

Agricultural Educators Abroad

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Abstract

Overseas opportunities for post-secondary agricultural educators frequently become available on funded projects, sabbaticals, Fulbrights and consultancies. Apart from potential financial incentives, other assets of international work can outweigh its liabilities as part of a professional career. But important personal and institutional considerations must be kept objectively in mind.

Clarification of motives, thorough study of host country, development of serious commitment, and clear understanding of on-site expectations are vital to success offshore. Ability to speak a second language and integration of children into bi-national schools can make the international experience an enriching time.

Careful attention to remuneration, documentation, immunizations, personal effects shipment, and immigration procedures alleviate potential problems. Emergency measures related to health, cash reserves, vital services and political unrest contribute to peace of mind.

Culture shock and re-entry syndrome are unfortunate

conditions which need to be recognized and dealt with should they occur. Support networks of experienced colleagues are important in this connection.

Behavior as a guest requires respect, sensitivity, tolerance, patience and maintenance of personal dignity. Consideration is critical in matters of religion, culture, attitudes, values, dress, speech and affection. Conversely, the respect and affection of host nationals is a strong indicator of acceptance and success. The excitement and ultimate benefits of travel are a rich growth opportunity, despite occasional discomforts and risks.

In summary, post-secondary agricultural educators have a role to play in international work, and opportunities open from time to time for committed professionals. Knowing what to expect overseas and how to cope with unfamiliar circumstances and situations can increase chances for success at the work site. A successful international assignment, in turn, may contribute an enriching dimension to an institutional career.

Introduction

Overseas opportunities for agricultural educators frequently become available on funded projects, sabbaticals, Fulbrights and consultancies. Yet, compared to the hundreds of domestic vacancies which occur annually, these opportunities are still somewhat rare. The experience and qualifications required for overseas service may favor a professional who lacks a frame of reference for assessing such an appointment or who simply is not aware of the potential benefits of spending a few years abroad.

Apart from the financial incentive, which is oftentimes favorable, other assets of international work may also outweigh its liabilities as part of an institutional career. Despite certain risks, educators become experienced travelers; their world view is greatly expanded and their perspective more informed. Versatility in handling difficult appointments or assignments may be enhanced. Language capability and cultural growth are improved, and racial and religious tolerance deepens. They become more confident, cosmopolitan and sophisticated. And, their survivability is significantly strengthened. These perceptions derive from the authors, personal experiences and interviews over time with other expatriate experts.

Preliminary Considerations

When pursuing an interest in overseas work, clarify the motives and be absolutely honest with self and family members. Motives may be professional, financial or purely adventurous; but there should be no hidden agenda when one considers relocating a family abroad, especially to the developing world.

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graduates and should be used to establish untapped industry contacts for future employment opportunities. Additional study is needed to determine the significance of non-agriculture employment opportunities.

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Read copiously about the history, politics, culture, climate and geography of the country of prospective assignment. Attempt to match personal qualifications and desires with institutional needs. Check the personal economics of the assignment. While project salaries are normally a result of formulae upon base; consultancy fees, Fullbright stipends and sabbatical benefits may vary widely. Some contracts compensate high living costs with perquisites ("perks") that may increase total income dramatically.

Work out a tentative plan to manage affairs at home and estimate any personal costs involved in rental, tax accountants and insurance policies for which your organization cannot be responsible. There may be some contract perks to consider, such as storage costs for personal effects or shipment of an automobile. Then, match projected income against costs. If the bottom line makes sense, and all members of the family remain enthused; proceed. Enter into the recruitment and selection process *with a commitment to accept* the assignment if it is offered.

Preparation for Assignment

Restudy the country and its region in depth through libraries, documentary films and visits with people who have lived in the area. Compare notes and impressions, but reserve a place for self intelligence, assessment, and perceptions.

It is important to know exactly what a project is expected to achieve in how much time and what the provisions are for its accomplishment. There must be no surprises when annual or end-of-tour reports fall due.

The ability to speak the language of a host country is of immense value. If the host nationals are not English-speaking or if English is not the common second language, then language capability is critical. Contracts normally provide for pre-departure or in-country language training.

On long-term assignments, some posts have American, bi-national or other English-speaking schools. Some don't; and where continuity of language or curriculum is important to subsequent university study, boarding schools may become the only option. Where the boarding schools are located in a third country, the cross-cultural overload for children can become excessive; but given adaptable, well-adjusted children, the international educational experience can be a marvelous and truly enriching time. American and other international schools can be crowded and competition for space may be acute, thus advance notification is vital.

Documentation will be required by host countries upon entry. In most countries, a valid passport is the minimum requirement and should be procured with plenty of lead time. Some class of entry visa may be required, as may valid drivers licenses, customs documents, immunization cards, photos, certificates of good conduct, powers of attorney and letters of introduction or credentials. In some cases, proof of academic degrees and diplomas is required. Too much documentation is better than too little. Prepare all this prior to departure.

Take recommended immunizations seriously and get them in advance. Some diseases have been eradicated and

immunizations are no longer required (small pox), or are required for specified areas only (yellow fever, polio). Travel agents and county health departments have current information.

Make sure what stateside fringe benefits remain in effect during an assignment out of the country. Normally, the perks of a project contract will assume the home benefits package. There may be rare cases where this is not so. Individual initiative is required in such instances.

Personal effects and household goods shipments vary widely depending on contract provisions. Don't take what is not really needed or what can be found locally at reasonable prices. For example, locally available folk art and handicrafts frequently make useful and attractive home decoration.

On-Site Factors

Immigration into a foreign land can be a routine affair or it can be quite something else. Borders are sometimes tense places in today's world. There may be police or armed soldiers present. Keep cool and preferably quiet. Have documentation in order and ready for presentation. Do not hand over any document which is not requested. Maintain personal dignity, and things will normally go well. Participate quietly in making the first exposure to a host country a pleasant experience.

If immigration (and perhaps health clearance) is a tolerable aspect of arrival, customs may still present some memorable moments. Tidily packed undies and intimate personal items may be displayed and the whole mountain of disarray returned to make fit into suitcases while the pressure of the queue bears down from behind. Or, surprisingly, arriving guests may simply be waved through customs as a gesture by the host country government.

Establish the best (legal) method for exchanging dollars to local currency. It is wise to maintain a small supply of cash dollars for unforeseen events. Dollars usually can be sold easily, but it is often difficult and expensive to buy them. Credit cards (e.g. VISA) are widely accepted in many developing countries.

Temporary quarters may include government lodging, pensions, boarding houses, and residential hotels. Make the best of what is provided. Of course, a permanent home will be sought as soon as possible, but that move will almost never correspond with the arrival of personal effects. Expect some disorientation being in an empty house with makeshift or borrowed accessories, or having to find storage for personal shipments until permanent lodging is ready. Storage can lead to confusion over who is responsible for the security of property. Don't despair, but don't become careless. Remember, most robberies and thefts occur during settling in or packing to leave. Use common sense. If housing must be self procured, engage a reputable national to find suitable quarters. But, remember that both the agency and the owner benefit from high rent.

Settle in cautiously but expeditiously. Learn the peculiarities of the host country social structure and behave yourself accordingly. Nobody expects U.S. personnel to "go

native", but host nationals appreciate respect for local custom. In sharing, maintain personal dignity. Don't be foolish, or loss of respect by nationals may result. If mistakes are made, don't be afraid to apologize if necessary. And, it is best to say little about initial impressions of hosts. Judgmental attitudes are easily detected by nationals and seriously interfere with on-site effectiveness. Remember, nothing observed is "stupid" or "funny." It's just different.

Domestic service may require a maid, cook, manservant, driver, gardener, houseboy, or some combination thereof. Learn the accepted relationship with servants and don't break that code. Self-styled "emancipators" usually become victims of the system. With the acquisition of domestic help, family and personal privacy is no longer a realistic expectation.

Learn what public services are available, where they are, what works well and what doesn't. These include markets, phone, post office, telex, fax, banks, and service stations.

Consult experienced residents about the medical community, and advise a recommended doctor about any special medical problems. Observe and evaluate hospital facilities before they are needed. Also, locate a good dentist and eye doctor. Don't underestimate the local pharmacist, who can (and does) attend many minor illness. The druggist is often known as the "poor man's doctor" and at times may be the only help around.

Emergencies abroad usually derive from political or health reasons. Have emergency plans for both scenarios. In the first instance, a plan may range from having a few dollars currency and a full tank of gas to a full scale evacuation of U.S. personnel from a country. The U.S. Embassy is responsible for evacuation plans and will not disclose them until they are in operation. However, an expatriate team can work out a telephone alert and mutual assistance plan. In case of health emergency, know doctors' phone numbers or addresses and know the way to the hospital.

If a religious faith is important, it will likely find denominational expression or something similar almost anywhere. Be sure to share in local arts, festivals, music and literature. Therein lies a wealth of culture, understanding, and beauty. If photography is a hobby or part of the job, take time to explore local feelings about people and things being photographed. Slides can become a lasting part of an experience abroad if others haven't been offended in taking them.

At work, remember that an overseas assignment occurs because someone thinks certain expertise is valuable. Immediate counterparts, however, may or may not share that view. Unless a position of authority is clearly granted, it is much safer and more gratifying to share expertise, and a posture of general helpfulness is certainly superior to a know-it-all approach. Underdevelopment is not synonymous with stupidity, and there is much to be learned from host nationals. There is normally a desire to learn from expatriates on the parts of host colleagues, but pride and station may prevent an outward expression of that desire.

Travel can be rather eventful. Always expect the unexpected. On the other hand, visits may be made (right on the

job) to parts of the world that are seldom seen or are seen only at great cost. "R and R" travel and travel to and from an assignment may access places that people pay fortunes to see and spend lifetimes saving for.

Culture shock is a much discussed topic. It may never be experienced, it may be suffered straight away, or it may catch up after years abroad. Simply be aware that it can and does happen.

Repatriation

Going home again presents another entire set of circumstances. That process is not always as simple as it seems. There may be some disorientation, reentry adjustments and even reverse culture shock involved in settling back in to the personal, social, and professional lifestyles once thought "normal." Professional currency may have suffered somewhat, but it can recover. Friends and neighbors may not share a high degree of excitement about overseas experiences, and may frankly be totally disinterested. Remember, *it is the returnee who is changed*. But, if the changes in life resulting from experience abroad are truly valuable, then self, family, and institution will have been well served.

Summary and Conclusions

Agricultural educators have a role to play in international work, and opportunities open from time to time for committed professionals. Knowing what to expect overseas and how to cope with unfamiliar circumstances and situations can increase chances for success at the work site. A successful international assignment, in turn, may contribute an enriching dimension to a professional and institutional career.

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