

Forming Partnerships With Overseas Colleagues

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the internet, developing world educators and researchers can now undertake collaborative projects with industrial world colleagues and do so at little cash cost. Such partnerships can make critically needed contributions to agricultural development through technology transfer and adaptation, research, production of educational materials and publications. We, the authors of this paper, coming as we do from Swaziland, Poland, and the United States, have found our working partnership rewarding. In this paper we share insights gained from our experience with the hope that others may develop such informal partnerships.

Abbreviations list:

ASA: American Society of Agronomy

ASF: Agronomic Science Foundation

CSSA: Crop Science Society of
America

LDC: less-developed country

NGO's: Non-Governmental
Organizations

PVO's: Private Voluntary
Organizations

SAGA: Strategies and Analysis for
Growth and Access

SANREM CRSP: Sustainable
Agriculture and Resource
Management Collaborative Research
Support Program

USAID: United States Agency for
International Development

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INTRODUCTION

Two of the world's most renowned and respected agronomists, Nobel Laureate Dr. Norman Borloug and World Food Prize Laureate Dr. Pedro Sanchez, have stressed the need

for greater emphasis on improving agricultural production in order to help reduce, and hopefully eliminate, world hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty (Sanchez, 2002).

Dr. Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of “The Earth Institute” at Columbia University and Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on the Millennium Development Goals states that one billion of the earth’s inhabitants are classified as extreme poor and all live in developing countries (Sachs, 2005). Sachs also reports that over 90 percent of the extreme poor live in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and South Asia. Tragically, the numbers continue to increase in sub-Saharan Africa while numbers in East Asia and South Asia have greatly decreased. Sachs further emphasizes that nearly half of Africa’s population is considered to live in extreme poverty. The immediate urgency of eliminating extreme poverty with the present world-wide threat of terrorism was brought to light recently by former Secretary of State Colin Powell as he stated “The war against terror is bound up in the war against poverty” (Sachs, 2005).

The involvement of U.S. Land Grant and other agricultural universities in international agricultural development has waned since the ending of the Cold War. This is due primarily to the fact that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has greatly reduced their involvement in international agricultural development and their thrust toward reducing world hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty. The authors believe that with recent developments such as the emphasis on globalization and the availability of e-mail, that industrial countries’ agricultural scientists and educators now have an excellent opportunity to independently and informally reverse this trend with a minimum of inputs other than a passion for making the world a better place.

The recent emphasis in the U.S. on globalization along with the ubiquitous use of electronic mail via the computer, enables agricultural professors and scientists throughout the world to easily become involved in informal cooperative international research and education projects. Electronic mail now provides a means for professors and scientists to freely, and instantaneously exchange ideas, plan and conduct cooperative research projects, write and edit manuscripts, and assist in teaching each other’s classes in almost any college/university in the world (Molnar and Fields, 2004).

The purpose of this paper is to encourage colleagues around the world to participate in some form of mutually beneficial professional activity with a peer/colleague in another part of the world, especially in a developing country where this type of activity would be most welcomed and rewarding for all involved. As an example, we are sharing our international cooperative teaching, technology transfer, and research experience over a period of more than two decades.

PARTNERSHIPS YIELD TANGIBLE RESULTS

Our partnering has produced numerous concrete results in our classrooms, research activities, and other scholarly activities. Our research projects enable us to discuss first-hand the results of our research in numerous tropical regions of the world. We have presented 15 joint scientific papers at various professional meetings and have published 17 refereed agricultural journal articles in numerous countries. We find Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Science to be especially useful in disseminating research

results because the journal is published on the internet and available from computers worldwide. Especially rewarding to us is the fact that the Indiana Academy of Science named Dr. Ekpo M. Ossom, of the University of Swaziland, a Fellow, in 2006 based upon our 13 papers presented at their annual meetings along with five published abstracts and eight refereed journal articles.

We have found that the translation and printing of textbooks can be a very inexpensive method of making the most up-to-date technology more widely available. For this to work, the author(s) must grant permission for the translation and printing royalty free. One of us (Charles L. Rhykerd) was involved in an Andrew Mellon Foundation-supported agricultural development project in Poland during the early to mid-nineties. We recognized that some of the latest forage production and utilization technology in the United States would be helpful if made available to Polish farmers. Consequently, permission was obtained from the authors and publishers of “Southern Forages” (Ball, et. al., 1991) to translate their textbook to Polish royalty free.

Three Polish agricultural professors, with collaborator Czeslaw Nowak taking the leadership, translated “Southern Forages” to Polish. The U.S. publisher of “Southern Forages” donated sufficient funds to publish 500 copies of the Polish edition for distribution to libraries, agricultural extension service offices, and agricultural schools. As a result of the success of this project, a second edition (Ball, et. al., 1996 & 1997) was later published which contained several chapters authored by Czeslaw Nowak. These chapters contained the latest forage research results obtained in ongoing investigations in Poland.

Recently, the authors of “Southern Forages” presented a forage production and utilization workshop in China. As was the case in Poland, Chinese scientists and farmers found the discussion of modern forage technology useful in their situation. Based on the success of their Polish translation, the authors authorized the translation of “Southern Forages” to Chinese, again, royalty free. In both Poland and China four-way collaboration was worked out. Scientists and educators in their respective developing countries through collaboration recognized the value of the technologies described in the book. The authors generously agreed to permit translation, royalty free. The publishers, private sector partners, supported the undertaking and the whole endeavor was triggered through the collaborative inquiries and exchanges of scientists from less developed countries (LDC) and the U.S.

COLLABORATION PRODUCES MUTUAL BENEFITS

Based on our experience and that of others over the last several decades, collaborative endeavors enable us:

- To exchange ideas about each other’s culture, public policies, economics, education, religion, sports, etc.
- To broaden our knowledge of diverse environments, agricultural systems, soils, crops, markets, etc.
- To become more constructively involved in the reduction of malnutrition and poverty through transfer and adaptation of technology to the needs of developing countries.
- To become active participants in international education and research.

- To share the benefits of literature search engines operating in the industrial nations that may not be available in developing countries.
- To generate opportunities to present professional papers internationally.
- To facilitate the publication of scientific papers internationally, which in turn, favors academic promotion/advancement. The “Literature Cited” contains a sampling of our publications (Ossom et al., 1987, 1991, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2006) that involved three developing countries: Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland.
- To become an active participant in international affairs and know individuals and families on a first name basis across international boundaries.
- To enhance the recruitment and placement of graduate students, post docs and individuals involved in exchange programs.

INITIATING CONTACTS

The success of an international cooperative endeavor depends upon both parties wanting to become involved in a collaborative research and/or educational project. Such cooperation can be encouraged but not dictated. Much thought and careful planning is required before embarking on such a venture. Chances of developing a successful relationship are enhanced if the prospective collaborators already know each other – as perhaps in a professor-graduate student relationship, as members of an international committee, or through a mutual friend.

For prospective LDC collaborators, we offer these following suggestions. If you have obtained an advanced degree in an industrialized country, the obvious first choice is to approach your former major professor. Our team effort resulted from an exceptionally good major professor-graduate student relationship. This is ideal because each individual knows the other person well. If one’s major professor is already over-committed, he/she may suggest colleagues who may be interested in a collaborative relationship. In the absence of a personal contact one may communicate directly with agricultural educators, deans and department heads to explore the possibility of establishing linkages. Additionally, professional organizations may be in a position to provide assistance. For example, in the case of agronomy, one might contact the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), or the Soil Science Society of Agronomy (SSSA).*

*The mailing address of each of these societies is: 677 South Segoe Road, Madison, WI USA 53711. The phone number is 608-273-8080. The society web pages are: www.agronomy.org, www.crops.org, www.soils.org.

AGRONOMIC SOCIETIES OFFER REDUCED MEMBERSHIP FEES FOR LDC SCIENTISTS

To increase the availability of Society membership and journals to the best and brightest scientists around the world, regardless of need, agronomic societies have created a special international membership category. Scientists in lower tiers of LDCs as defined by the World Bank may qualify. If so, they may join ASA, CSSA, or SSSA at a reduced annual rate (other fees may apply). In addition, the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) has

established the ASF International Member Fund to further reduce the annual membership fee by 50% to scientists with the greatest need. Additional information concerning these two programs is available at www.asa-cssa-sssa.org/membership and www.asa-cssa-sssa.org/membership/pdf/international_discount.pdf. We hope that other scientific organizations will follow the lead of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA.

FINDING NEEDED FUNDING

A major obstacle to a productive, synergistic relationship may be funding. If the industrial country partner desires such a collaborative relationship badly enough, he/she may invest personal funds. Such an investment can be very rewarding. Real satisfaction comes from knowing that you have personally contributed to the well being of people in need.

Obtaining funding from major donors such as USAID and World Bank is difficult as the projects that they intend to fund require competitive bids from institutions or companies, not from individuals. Although USAID has greatly reduced their support of agricultural development in low-income countries, limited opportunities are still available. For example, The Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Program (SANREM CRSP) is presently being managed by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Details are available at <http://www.sanrem.uga>. Agricultural economists may wish to contact Cornell and Clark Atlanta Universities concerning a grant supported by USAID entitled "Strategies and Analysis for Growth and Access (SAGA) Project". Logging into www.saga.cornell.edu would provide further details.

The embassy in the country of interest can be a valuable source of information on funding for projects from both private and public sources. Other potential funding sources include Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO's) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's). And one can, with the backing of one's institution, approach private foundations which support development work.

CONCLUSION

Based on our experience, partnering with overseas colleagues is not easy. Funding, if required, is especially difficult. However, with present-day, virtually costless electronic communications, partnerships can be launched more easily than ever before. Our collaborative projects have proven to be both personally and professionally rewarding. We think that others may also find that establishing a collaborative relationship may bring many rewards to the participants.

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