Building And Sustaining Croatian Cooperative Business Leadership For the 21ST Century Through Education And Outreach: Using Multi-level Organizations

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Introduction

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) espouses one of its guiding principles as “member education.” An education and outreach project involving Montana State University (MSU), the University of Zagreb, and the Croatia Independent Association of Agricultural Cooperatives (IAAC) sought to institutionalize and increase community capacity for sustained cooperative business leadership development in Croatia by educating faculty and students at the University of Zagreb and developing an educational outreach program to be directed at cooperative business practitioners.

Purpose

The project helped to meet USAID/Croatia’s most important strategic objective—(SO) 3.1: Reintegration of War-Affected Populations—as well as three out of six of USAID’s overall strategic goals: (1) encourage broad-based economic growth and agricultural development; (2) building human capacity through education and training; and (3) re-establish conditions necessary for political and economic development.

Conclusions

The project addressed Croatia’s vital need to revitalize traditional industries such as agriculture, and thus economic opportunities, in war-affected areas to maximize the return of refugees forced from their homes during the recent conflict in Croatia. To sustain economic opportunities through cooperative business development in Croatia, cooperative business programs and outreach were founded within a university having an established reputation for furthering agricultural business and technology throughout Croatia.

As the cooperative business curriculum at Croatian universities evolved, it provided continued opportunities for outreach by university faculty in cooperation with the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Additionally, University of Zagreb agriculture faculty members and Croatian Agricultural Cooperative leaders were able to visit Montana State University to consider other possibilities for increasing Cooperative Business Education activities through outreach and formal means.

Project activities enabled the collaborating Croatian University agriculture campus to establish effective resident instruction cooperative business education programs and an outreach program to (1) develop academic curriculum on cooperative business principles and practices for use at the university level in Croatia; (2) provide training to agricultural economics faculty at the University of Zagreb that focuses on the methods and techniques most applicable to delivering cooperative business course material to university students; and (3) develop an outreach program aimed at improving the strategic planning skills of Croatian agricultural cooperative directors. The university cooperative business program initiative that was established is expected to be fully sustainable through support of the university and local and state governments. It resulted in a model that can easily and successfully be replicated elsewhere in Croatia and Eastern Europe where formal and extension education efforts are being conducted to augment economic efficiency and commerce in the agriculture sector.