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U.S.-DPRK
EDUCATIONAL
EXCHANGES:
ASSESSMENT AND
FUTURE STRATEGY

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WHAT MAKES THE
DIFFERENCE?

STUDY TOURS AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR DPRK SPECIALISTS

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Since the beginning of humanitarian aid programs addressing the food emergency in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), most aid agencies have included a variety of study tours or technical exchanges in their programs. This chapter reviews the development and implementation of such programs, discusses the objectives of these programs, and identifies characteristics and features that contribute to the effectiveness and success of educational exchanges with the DPRK. The author was coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) agricultural assistance program in the DPRK between 1998 and 2007. This chapter draws from the AFSC experience¹ but is informed as well by information on exchanges carried out by other U.S. and European aid agencies. At the request of several program representatives, specific organizations and programs will not be identified in the examples discussed.

There have been many types of study programs involving DPRK participants. In this chapter the term “study tour” refers to relatively short-term (that is, month-long or shorter) programs that provide an overview of one or more subject areas. “Training program” refers to programs (typically longer) that are intended to provide the opportunity for more in-depth study and practical skill development in a topic area. “Study program” is the general term encompassing all possibilities. This chapter will focus on study programs outside the DPRK; however, in many cases these study programs are linked with other types of training in the DPRK, whether formal workshops or seminars, or hands-on practice and discussion at a farm, clinic, or other location. U.S. agencies have normally been quite limited in their ability to implement formal training in the DPRK. There have been a few one- to three-day workshops, and a very few notable instances where foreign experts have worked side by side with DPRK counterparts installing equipment such as wind-powered electrical generators, hospital operating rooms, or water and electrical systems. Such projects have included an explicit training component beyond just getting the equipment installed and working.

Context

The early international response to the DPRK famine included both food donations and material and technical assistance to the farming and health sectors. NGOs and other agencies working in agriculture and health began to look for opportunities to bring North Korean counterparts to the United States, Europe, or elsewhere in order to introduce them to current practices and technology. DPRK participants in these programs were usually well-educated specialists, but typically two decades or more out of date in their fields, because of the country's isolation and lack of access to international publications and other information. Study tours organized to provide general information regarding farming methods, health or sanitation were an important step in improving communication and understanding between foreign assistance personnel and their DPRK counterparts. During the mid and late 1990s, substantial tensions and disagreements were common in aid programs, as international program directors attempted to acquire sufficient information about conditions in the DPRK to organize effective programs, and DPRK counterpart organizations insisted that they could implement the programs themselves, given the material resources. The gap in knowledge and technical perspective compounded already intense differences in political and policy perspectives.

DPRK specialists, whether in agriculture, public health, or medicine, actively pursue new knowledge and information. They are not uninformed about international developments in their field, but especially through the late 1990s had very spotty access to international publications. Thus, they might have read a single research report about earthworm farming, for example, but have no information about either the organizational and agricultural context in which earthworms are raised or any other research on earthworms that may question or amplify the findings that they have read. The example is trivial, but the overall process is not. Scientific knowledge must be understood within the context of a field, and the DPRK specialists did not have the contextual background to evaluate what they might be reading.

Thus, the objective of early study tours was almost always to provide broad-based introductions to a particular topic, whether corn breeding, tuberculosis diagnosis or municipal water supply. North Korean participants in these delegations tended to be mature specialists (scientists, doctors, technicians) who were trusted by their government and could interpret what they saw and relate it to the DPRK situation. This pattern continued for a number of years. The education process was slow given that it was an unusual NGO that was able to invite abroad even two groups of North Koreans per year. A typical program in the United States lasted for around two weeks and included three to five participants.

Over time, the content and objective of these programs evolved. As Koreans gained current information about their fields, and as international

staff learned more about the DPRK situation and began to focus the activities of their aid programs more tightly, the subject matter of study tours likewise became more focused. Rather than visiting dairy farms, pig breeders, and corn farms as part of a single study tour, for example, a study tour might concentrate only on pig nutrition and pig housing systems. Korean specialists were clearly doing a good job of sharing what they learned with their colleagues and superiors, as subsequent participants came with greater overall awareness of the particular field of study, as well as with specific questions or topics that they wanted to investigate in depth.

In the early 2000s, international assistance agencies (NGOs and others) began to transition from an emphasis on emergency material assistance (whether in the form of food, farming supplies, medicines, or equipment) to programs that addressed underlying problems such as poor soil health, unimproved seeds, a widespread inability to properly diagnose certain medical issues, or a lack of clean drinking water. DPRK counterparts continued to insist on high levels of material aid, but also began to recognize that up-to-date technical and scientific knowledge was vital to the national recovery effort. Knowledge sharing programs were therefore able to link training and study tours more closely to program activities in the DPRK.

From Study Tour to Training

The key element in the evolution of education programs from study tours to practical training has been the gradual growth of a shared understanding of information needs. In the early years of assistance, U.S. and other international aid staff were trying to learn enough about the DPRK to provide appropriate aid as well as appropriate educational materials. These efforts were often scattershot at best, until a clear picture of the sector (be it agriculture, medicine or public health) emerged. DPRK aid coordination counterparts (typically in the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee—FDRC) and technical specialists had little information about the last ten or twenty years of technical development outside the DPRK, and assumed that their key needs were improved equipment or seed, and more fertilizer, rather than updated knowledge. This assumption was sharply challenged during the first few years of study tours, and by around 2001 DPRK study delegations were clearly looking for current scientific and technical information to upgrade planning and management efforts at home.

To understand the development of educational exchange programs with the DPRK, one must consider the motivations and objectives of the parties to the exchange. These objectives have not been constant over time, nor entirely shared. U.S. NGOs proposed and implemented study tours for a variety of reasons, including:

- To bring their counterparts up to date in their field, so that program

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

activities can continue effectively.

- To reduce the isolation of the DPRK and introduce new ideas and experiences.
- To develop person-to-person contacts between Americans and North Koreans, that might serve as a foundation for greater reconciliation and understanding.
- To modernize DPRK institutions and practices in a particular field.
- To expose DPRK participants to Western institutions and information sharing networks.

The DPRK authorities have some similar and some different objectives:

- To collect up-to-date technical or scientific information for review and possible dissemination.
- To learn applied techniques that can be adopted or adapted to DPRK conditions. To collect books, scientific journals, samples, seeds, equipment, etc., for testing and use in the DPRK.
- To cautiously allow trusted scientists to travel, but to minimize the impact of their visit on their social and political outlook.

Figure 1 outlines the types of education exchanges ranging from familiarization study tours to university degree programs. Over time, exchanges with the DPRK have tended to evolve upward along this continuum, but with a separate path and rate of change for each international partner. Some aid agencies have not been able to progress past the level of a specialized study tour, while others (mostly from Europe) are now supporting extended practical study and training.

Figure 1 Typology of Exchange Programs

Outside DPRK		Inside DPRK	
<i>Examples</i>	<i>Type of program</i>	<i>Type of program</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Degree programs in Australia, Europe	University degree program	Faculty at DPRK universities	So far not generalized beyond language instruction
Specialized training at Chinese & European universities sponsored by Western NGOs	Formal non-degree university study	Faculty at DPRK universities	European faculty teaching language in Pyongyang
Specialized agriculture or economics training at European and Chinese universities	In-depth training programs	Teachers resident in DPRK—specialized programs	Specialized language programs: English, French, German
Fruit production training in Europe, cardiology training in U.S.	Practical training (>=4 weeks)	Project training > 1 week, or joint installation of equipment or facilities renovation	Installation of wind-electric generators, hospital equipment, medical laboratory
Many examples from 2000 onward in Europe, United States, Canada, Asia	Specialized study tour	One-off lecture or workshop	Visiting specialists in agriculture, medicine, etc by many agencies
Typical pattern in late 1990s, mostly superseded by specialized study tours	Familiarization study tour	Normal technical project visits	Ongoing from beginning

Partnership agreements developed

Source: author.

DPRK authorities were taking a calculated risk in allowing scientists, doctors and technical specialists to travel abroad, especially to the United States and Europe. Officials who had previously worked abroad presumably knew very well that the travelers would see that the rest of the world was not as backward and antagonistic as was depicted by DPRK media. Thus, the study delegations were required to bring back clear and *tangible* proof of the benefits of their excursion. The phrase “demonstrate the success of the delegation” implied that the delegation would return with technical books, scientific journals, samples of medicines or agriculture chemicals, seeds, and so on. In other words, they needed to return with tangible evidence to demonstrate to their superiors that the delegation had been able to reap

some bounty during its stay in hostile territory, and thus justify the delegates' exposure to unorthodox ideas and vouch for the benefit of future delegations.

As the knowledge base increased, and as both sides developed greater understanding of and appreciation for each other's objectives, educational programs became somewhat more focused and more closely integrated with aid program activities in the DPRK. For example, one NGO implemented three agriculture study delegations between 2004 and 2006 that concentrated on techniques of crop rotation, soil fertility management, and organic farming, in support of its sustainable farming program activities in the DPRK.

DPRK partners began to request longer and more focused study opportunities, sometimes before U.S. partners were able to consider these requests. At the same time, several U.S. universities that provided training and support to delegations invited by U.S. NGOs have expressed interest in inviting DPRK scientists for extended stays for either study or cooperative research. But DPRK authorities have so far been unwilling to allow extended stays in the United States, and it is also not clear that the U.S. Department of State would grant visas permitting more than a three-month stay. Study opportunities of less than a month can provide useful information, but seldom impart the hands-on experience needed for participants to develop useable skills or integrate knowledge in a practical way. Longer-term training is necessary to do more than develop awareness of new methods.

Whatever longer-term training and research has occurred has mostly been implemented outside the United States, particularly in China and other Asian countries, or by European aid organizations. For example, one NGO has supported DPRK rice breeders so as to give them the opportunity to work at a Vietnamese research center. The scientists have lived in Vietnam for as many as five months at a time, and the program has now been repeated for six years. The scientists have opportunities for independent research and discussions with their Vietnamese colleagues during these stays. At least one European agency has placed DPRK farm technicians in working European farms for up to a half year.

With these types of program changes, the objectives of DPRK participants have also evolved. Information and practical skills are more highly evaluated than during the early years. Copies of reports, scientific papers, technical bulletins, and the like are collected (now almost exclusively in electronic format) and brought home on CDs or thumb drives. This approach greatly facilitates the dissemination of technical knowledge in the DPRK, once the documents have been reviewed by security. Many are reportedly made available on the DPRK intranet. Program continuity is also improved. In some cases, a specialist from the DPRK may participate in more than one training program. This helps to form connections between disparate information sources, and contributes to the integration of the knowledge gained, though it necessarily reduces the number of DPRK specialists who acquire foreign

study experience. Study program participants may also share information gained in seminars with their colleagues after returning to the DPRK. The extent to which this happens is unclear, but it is evident that information is being passed from participants in one delegation to another.

Nonetheless, significant difficulties remain in imparting practical skills, whether technical or management, in short-term training programs. There are so many constraints and shortages in the DPRK that one cannot automatically expect that techniques learned (or even learned and practiced) during a study program can be replicated in the DPRK. Modern laboratory equipment or chemical reagents may be unavailable, crop planting requirements may impede the use of learned management methods, or spare parts to maintain equipment may be unavailable. As has been the case in all instances of international cooperation with the DPRK, it is very difficult to implement isolated changes when related institutions and support infrastructure are undeveloped or not functioning. A very few assistance agencies (both American and European) have begun to succeed in building close links between physical construction (such as hospital renovation or seed processing plants) and technical training of the personnel who will operate those systems. This sort of linkage seems to happen best when training programs or hands-on workshops are implemented in the DPRK, at or in conjunction with the construction of the new or improved facility.

More formal and long-term educational programs are uncommon, but do exist. In fact, *all* levels identified in Figure 1 have been accomplished by Western agencies working with the DPRK, though to date there are far fewer examples and fewer DPRK participants at the higher levels. U.S. organizations have been able to implement all levels outside the DPRK up to and including extended specialized training, but have not yet been able to place any residential instructors in the DPRK at any level.

Keys to Success

Considering the many study programs that have been carried out by U.S. NGOs as well as other aid agencies working in the DPRK, we can identify a number of factors that contribute to meeting objectives of effective knowledge transfer, program support, and improved relationships between international and DPRK counterparts. To some extent, these factors are simply elements of good program management, but in work with the DPRK, some are either particularly problematic or critical for program success. These factors are identified and discussed below:

Participants

Having the right personnel participate in a study program is absolutely critical, and happily has been somewhat easier in programs for the DPRK than in some other countries. Ideally, participants from the DPRK hold applied

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

positions in their organization, are somewhat senior and mature enough to understand what they are learning, and, on returning home, write reports that are widely trusted. Senior party or agency heads generally do not benefit from technical education as much as lower-ranking specialists, but it is also important in some instances that the agency heads see technology or undergo training firsthand in order to assess and recognize its value and relevance and to support its adoption in the DPRK. DPRK authorities have generally not allowed junior technical staff to participate in programs organized by Western aid organizations. Yet younger specialists may benefit more from longer practical training programs where the objective is to impart working, hands-on skills and knowledge. To date, such programs are few in number, but may increase. Including field-level practitioners such as farm managers or hospital staff has in some cases been beneficial, with these participants gaining much from the experience. But a few agencies have reported experiences where the participants were relatively uneducated, unprepared for an international learning experience, and unable to benefit from the study tour. This is frustrating for all parties involved.

While it is mostly impossible for international aid agencies in the DPRK to identify or request specific participants for a study program, it has sometimes been possible to specify the characteristics or backgrounds of the participants and/or to specify the mix of technical specialties represented in a group. For example, one agriculture delegation included a soil scientist, an entomologist, and an agronomist, in order to consider multiple aspects of organic farming methods. For most U.S. NGOs, the identity of the individual participants has not been known until their visa applications were sent to the State Department, or to the other host country's embassy.

Virtually every study delegation from the DPRK includes one member from the relevant aid coordination agency, for example the FDRC, KAPES (Korean American Private Exchange Society), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. This person is the functional equivalent of the guides that accompany visiting international staff in the DPRK, and in the best circumstances provides accurate translations for the delegation and act as an experienced intermediary between the delegation members (often traveling for the first time) and the host agency staff. Some U.S. agencies have been fortunate to work with specific Korean guides over a period of several years (for delegations both to and from the DPRK), with the guides developing both knowledge of technical terminology and a genuine interest in the subject matter of the assistance programs. In such situations, two-way information transfer is quite smooth. In contrast, if the Korean guide/translator is neither proficient in relevant technical vocabulary and concepts nor interested in the subject matter, the quality of the learning experience is substantially degraded. A few NGOs have complained about the guides/translators assigned to their projects and have been able to effect changes. Delegations composed *entirely*

of staff from aid coordination agencies are inappropriate for transferring practical knowledge to DPRK line ministries or other agencies, but may be necessary to lay the political groundwork necessary for the eventual approval of technical training programs.

Partners

Most aid agencies hosting study programs do not have the in-house technical expertise to provide training in the relevant topics, and must rely on partners—such as universities, training centers, corporations, industry associations, hospitals, and so on. Selecting appropriate partners is crucial to the success of a training program. Universities, with their experience in international education, agricultural extension, and short courses, are often ideal partners, particularly if the university has an active and experienced international studies and cooperative research program. When organizing a study program outside the NGO's own country, partnering with a local NGO (which may not have programs in the DPRK) can be an effective way of making contacts and plans with training organizations in that country. Some companies are willing and able to provide hands-on instruction and practice to representatives of an organization that purchases their products (e.g., chickens for breeding or industrial equipment). To date, the DPRK has not taken much advantage of such commercial-based opportunities, but they should be recognized as a potential resource.

Planning

The best study programs are built around specific information needs of the aid program in the DPRK, or around information or skill needs identified by DPRK partners. It is crucial to know in detail what the specific knowledge transfer goals are, and to plan how and by whom the information will be presented. Ideally this process occurs through close communication and planning between international and DPRK program staff, well in advance of the study delegation. However, communication between U.S. NGOs and their DPRK partners is frequently obstructed and limited by the DPRK channels, and so this ideal is often not accomplished. International program staff have often been forced to plan a program based on rather limited information from the DPRK.

Planning with the university or other training partner is also vital, to ensure that key subjects are addressed and that the program is appropriately oriented to the expected level of the DPRK participants. Depending on the background and experience of the training partner, it has sometimes been beneficial for aid staff to meet personally with the partners for advance planning.

Preparation

Both the DPRK participants and the training partners need orientation and preparation for the program to be most effective. Where possible, DPRK participants should receive an orientation regarding international travel and living in the destination country, as well as regarding any organizational requirements of the program. At least one aid agency has been able to accomplish this on a regular basis. One must assume that the participants already have appropriate professional and technical preparation, as a criterion of their selection, although as noted in the section on participants, this has not always been the case. While some European aid agencies have been able to review and possibly reject proposed individual participants in advance, that has almost never been possible for U.S. NGOs.

Preparation of staff and resource personnel from the training partner hosting the delegation (university, farm bureau, hospital, etc.) is beneficial. Most people have no knowledge or understanding of the social and economic institutions of the DPRK, and how they affect day-to-day decisions in farms, clinics, etc. Clarifying, for example, that farmers can't just go out and buy more fertilizer for their fields, but must make do with whatever quantity was delivered at the start of the year, substantially changes the discussion of farm management decisions. Giving the host organization and the planned resource persons written briefing information in advance about the DPRK, the agency's program in the DPRK, the backgrounds of the DPRK participants, and the organizations from which they come, is also helpful in developing presentations that are more meaningful and relevant to the DPRK specialists.

Program Relevance

There is a nearly unlimited number of topics or areas of training that could be implemented in work with DPRK partners, but the best use of resources is to focus on study and training programs that are directly related to an agency's ongoing program activities in the DPRK. If an NGO program concentrates on primary health care, for example, training in cardiac surgery does not contribute to the main program goals. Similarly, if an agriculture program centers on developing improved crop rotation systems, training in agronomy and crop interactions is more relevant than training in chicken nutrition. There certainly have been occasions when an aid agency has implemented a study program on topics that are not central to its mission, often as a necessary contribution to building a relationship with its DPRK partners, or because the topic was generally useful for the DPRK, though not central to the agency's mission. Sometimes requests are made by DPRK counterparts for high tech or cutting edge training, such as genetic engineering in plant breeding, intensive livestock production, or open-heart surgery. The agency receiving such a request must consider whether it is an appropriate use of limited aid resources when the DPRK is unable even to produce clean seed

for its farms or provide basic medicines in district clinics.

There have been times when DPRK national priorities—for example, to greatly increase potato production—have caused aid organizations to revise both their on-the-ground activities and their study and training programs. The benefits of such a redirection must be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Interpretation

DPRK participants in study programs are often traveling away from home for the first time, and are confronted by strange and often not easily understood institutions, cultural practices, and information. Many are quite nervous at the prospect of traveling to countries that they have been told are threatening and antagonistic. Providing basic information as soon as the delegates arrive about the state and town where they are—about lodging, transportation, and meal provisions—and giving them a copy of a detailed program itinerary may go a long way in overcoming initial uneasiness and establishing an environment for cooperative learning.

We all make assumptions based on our home culture, and there are often information gaps between resource persons and North Korean specialists. An American farmer talking about his management decisions based on anticipated market price, profit margin, and bank loan costs makes no sense to a Korean farm manager who is not operating in a market environment. Pausing the discussion for a moment to explain to both sides the differences in systems and underlying assumptions can clarify many points and improve subsequent communication. This is an important responsibility of the accompanying aid agency staff, and potentially also of the DPRK guide/translator, who also has an opportunity to explain the priorities and viewpoints of the delegation and of the DPRK counterpart organization.

In addition, despite usually excellent translation, key points may get missed, and an attentive aid agency staff accompanying the delegation may notice the gap and fill in at an appropriate time. Sometimes it is also helpful to remind a group during a conversation that a similar or contrasting point was made in another meeting several days earlier. This contextualizing of the learning experience helps to cement and organize the information that the participants encounter, and aids in retention and understanding.

Internet

As electronic data sources have proliferated, and as virtually all scientific publications are now available online, it is essential that study delegations have ample time to explore these resources. Participants should have access to university library computers that provide them with an unlimited ability to download journal articles, together with initial guidance and help in manipulating search engines to make their research efficient and effective. Blocks of time should be built into the program itinerary to allow participants

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

to utilize this priceless resource.

Flexibility

Nothing ever goes exactly as planned. An agency may plan a study program and learn when the delegation arrives that it has a rather different set of priorities, which had not been communicated through official channels. This is not common, but has occurred. More common is the delegation that brings additional requests for visits, study topics, or supplies that are reasonable and related to the core topic, but were not included in the initial plan. In such cases, a good relationship between the aid agency and its education partner(s) will facilitate modifying or augmenting the original plans. The host agency should also be prepared to take advantage of unexpected opportunities, such as a professional conference nearby, or a community presentation by an agriculture extension agent on topics of interest to the delegation. When plans are broken, make the best of things: one agriculture delegation had its final flight leg in the United States cancelled due to weather, with no assured onward transport for three days. The agency staff turned the 700 mile drive to the final destination into a moving introductory lesson on dryland farming, center pivot irrigation systems, beef cattle feed lots, and the U.S. trucking industry, all viewed through the car windows along the way.

Follow-up

Study programs work best when what is learned is put into practice on return home. U.S. agencies have not always been able even to meet with study program participants after they return to the DPRK. The situation has generally improved over the years, but there are still occasions when participants simply disappear into the woodwork. But in the best cases, agency staff continue to work with the study program participants on project activities, sometimes over many years. Such continuity builds mutual trust and understanding, program coherence, and improved study programs downstream. Having participants in study programs abroad act as resource persons in follow-up workshops in the DPRK also cements learnings and interprets them in ways that are relevant and meaningful for the DPRK situation. At least one aid agency requires study program participants to keep a daily log and write a debriefing report once they have returned to the DPRK. At the very least, an agency staff should sit with the delegation just prior to the end of the program and discuss in detail their evaluation of each of the different program activities and what they have learned. This both provides vital feedback for future program development and demonstrates respect for the ideas and opinions of the participants.

Another important aspect of follow-up is building institutional relationships between DPRK organizations and international counterparts. For U.S. organizations, this has been quite difficult and relatively unsuccessful.

More than a few U.S. universities have offered either extended training programs or cooperative research opportunities as a preamble to more general cooperation, but to date only one of these invitations has been accepted. There is one general cooperation agreement in place between a DPRK research organization and an Asian research center (not in China) that was facilitated by a U.S. NGO, but nothing else that I know of.

Food and Fun

Most DPRK participants in a study program are exceedingly mindful of the unusual opportunity they have, and of the very short time available in which to accomplish a long list of goals. They work hard and usually meet among themselves until late every night, discussing and reviewing each day's activities. Attending to their nutrition and mental rest contributes to their overall evaluation of the experience, as well as to their ability to learn. Arranging lodgings that are apartments, or hotel suites with a kitchenette, allows the delegation to cook Korean-style meals from time to time, and also creates an opportunity for the participants to explore grocery stores. In addition, the lounge space found in a typical suite becomes a place to sit, talk, and drink at the end of the day, with the agency staff guide joining with the Korean participants (and sharing in the cooking and KP duties). Many things can be discussed and learned during these more relaxed hours. When eating in restaurants, it is enjoyable to introduce the Korean participants to the variety of international cuisines available in the United States, as an informal part of the program. My experience suggests that Mexican, Italian, and Indian cuisines—all spicy and substantial—are greatly enjoyed, so long as there are also regular East Asian meals to keep some contact with the familiar. Regional cooking is also something to explore as another window on American culture.

Any study program of two weeks or longer needs at least one rest day a week, which could be accomplished by a Sunday drive to a nearby park or lake, attendance of a sports event, visit to a winery, or the like. While the Korean participants may say that they would rather work in the library or do Internet research, taking at least some time off will contribute to everyone's mental health.

Choice of Location

Study programs can and have been implemented in many locations, often in the NGO's home country, and often elsewhere. There are benefits and drawbacks to both situations that should be considered in program planning. Carrying out the program in the United States (assuming a U.S. NGO as host) allows for the maximum opportunity to build personal contacts and interpersonal understanding between people from two countries that are political adversaries. This is a central objective for some NGOs, though not for all. However it is, if anything, counter to DPRK goals. It is also often

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

easier to organize the details of a study program in one's own country, because professional contacts may already be in place, and there is a common language and culture of education. When unexpected requests are made, or when accidents occur, it is easier to respond and access appropriate resources within one's own culture than when working elsewhere.

Americans are also in some ways particularly open to informal contact with visitors. Home visits and shared meals in homes of university faculty, program supporters, and the like are frequent elements of study programs in the United States, but not so common elsewhere.

In some fields, the United States, Canada and Europe are seen as leaders and, by extension, as highly preferred venues for study. On the other hand, conditions in Asian countries may be closer to those in the DPRK, and technologies easier to adapt. Asian specialists (especially in China) understand the situation in the DPRK better than many non-Asian specialists do, and can relate to DPRK study participants rather well. However, programs have also encountered situations where fundamental technical information is not freely shared by Chinese hosts, because it is seen as sensitive or as enabling industrial competition.

Agency staff accompanying DPRK study delegations in Asia have noted that in some cases DPRK participants are strongly impressed by the differences in economic and social patterns they encounter, because they expected other Asian countries to be similar to the DPRK, whereas Europe and the Americas are obviously different. Such observations would suggest that delegations to Asia may have a greater impact on North Koreans' worldview than delegations to North America or Europe.

Finally, there are practical considerations: visas to China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are much easier to arrange than visas to the United States, Canada, or Europe. DPRK authorities are also more willing to allow delegations to travel to friendly socialist countries than to the West, and in some cases have put such strict time limitations on delegations to the United States that the learning opportunities are severely constrained. Travel expenses to and within the United States are greater than in China, though air tickets to Southeast Asia cost about as much as travel to the United States.

Overall, there is no compelling reason universally to prefer study programs in one country to those in another. Good programs can be implemented anywhere that there are good resource and teaching institutions, provided the host agency is capable of identifying those resources and developing good partnerships with them, as discussed earlier. The key is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of a specific training location with respect to program objectives, and organize the program to take maximum advantage of the strengths and to counteract the weaknesses. Close discussion and vigorous negotiation with one's DPRK counterpart is essential to this process.

Overview

This chapter has reviewed the experience of U.S. and other aid organizations in carrying out study programs with the DPRK. In general, the content and implementation of these programs has gradually improved over the last 15 years, and the programs have become more focused and oriented toward transferring applicable knowledge and skills, in contrast to the early approach of familiarization tours. Much more can be done, however, but the obstacles to more effective study programs come primarily from the DPRK authorities. Every year a plethora of offers and opportunities for study and training programs for DPRK participants are not accepted, and the proposed length of programs is cut. Most agencies organizing study programs are aware of and attentive to many of the factors of success that have been discussed. Hopefully identifying and listing them here will assist in future program development.

Notes

¹ To date, the AFSC agriculture program has implemented seven study or research trips to the United States, two to Canada, ten to China and six to Vietnam, with durations ranging from a week to five months. The general cooperation program has implemented one medical study tour in the United States, as well as eight training programs in China, addressing topics such as library science and management.