apparent bottleneck with GOZ public service clearances; the desirability and possibility of building internships into participants' programs where appropriate; and the issue of professional exams for specific individuals. The written survey of both participants currently in training and returned participants will likely provide more insight into the implementation and appropriateness of training under the ZIMMAN project to date. The survey of returned participants should give further evidence of training effectiveness and its impact on participants' professional development.