

9. Wissenschaftstagung Ökologischer Landbau.
Beitrag archiviert unter <http://orprints.org/view/projects/wissenschaftstagung-2007.html>

Some aspects of organic agriculture development in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Keywords: social tension, development of organic agriculture, education

Abstract:

Numerous authors and documents (IFOAM, OECD) focused social capital as critical for sustainable human and economic development. In this context social benefits that arise from organic farming is one of the factors that balance «competition» between organic and conventional agriculture. The paper presents some of the results of 6-years project on introducing and development of organic agriculture in the West Balkan countries, specified in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The authors discuss possibilities of organic farming as a matrix for overcoming social tensions and interpersonal relations created in war. Experiences from project indicate that systems of norms and standards and networking needed in exchange of experiences asked for collective action. Work in groups, separated by ethnic and social barriers at the beginning of the project, gradually changed to partnership based on individual contribution, regardless the «start positions». The approach: from environment, health and social aspects toward market and economic values, that offer organic agriculture, could be instrumented in this sense, according to the project's results.

Introduction and Objectives:

Economic, social and ecological issues are indispensable if we want to compare effects of organic and conventional agriculture in some society. In B&H organic agriculture, sector that focuses rural development is recognized as a very promising one. As the hilly-mountainous country, with mainly unpolluted environment, available labor, small mixed farms, B&H is considered as the suitable one, and organic farming has been indicated as competitive advantage of this country. Practicing of organic farming can contribute also to the future protection of nature, biodiversity, people health and welfare of animals. Organic agriculture presents possibility for development of new economic activities as tourism, export or special food production. But in B&H organic agriculture is recognized also as possibility for restoration of severely disrupted inter-ethnic and interpersonal relations, as a chance for returning of refugees and displaced persons, as possibility for creation of relations that can create new economy and security for people in villages. The paper will present some of the results of the 6 years project: »Introduction and development of organic agriculture in SEE countries« implemented by Avalon foundation, The Netherlands, in the West Balkan countries. We will highlight aspects that contributed to the building up of social capital in B&H, focusing activities of local people and not presenting the project in full dimensions.

Methods:

The research working hypothesis is that organic agriculture is excellent tool to develop social capital in developing countries. In another words, the very high social benefits of organic agriculture is one of the factors that balance «competition» between organic and conventional agriculture.

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Results and Discussion:

In B&H the project started in 2000. Four organizations, located in the different parts of the country, were chosen as the project's partners: NGO «Beta» as national coordinator from Sarajevo ; «Farmer» association of farmers from Kalesija in the North West part of FB&H, Association of farmers from Republic of Serbska centered in Prnjavor, North East B&H, and «Amica» organization that gathered woman in needs from Tuzla, North West B&H. Organization of the project asked for the very sensitive, balanced approaches to the people, that came from different ethnic, geographic, cultural and traditional matrix. In the country where roughly estimation was 200 000 of killed, 1,5 million that left the country, with every second person that was displaced, with totally destroyed economy and transition to the market economy at the door, it wasn't easy to set the common goals and find the way to introduce something totally new with the people of bitter life experiences.

The multifunctional of organic agriculture has offered great possibilities. The common denominator of all activities was education, in rooms but also in fields. Organic agriculture, special part that covers norms, standards, processes of inspection and certification, was new subject, because the total information blockade during the war, in the period of nineties, didn't permit any closer relation to these aspects. Sustainability, sustainable development and its instruments were totally strange to the everyday people. The project's program comprised education courses on the international level (one or twice a year, organized by Avalon Foundation), and at the local level (organized by the national coordinator). This was possibility for local people to offer what they felt was needed. To us it was step a head comparing other projects in the field.

During the first project's year we have introduced courses and project coordinators meetings almost every month. Seven people, our «partners», represented their organizations in the project's board, while more then hundred were involved in the different courses (principles of organic agriculture, agriculture and environment, health and food, norms and standards). Next year the new partners jointed the group: AFSC with the project «Common Gardner» widespread all over the B&H, and a little bit later «Village of peace», foundation of Rudolf Walter from Germany. "Village of peace" is situated in the area of Lukavac (Tuzla region) organized according to the principles of the organization of «SOS Kinderdorf», that offered home for children without parents, mainly from East Bosnia (Srebrenica), the rural region that suffered the most during the war. Organic farming was one of possibilities for children education. The secondary agricultural school from Živinice and the secondary agricultural school «Sanus futurum» from Sanski most (North West Bosnia) also jointed the project. Some of our partners succeeded to get their own projects, leaving space for overlapping of some activities. We offered education (four seminars and workshops per year), some literature that we prepared, field trials and some machinery insisted on difference between organic and old, extensive agriculture. The project has been presented in the media, local TV and newspapers, getting on significance and weight. People were interested in. Project's mobilities enabled them to meet each others, exchanged experiences and compared their life situations.

Gradually, the topics of our courses has changed, from sustainability, environment, agro- biodiversity, people health and animal welfare, organic standards and norms in farming, towards marketing, EU legislatives, business channels, market niches, agro-tourism, fairs and trade. Of course some topics persisted (plant protection, organic seeds and seedlings for greenhouse production, gender issue). We supported foundation of national certification body, took a part in creation of logo for national organic mark, gave support to foundation of B&H association of organic farmers. Also the

structure of the project's organization has changed. We have got opportunity for registration our NGO on the state instead on the entity level, as was before. Our seven partners became founders and had total insight in the program activities. The transparency, confidence and trust were absolute requirement. Instead of partnerships based on regional or ethnic connection, or partnership based on association of different groups of people, we tried to build functional partnership based on partner's individual contribution and their interest in organic agriculture. As the result, in the fourth and fifth project's year the gradual separation of people based on individual differences, took place and a new grouping appeared. We simply realized that our partners fit to one of the following groups:

- leading group of farmers: producers that produce for market, who know processes in organic farming, inspection and certification, the people that are forming organic market in B&H
- people in needs who accepted organic farming as possibility to overcome difficult economic situation; primary refugees and displaced persons, unemployed, people at the social margins.
- people in education who's job is to spread organic idea (secondary agricultural schools), and
- people involved in trade of organic products and goods.

We introduced possibilities for our partners to participate at fairs in B&H. First it was Eco fair in Bihać, where we presented our project and offered some of certified products. In the next, fourth year, we appeared at the eco fair in Tuzla, insisted that the whole family of ours partners took part in the program. In that way our participation at fairs was enriched by contribution of all family members, all generations. Next year, our partners have prepared «organic table» for the opening ceremony of the third ECO-fair in Bihać

Our small leading group of farmers had increased gathering new families who accepted risks to produce in organic way, without any help from the state (still FB&H has no law in organic). They cooperate with each others, exchanging experiences, machinery, goods and common battle for organic market.

In fourth year, we decided to start new activity: B&H Conference on the actual moment in organic agriculture. The First Conference was held in Tuzla, next year in Bihać and in the last project's year in Sarajevo. We were trying to gather all involved in organic movement in B&H. The lack of state and officials support, we were trying to compensate by spreading of our idea and increased public interests.

Our group was internationally recognized during the First IFOAM International Conference on Organic Wild Production, 2006 in Teslić, when among different activities our partners prepared food - «organic table» for the participants.

Conclusions:

It is difficult to estimate that just organic farming practices contribute to the overcoming of people tension – we didn't have control group. But it is for sure that the project had success and that people normally communicate. The products of one of our partners (cereals and flours) has entered supermarket (one of the most popular in B&H), two of them has got state land to practice organic farming, one built cottage house with the restaurant where he would offer his organic chase, few of them signed contract of exchanging organic goods for trading and tourist offer. Without project and its multi-

functional topic all that wouldn't happen. Besides, the project's influenced organic agriculture scene in B&H (national mark, association of organic farmers, annual conference) gathering more people. Analyzing the results it is difficult not to conclude that part of success belongs to the project's topic – organic agriculture. Other topic probably wouldn't contribute in the same way or get the same success. The organic farming, by itself, asks for better understanding of nature's cycles, nature itself and presents very good matrix for building positive people relations. People needs others people, their experiences. In the project education was used as tools for creation connection, common "glue" that supported people openness and good working atmosphere. Our partners have got impression that they were working on some special issue, something good and positive, and something they have to learn that made them different from all others. Mutual trust, encouraged by the organic agriculture movement, contributed to building social capital within the project.

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