

Project Abstract:

Agricultural Schools as Centres of Competence for Regional Education and Training in Rural Areas in Moldova.

Poverty Reduction Based on the Principle "School and Community" in Rural Areas.

Short description

The project (24 months, January 2004 until December 2006, extension until Spring 2007 envisaged) aims at developing two agricultural schools (ŞP Leova and ŞP Nisporeni) in structurally disadvantaged areas of Moldova into regional centres of competence of vocational education and training. In order to link these schools with their socio-economic surrounding and make best use of synergetic effects, the project chose a school-and community-approach that includes the involvement of two villages per pilot school. Project activities are composed of in-service training of the school staff and the head of the schools, as well as investment into school infrastructure (in particular related to the set up of a winery in both schools) and a study visit to Austrian agricultural schools. The school program has already been adapted to the existing and anticipated labour market needs in the region. It aims at the skills necessary for developing self-supporting farms into micro businesses and the auxiliary services that could be generated around them. The schools started cooperation with partners in the region. Such cooperation needs to be established as part of the school's organizational culture.

Background – logic of intervention:

The agricultural sector continues to be of main importance for the Moldovan economy, with 43% of the labour force working in agriculture in 2003. At the same time, incomes in this sector are considerably lower than the national average (30.3 € per month in agriculture in comparison to 53.9 € national average in 2002). In line with this, the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2004-2006) states that poverty in Moldova is *'a phenomenon mainly associated with the agricultural sector'*.

After the privatisation of agricultural assets, many former workers of collective farms were left with a piece of land without having the education or upbringing that would enable them to develop their farms into successful enterprises. Because of their desperate situation many young farmers have left the country while older landowners tend to lease their property to big enterprises, very often at unfavourable conditions. As time goes on, it can be expected that more and more international food producers will learn to appreciate the potential of Moldovan soil. They will be interested in obtaining large quantities of raw products at low prices from large scale farms to be processed in factories in or outside the country. While a certain degree of consolidation of ownership structures is inevitable, it must be understood that this could lead to a situation where only a few will benefit from the development, while a large number of small farmers could end up without any basis of income at all.

However, without adequate education or training, only few landowners will manage to survive in the long run. There is a big need 'to develop self-supporting agriculture into micro-businesses and the auxiliary services that could be generated around them' (ETF, *A Study of the Moldovan Education and Training System and Its Relevance to the Labour Market Needs*). Programs such as the Rural Investments and Services Project (RISP) have addressed this issue by creating possibilities for consultation and financing for agricultural SMEs and micro-businesses.

There have also been different efforts to reform the VET system. However, agricultural schools continue to educate and train specialists with a narrow profile for large farming structures. As of

now, the education they receive does not sufficiently relate to the possibilities and necessities of the farms of their families.

Project impact on the lives of the rural poor.

The improvement of the school services on different levels (better school management, practice-related education, modern curricula, improved employability of the graduates) ensure access to a better education and training for the graduates. Those are mainly from the region where the school is located, i.e. come from socially disadvantaged groups. Via a better education they will have more possibilities to find qualified jobs in the region respectively to run their family farms in the future more successfully. As the in-service trainings have also an important entrepreneurship-component, it is expected, that some of the graduates will establish enterprises on SME-level.

The described effects certainly will only occur after a first generation of students that went through the new curriculum, will have left school.

Furthermore through the community component farmers in the surrounding villages will receive training and consultancy. In the field of wine and vegetable production the schools together with surrounding villages will promote an increase in the diversification of production, improved quality and better marketing. Through this strategy the project will enhance the chances of farmers to increase the income they generate from farming and related activities.

Challenges

Labour market needs in agricultural education and training have changed dramatically over recent years in Moldova. This poses fundamental challenges for agricultural schools, their staff and future cooperation possibilities. New skills are needed as well as new forms of management and closer cooperation with the labour sector.

Development impact

When the project started, all 19 VET schools with agricultural profile in Moldova were teaching the same program to students not taking into account the opportunities and necessities particular to their regions. An important aspect of the project was to connect school development with regional development. This has not only changed the organizational culture of the involved schools, but also provides a model of good practice for other VET schools.

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