

# On Becoming A Successful International Educator

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*"My highest frustration levels and highest fulfillment levels were reached while in Indonesia. I'm ready to go back."*

• *Dick Yencer, a U.S. vo-ag teacher (1979)*

For over three decades many professional agriculturalists from the United States have served as international agricultural educators, particularly in the Third World. Many of them including Mr. Yencer (quoted above) had success stories to share. Others have not been as positive about their international assignments. Even though there are some disappointments and frustrations, there is still a growing number of agriculturalists in U.S. colleges who express deep interest in international assignments (bin Yahya and Moore, 1984; Meaders, 1982; Perez and Rogers, 1983; Thuemmel and Welton, 1983).

In view of the possible disappointments and frustrations that could stem from international assignments and the increasing numbers of professionals from the various agricultural disciplines with interest in international activities, it becomes important to **identify** some of the basic "agreed-upon" thoughts and behaviors necessary to enhance success in foreign assignments. Many agriculturalists who accept international assignments seem to have three fundamental goals in view: (a) personal growth, (b) professional improvement, and (c) achievement of project/program objectives in the context of overall improvement in the well-being of the people. In order to achieve all goals, professional agriculturalists who opt to undertake foreign assignments need to be fully aware of some very basic **DOs** and **DON'Ts** as they relate to international assignments. In this article, the reader is presented with some **TIPS** for success from a group of professionals who have been involved in international development activities. The suggestions appear to be appropriate for "first-timers" and may be helpful for "old-timers" who might have had disappointments in their first assignment abroad.

### Background Information

In 1984 the researchers conducted a census survey of U.S. agricultural teacher educators who had experience in international development activities at foreign locations. The purpose of the project was two fold: (1) to assess the past and (2) to determine the future role of the U.S. agricultural teacher education profession in international agriculture and rural

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development. Six separate sources were used to identify members of the population. These were: **Directory of Agricultural Teacher Educators** (Rogers, 1983-84), a publication by Meaders (1982), a list provided by Thuemmel and Welton based on their 1981 study, a list from a previous study by these authors (1982 reported in 1983), **AATEA** (American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture) **Newsletter** (issues from January 1983 through July 1984), and a survey sheet these authors used to contact head teacher educators to confirm faculty listings.

A total of 117 educators was identified and each contacted directly using a mailed questionnaire consisting of 19 questions. Teacher educators were asked to record their responses to the questions on a blank cassette tape, which was enclosed in the package for that purpose. After three reminder letters and a phone call 113 (96.58%) responses were received. Of this number, nine were misidentified by their heads as having had international experiences abroad and two were inaccessible because they had just retired at the time. Therefore, the "real" population defined as only those teacher educators with experience in development activities at foreign locations and were accessible was 102 (87.18%), of which 96 (94.10%) cases were usable.

Responses were transcribed and then synthesized by the researchers. For the purpose of this article, only responses to Question 17 of the research instrument are presented and the question was:

"If you were giving **advice** to other teacher educators with expressed interest in international assignments or actually preparing to leave on international assignment for the **first time**, what would you say?"

### Findings

Responses to the above question were grouped into two main categories: 1) predeparture advice and 2) on-location advice. First, there were suggestions (refer to Table 1) deemed worthwhile prior to departure on a foreign assignment. Secondly, "first-timers" were advised to shoulder certain responsibilities (refer to Table 2) once they were at the foreign location. **Most statements in the tables are direct quotes** from one or more university professors of agricultural education. Other statements (marked with an \*) are combinations of two or more similar quotes.

### What Should You Do Before You Leave On Assignment?

It was advised that those with expressed interest in foreign assignments first resolve some basic personal and family issues before any decisions are made. Refer to Table 1. These issues included the "real" reasons

they would want to leave their position in the U.S.; whether the family relationships would be adversely affected by such action; and age and education of children. If the first set of issues are successfully resolved, then the next step is to go "scavenger hunting." Information-gathering is important. "First-timers" in particular need to learn as much about the country of interest as possible. It is also crucial to learn the "working language" of the country (if it is not English). It was strongly suggested that one expect the unexpected and that culture-shock is normal.

**Table 1. Advice From Agricultural Educators to Their Colleagues Expressed Interest in International Development Activities: Pre-Departure Responsibilities**

- 1 Ask yourself whether or not your wife and family are going to be happy?
- \*2 Consider the age and education of your children.
3. Reflect very critically on the question, How did I get interested?
- \*4 Ask yourself whether or not you are committed, dedicated, and motivated enough?
5. Ask yourself whether or not you are running away from your Head of Department?
6. Be sure you are not going for the wrong reason.
7. Think through very carefully if that is what they really want to do.
8. They must have a true missionary spirit to be effective.
9. Learn the language.
10. Learn a foreign language.
- \*11. Study the country extensively: its climate, geography, cultures, educational system.
- \*12. Visit with and learn from your international students.
13. Seek out all travel information about the country or countries.
14. Visit with those who completed assignments in the country you plan to visit.
15. Get a passport.
16. Get a visa.
17. Get yourself inoculated.
18. Secure medical advice from your physician.
19. Get a health check.
- \*20. Decide whether or not to take your family.
- \*21. Become very clear of your exact responsibilities while on assignments.
- \*22. Be sure you have a secured position in the United States upon your return.
- \*23. Avail yourself with suitable reference materials and resources.
24. Don't build hopes too high.
25. Be prepared for setbacks in the cultural, social, and political situations in these countries.
26. Be prepared for the unexpected.
27. Be prepared for cultural shock.
28. Be prepared for frustrations.
29. Be prepared for the worst.
30. It is an unprecedented opportunity to get to know other people.
31. It is entirely normal to face culture-shock.
32. It takes more time to become accustomed to mores, customs, etc.
33. Expect the unexpected, which becomes the normal.
34. Three qualifications are (1) must like people, (2) must be able to get along with all kinds of people, and (3) must want to do it.
35. Three virtues (1) be patient, (2) must have persistence and (3) must have perseverance.
36. Ready broadly on the field of international development.

Note: All statements are direct quotes except those with \* marks.

### What Should You Do While In The Host Country?

Four broad categories of suggestions (reported in Table 2) constituted the in-country responsibilities. The first of these categories was the technical-professional dimension. First-timers were cautioned to demonstrate competence and objectivity during situation analyses and decision-making. They were also to try and refrain from prescribing quick-fix solutions to seemingly perennial problems. The overall tone of the suggestions was that of caution. Refer to items 1-23 in Table 2 to see the exact statements suggested by teacher educators in the technical-professional dimension.

**Table 2. Advice From Agricultural Educators to Their Colleagues With Expressed Interest in International Development: Responsibilities While in Host Country**

- I. The Professional - Technical
  - \*1. Be familiar with subject-matter and be technically competent.
  2. Use workable principles.
  3. Be down-to-earth.
  - \*4. Be prepared to introduce technology appropriate to the specific context of development.
  - \*5. Make concerted efforts to consider the implications of the programs you helped develop for the given culture.
  6. Be objective in your analysis and decision-making.
  7. Refrain from quick answers.
  8. Don't prescribe solutions.
  9. Don't force an agenda on yourself.
  10. Don't make groundless assumptions.
  11. Be a consultant.
  - \*12. Cooperate with other experts involved in the project or program.
  13. Take with you professional books, magazines, and journals.
  14. Keep in mind you are first, a reservoir of knowledge, then a fountain.
  - \*15. Establish and help maintain a library for the people.
  - \*16. Don't expect the U.S. land-grant concept to have immediate success.
  17. Find out why they do things the way they do before deciding on a course of action.
  18. You are there to give advice not to take over... be cautious with how you do so.
  19. Become a part of the team... don't think the people are not smart.
  20. Assure yourself that sufficient on-site opportunities are provided... negotiate for them.
  21. Use the farming systems approach. Work with what's available and adjust to their situation.
  22. Don't become another 'ugly American.' You are there as a consultant to help their leaders. And if you can initiate the idea with their educational and agricultural leaders and let them receive the credit, then the project would probably continue and become very worthwhile. If you are the one who wants to grab the glory and do everything in your name, as soon as you leave the project will be forgotten.
- II. Perceptions and Values of the Other Culture
  1. Make a concerted effort to understand and feel the culture.
  - \*2. Try to understand the problems of the people.
  3. Be prepared to learn more than you offer.

Table 2 continued

4. Get to the grassroots and apply yourself.
  5. Don't impose your values and lifestyle on the people.
  6. Avoid the provincial and parochial attitude of most agricultural teacher educators.
  7. Study and understand the local customs and agriculture of that country.
  - \*8. Mingle and interact freely with the people.
  - \*9. Visit homes of the local people while in the country.
  - \*10. Use Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
  - \*11. Find out what the host government's position is on the project.
  - \*12. Don't attempt to uncritically translocate the success stories of the United States into these other countries.
  13. You must enjoy being with people to enjoy in cross-cultural environment.
  14. Learn to be friends with all levels of the people.
  15. Attend social and cultural events.
  16. Learn from the people.
- III. The Time Dimension and Communications
1. First of all leave your wrist-watch and calendar in the United States. In most countries time is not of the essence as it is in the United States.
  - \*2. Don't be overly concerned with timelines, deadlines, bottomlines, and logistics. Be prepared to go at a slower pace.
  3. Remember that change is a slow process.
  - \*4. Accept a relatively short-term assignment; first familiarize yourself with the culture.
  5. Plan to stay at least four years. I think a 2-year assignment (is to) get your feet wet. And by the time the two years (are) up, you are just then preparing to get effective. I think you have to stay longer to make a real impact.
  - \*6. Take time to review the social and economic policies and actual direction of the national government to help you communicate more effectively.
  - \*7. Study the existing obvious limitations to development in the country of interest.
  - \*8. Be sure you create a free, uninterrupted channel of communication with the U.S. while on foreign assignment.
  - \*9. Don't hesitate to ask questions.
- IV. Personal and Other Relationships
1. Be flexible.
  2. Be prepared to do a lot of things by yourself.
  3. Be patient.
  4. Be ready to adapt to the new environment.
  5. Keep an overall personal goal in view.
  6. Keep your enthusiasm up.
  7. Check into the cost of housing.
  8. Be committed.
  9. Don't become over glamorous.
  10. Be curious.
  11. Give yourself benefits to look forward to by mingling and interacting with the people.
  12. Be a good listener.
  13. Establish good relationships.
  14. Don't prescribe.
  15. Be adaptable.
  16. Must have persistence.
  17. Must have perseverance.
  18. Be yourself.
  19. Don't try to dress like 'the foreigner'.
  20. Should remember you are a visitor. Respect the customs, habits, etc. of the people.

Note: All statements are direct quotes except those with \* marks.

Secondly, "first-time" international educators should make a genuine effort to understand the cultures of the peoples (refer to Table 2-II). Concerted efforts should also be made by these educators to understand the "real" problems the local peoples encounter. They were advised to refrain from imposing their values and lifestyle on the natives of the other country.

A third category of responsibilities relates to communications and the concept and use of time (refer to Table 2-III). Time, according to the experienced international agricultural teacher educators, is not of great importance in most Third World nations. Therefore, there appears to be no need for becoming overly concerned with deadlines, timelines, or bottomlines. Besides, change or development is a slow process. First-timers were also advised, thus: "Don't hesitate to ask questions."

Finally, international agricultural educators should consider their personal traits. Desirable traits are reported in Table 2-IV. Some of the traits are being flexible, adaptable, curious, patient, committed, persistent, persevering, and a good listener. Also, first-timers were advised to try to mingle and interact with the local peoples, to respect the customs and habits of the natives, and to "keep an overall personal goal in view."

### Summary and Implication

Agricultural educators with international experience were of the opinion that acquiring such experience is worthwhile. They also agreed that certain pre-departure activities were crucial and important for first-timers. Furthermore, they believed that, upon arrival at a foreign location, an international educator has to assume a new set of responsibilities. While on assignment, the first-timer, even the old-timer too, needs to assume and fulfill responsibilities in the following dimensions: (1) technical/professional competencies and skills, (2) perceptions and values of the other culture, (3) time and communication, and (4) personal and other relationships.

The suggestions gathered in this research appear to be applicable to the professional groups involved in Third World agricultural and rural development process. Granting that the above statement is valid, there is an important implication for administrators of international agricultural programs in U.S. colleges. These findings could serve as a basis for planning, organizing and conducting seminars and workshops to prepare agriculturalists for international assignments.

Agriculturalists with expressed interest in international assignments need to be well informed of the ABC's for successful involvement in foreign activities. Without such knowledge, their experiences could be **everything else** but success stories. Every "first-timer" dreams of becoming a successful international agricultural educator and deserves to be one too.

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# Global Agricultural Systems: Simulating Reality

Patrick W. Naughton

Learning is better achieved when the topic is dynamic and the teaching method stimulates students. Teaching can be made more a science, and less an art if faculty are willing to put the onus of learning on students yet provide them with the opportunity to be creative. Simulation exercises aid faculty in stimulating students to learn because simulations combine "... the potential of being representative of some aspects of reality with the human tendency to engage in gaming" (Butts, 1975, p. 2).

This article illustrates the use of a simulation exercise which was designed to assist students in recognizing geo-political factors in global agricultural systems. It is a process-driven simulation which means the focus is on the means rather than the end. Students concentrate on the basic dynamics of the political process so that — as in reality — the simulation becomes an open-ended experience where the consequences of an action, or lack of action, lead to new situations to which students need to react. The dilemma for faculty is how to construct simulations that will be realistic without being too complicated or so simple that they are unrealistic. One possible solution is to use real information and situations but alter the presentation (Wilms and Steinbrink, 1971).

## Global Agricultural Systems:

Agriculture is global. Climatic perturbations in the Soviet Union affect American wheat farmers. Surpluses of sugar on the world market can give headaches to beet and cane sugar farmers in the midwest, Louisiana and Hawaii. And, of course, a frost in Florida causes the price of orange juice to rise. Even on the local scene the law of supply and demand can make or break a truck farmer.

There are probably no other commodities that react so intimately to change in the system than those provided through agriculture. Students need to become aware of the linkages of agricultural systems and one strategy to accomplish this is the use of simulation. However, background noise (prior knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes) in a global simulation can be great and may overshadow the processes under study. When a place, person or event is mentioned, most

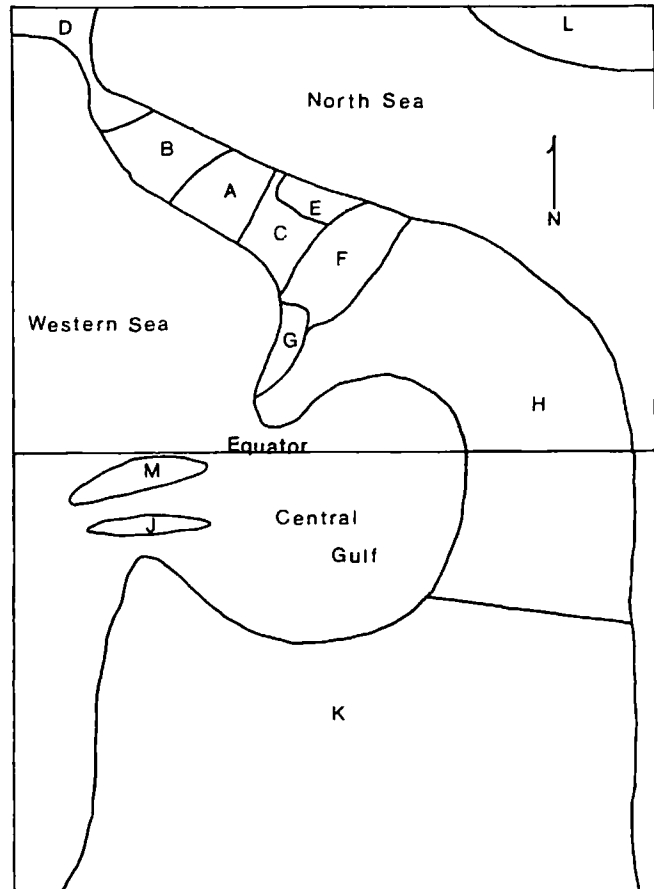


Figure 1. Global Agricultural Systems

people react one way or another. The reactions may range from friendly to indifferent to hostile. These reactions are background noise and may affect judgement. So, if we are to neutralize background noise and concentrate on the interactions of the global system, then we need to provide students with a sense of the make believe. However, if the exercise is going to illustrate valid processes, then it needs to be based on reality.

Figure 1 is an example of the type of map that can be used as a prop for a global agricultural systems simulation. A map provides a place image to the viewer and serves to focus attention on the simulation rather than on a real situation (Naughton, 1978). As such, it should be displayed as a wall map or on an overhead projector — if students receive it as a handout they will

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