

IPP TECHNICAL EVALUATION

US Partner: Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA)

NIS Partners: The agricultural schools in Bila Tzerkva; Dnipropetrovsk; Kharkiv; Zhitomir; Kamyanetz-Podiisky

Site Visits: Bila Tzerkva, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk

Date of visits: Bila Tzerkva November 11, 1996;
Kharkiv November 13, 1996;
Dnipropetrovsk November 29, 1996.

Date Report Submitted to IREX: November 15, 1996

A. Strongest aspects of the partnership

The strongest aspect of the International Partnership Program (IPP) between the aforementioned schools and Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA) is the fact that VOCA has refocused its efforts on the partners listed above. VOCA had expanded the number of schools participating in the program to approximately twenty-five. This number was excessive, caused administrative difficulties, and resulted in the dilution of resources and a lack of communication among all of the partners.

A definite strength of the VOCA partnership is VOCA's new Ukraine country representative, Alberta Ashbrook. Alberta is familiar with the IPP from her time with VOCA in Washington and she plans to work closely with the remaining schools for the duration of the program.

The strongest point of the partnership with regard to agriculture is the reduction of the number of partner schools from twenty-five to five. Given that the emphasis of the program is on "training trainers", a concentration of resources and effort is mandatory for any kind of successful result, especially if the trainers and trainees speak different languages and were raised in almost totally different political and economic systems.

Weakest Aspects of the Partnership

The weakest aspect of this partnership lies in the overly ambitious implementation program that greatly increased the number of participating schools. The increased number of participants resulted in the dilution of effort and of resources. Financial and administrative constraints make the inclusion of every agricultural training facility

unrealistic. VOCA will now concentrate on the schools deemed most worthy to receive the remaining resources. These schools are:

Bila Tzerkva,
Kharkiv,
Dnipropetrovsk,
Zhitomir and
Kamyanetz-Podiiskyi.

The benefits the Ukrainian farmer will receive from the program during the remaining time will be minimal. The benefits that can be expected from the program during the remaining time are limited to what may be gleaned from the translated FBPM and what has been distributed to the schools for the farmers' use. The possibility also exists that the farmer may acquire some useful knowledge by taking courses offered by instructors who attended the FBPM training seminar in Wisconsin.

Recommendations for Improvement

Due to the limited time and resources remaining in this particular IPP project, the amount of improvement that can be expected is minimal. Limited computer hardware and software will be provided to the remaining schools according to the new implementation plan provided by VOCA. VOCA and the recipients of the computer equipment need to ensure that this assistance is used to its full potential.

All of the schools that I visited requested an improvement in their communication capability, especially their e-mail facilities. They expressed strong interest in communicating with other educational institutions having an agricultural emphasis from the United States and around the world.

Attention should be paid to the language barrier in communications involving e-mail between Ukraine and the United States. While it is true that many of the schools offer English courses, very few of them combine English with an agricultural focus. English language studies should be made a part of the curriculum so that those who wish to study or do research with American colleges can do so without resorting to time-consuming translations.

B. "Criteria for Success"

The remaining schools of the VOCA IPP in Ukraine still have a long way to go to achieve self sustaining success. All of the schools visited the need for continued funding of the program stressed as the main "criteria for success", and considered such funding to be very important for continuation and eventual success.

The schools also felt the following were necessary for a successful conclusion to the IPP: improved communication capabilities; more access to western agricultural information and research; more materials concerning actual agricultural production practices; and more qualified volunteers who could stay for a longer period of time. Bila Tserkva, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk all expressed interest in hosting additional volunteers. Bila Tserkva expressed a strong desire for a computer specialist to facilitate their access to the Internet and to improve their e-mail capability. They also wished to become a "server", although it is my understanding that this is expensive.

There is great interest in hosting volunteers who can provide concrete assistance in production agriculture. The most desired volunteers are those who are able to assist in improving yields and profitability. Other important areas for volunteers to concentrate on would be accounting and a combination of e-mail with professional relations. E-mail and professional relations can be combined and used to further production goals by facilitating the easy transfer of information. E-mail can also be used as a means of communication among academics.

Recommendations

Since the IPP grants are going to expire in the near future, the participants need to examine alternate sources of funding. Possibilities exist through the World Bank, Western Enterprise Fund, Know How Fund, The Soros and Eurasia Foundations, Citizens Network, and others. There is not much chance of receiving any substantial assistance from the Ukrainian government due to the current economic situation in Ukraine. I am not familiar with any specific projects of the above organizations that target agricultural training or retraining institutions.

The Kharkiv Institute was engaged in an ongoing program with the German Ministry of Agriculture that pertained to land use/mapping and which involved computers and training. The Dnipropetrovsk Institute related that they were in contact with French and Canadian technical aid organizations as well. These contacts should also be pursued.

Additional improvements will be achieved by providing hardware and software to improve communication capabilities (e-mail, Internet, etc.). Technical assistance should be provided along with the hardware and software packages to minimize start up difficulties.

C. Technical Merit and Appropriateness of the Following Components.

1. Training

The training aspect of the VOCA IPP program in Ukraine is limited in scope. Due to the dilution of effort among so many schools so early in the program, little has actually been achieved despite the great number of individuals affected. With regard to the training provided by those who had traveled to the United States, it was basically limited to

relating their experiences and making comparisons between agriculture in the US and Ukraine.

During my conversations with Bila Tzerkva, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk, I learned that the main result of the program was the inclusion of FBPM topics in courses currently taught for comparison purposes. Individual professors are using the knowledge they acquire to compare and contrast various production and business practices in the United States and Ukraine. Although much can be learned by comparing and contrasting systems, it remains an academic exercise. What is needed in the training is more emphasis on HOW and WHY business and production practices have achieved as much as they have in the United States and how they can be implemented in Ukraine.

Recommendation for Improvement

Although it is probably too late for this program to institute much change, improvement in the training could be achieved by: increasing the time allotted for actual training; repeating training where necessary; creating advanced courses for advanced participants; and focusing on the topics that will have the most practical use and are most demanded by the Ukrainian partners. Improvements can be obtained through additional oversight by VOCA. Increased oversight will provide the schools with an incentive to more closely follow the guidelines and deadlines established by the program.

The training can be improved by an increase in communication between Wisconsin and the participating schools. Increased access to the Internet and e-mail would prove beneficial. The training sessions in the United States can be improved by increasing the length of the sessions. Two weeks or one month is hardly enough time to become familiar enough with the intricacies of America's agricultural system that one might be able to teach it to others.

My suggestion would be to concentrate the training in both the United States and Ukraine on one particular aspect of the FBPM curriculum. Such a concentration would allow a more in depth presentation of the topic and help ensure a more thorough understanding of the topic by the trainees.

Additional topics that could be added to the FBPM translation that would be beneficial to Ukraine are financial management, as well as more detailed production information about conservation tillage, dairy herd management, swine management, and integrated pest management in crop production.

The schools participating in the IPP should make greater use of advertising, using both print and media to promote the benefits of the services and educational materials available from the schools.

2. Products

The products developed during the life of this grant are of very good quality. Improvements could be obtained by paying closer attention to development. Translations of materials should be examined by a native speaker of the target language. The subject matter of the materials should be constantly updated to take advantage of developments in agricultural research and technology. Development of communications, especially e-mail and Internet, will greatly facilitate information transfer and make the task of updating material much easier. The FBMP material that has been translated into Ukrainian and distributed to the schools is a very good foundation to build upon. The translation is of good quality though some of the subjects are less relevant to Ukrainian conditions than others, especially the section about restricted use pesticides in the United States. The FBMP material needs to be organized according to subject matter; i.e., all dairy material under "dairy" or all financial material under "finances".

D. Additional technical assistance

Additional technical assistance in the form of computer software and hardware will increase communications capabilities of the schools with western colleges via e-mail and the Internet. This increased capability should be expanded to other universities and colleges involved in agricultural education and research. Other technical assistance in the form of more aid to the English programs at the schools, and greater access to agricultural textbooks, extension bulletins, journals, computerized record keeping, and production programs would prove to be beneficial.

E. New Follow-up Directions for the Project

A possible follow-up direction to this project might be found in training producers as well as trainers. There is a very real interest among private farmers in acquiring western agricultural technology and expertise. The private farmers would be a lot more willing to pay to attend or to send employees to a seminar if the course or seminar tailored to meet their demands. Corporate sponsorship, both foreign and domestic, for the program may hold promise as a possible solution to the viability problem.

There are several other organizations working in the same sector that the partners may collaborate with. Among them are the Soros and Eurasia Foundations, Western Enterprise fund, the Know How Fund, TACIS, and the World Bank.

F. Assessment of the Partnerships Sustainability Plan

The original goal of having a cadre of schools providing seminars to "train trainers" in western agribusiness and production practices will not be reached by the end of the program, and is still some distance away from being achieved. The goal of providing computer hardware and software to facilitate communication between the schools in Ukraine, as well as between those schools and institutions in other countries, is much closer to being realized, especially once the newly revamped implementation plan is effected.

G. Other Comments

Due to the expansion of the VOCA IPP from five to twenty-five schools, this particular program provides limited practical assistance to the private farmer of Ukraine. The private farmer of Ukraine needs a wide variety of educational and informational opportunities. The farmers must be able to gain access to courses in proper business planning, marketing, management, as well as to courses in production agriculture. While many of the schools already offer such courses free of charge to farmers, they are outdated and do not include the latest agricultural advances. Increased communication with western agricultural specialists would help change that. The plan of training trainers to increase the number of people affected and to increase efficiency is good in theory. The comparison of a pebble dropped into water is often used as an example but it must be remembered that the wave becomes weaker as it gets farther away from the source. This dilution of efficiency is readily apparent in examining the results of this program.

It would have been much more effective to have twenty trainers travel to the United States three times each, rather than to have sixty travel once. The effectiveness of the volunteers would also have been improved by having them stay in one place for a month.

The Ukrainian private farmer needs the most direct possible access to information that will make him and his business a viable economic and political entity. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, he must have inexpensive access to high quality information covering all aspects of production agriculture and the opportunity to acquire knowledge in detailed business planning, management, and marketing. To expect that a Ukrainian trainer may become a highly qualified teacher after a two week seminar and a month in the United States, despite language and cultural barriers, may be overly optimistic.

All of the private farmers that I spoke with were much more interested in listening to American professionals personally. The schools need to provide the Ukrainian farmer more of what he needs to survive and prosper. While the schools are not able to provide everything that the farmer needs, they are in a position to provide a great deal of assistance. The schools are in a position to provide the most important input that the Ukrainian farmer needs -- information. This information must include the latest advances in production, technology, and research. The farmer also needs information on how to conduct his operation as a business and on basic Western business principles.

Another very important topic to cover would be the establishment of marketing cooperatives and associations. In order for the schools to better market their services to the private farmer, they must offer the farmer something that will improve his bottom line. Detailed courses in dairy, swine, crop, and poultry production would draw the private farmer to the seminars; he would be willing to pay for something that will make him money.

Bila Tzerkva Workshop

The March 1996 workshop at Bila Tserkva concentrated too much on theory and not enough on actual concrete results. More actual assistance and guidance from the presenters of the workshop would have been desirable. The following is my understanding of the topics covered during the workshop:

First half-day: registration, greeting, and outlining plan for workshop.

Second half-day: understanding the system of agriculture in Ukraine.

Third half-day: transfer and distribution of agricultural information, development of Ukraine model, aspects of training.

Fourth half-day: meeting of workshop participants with president of NTC.

Fifth half-day: creating a national organization and explanation of how participants will:

1. fulfill the program / organize their efforts
2. adhere to the schedule
3. estimate their own progress.

Sixth half-day: farewell banquet.

It seems that the only periods of time in which the workshop really concentrated on the topic of "training trainers" were the third and fifth half-days. The workshop would have been better if it had provided more information on how to train trainers. The workshop would also have been improved if it had outlined expectations, guidelines, clear cut goals, and how they could be achieved. Should there be a workshop this spring, participants must discuss and define their goals and achievements within the context of the program. Other topics that can be covered are those pertaining to information transfer and to training trainers.

The workshop could also be improved by the inclusion of presentations from other organizations and companies about themselves and their products. The Ukrainians would most likely be interested in listening to presentations from those organizations and companies who could provide some form of free or low cost technical assistance or funding. The schools are especially interested in obtaining up-to-date information about advances in production agriculture that can be incorporated into their courses. Organizations such as TACIS, the United States Agency for International Development, and Citizens Network, or companies like Cargill and Monsanto might be contacted. Land grant universities like Michigan State are also possibilities. Naturally, more participants in the workshop would also increase networking possibilities for all participants.

I was unable to obtain any information about the implementation plans that were being developed at the March 1996 workshop. I doubt that anything serious was done about

their development, given the apparent confusion surrounding the project. In any case, the new VOCA implementation plan rendered them obsolete if they did indeed exist.