

A Preferred Partner

The obstacles on the road to reform underscore the country's need for technical assistance and know-how. Industrial output has fallen, real unemployment — a new phenomenon in a post-communist society — is rising and attempts at privatization are patchy. Nevertheless, there is hope.

The key is partnership. Task Force projects match particular Canadian expertise to Polish needs in such areas as management training, telecommunications, agriculture and energy. "We have the ability to move in quickly and offer practical hands-on assistance," says Robert Lee, the Task Force's Program Manager for Poland. One in ten Canadians has family ties to the region. This fact, and Canada's multi-cultural mix, have enhanced its reputation for being "culturally sensitive," placing Canadians in a unique position to assist.

A Focus on People

With its limited resources, the Task Force cannot finance capital expenditures, but it can assist Poland in building on its primary resource: its people. To this end, a number of the economic development projects focus on professional training and management.

One of the earliest projects was with the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO) of Toronto, which places retired managers and business leaders to act as consultants in Canada and elsewhere. More than 70 volunteers from all sectors and every corner of Canada have gone to Poland on assignments ranging from one to three months.

CESO's Witek Gotowski, Manager for Europe, says the Canadians work closely with companies in Poland's newly emerging private sector to improve the efficiency of their operations and the quality of their products.

Success stories abound. In many cases CESO volunteers have helped turn companies around, increasing their output and creating new jobs in the process.

Retired Northern Telecom executive William Waring of Grand Bay, New Brunswick, helped increase production by 50 per cent at Cyfral, a manufacturer

of intercom and security systems in Lodz, Poland. Waring showed Cyfral's young owners a manufacturing management system that helps boost productivity, increase quality and control inventory. The company tripled its sales in 1991 and hired 18 new employees, most of them women.

In another project, a Polish-Canadian professor of actuarial sciences at the University of Western Ontario, Kris Stroinski, recognized the need for actuaries to assist the private insurance companies emerging in Poland. With the assistance of the Task Force, Stroinski has organized summer schools at Warsaw University to train more than 60 actuaries.

Mathematics is a strong discipline in Poland, so the country has a solid talent pool.

"Our training is helping to translate that knowledge into a professional skill in demand in Poland's emerging market economy," says Stroinski, who has been named the first chairperson of the new association of actuaries in Poland.

Toward the Future

Canada has sponsored projects focusing on co-operatives, the environment, privatization, trade and investment, transportation and telecommunications. Recognizing the importance of balancing short-term training that responds to immediate needs with in-depth, longer-term alternatives that build toward the future, a consortium of 34 Canadian university management schools has also been commissioned to establish a comprehensive undergraduate business and management training program at the Warsaw School of Economics.

Technical assistance is a two-way phenomenon that has been instrumental in building trust and economic links between the two countries. As a result of their involvement in Task Force projects, many Canadian firms find themselves well positioned to pursue trade and investment opportunities in Poland. For example, the Eduplus project led to the signing of six contracts with Canadian firms to provide goods and services. These include drilling equipment from Manitoba, fibreglass from Ottawa, and six portable sawmills made in Barrie, Ontario. ■

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