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Original scientific paper

Economics of Agriculture 3/2012
UDC: 334.73(497.13)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARMERS' COOPERATIVE SYSTEM IN AP VOJVODINA

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Summary

On the basis of the systematization of relevant attitudes predominant today with respect to sustainability at the global level, the authors have made a concept of a questionnaire, carried out a survey and paper-presented the results of their research into the attitudes of directors of farmers' cooperatives regarding the socio-economic, legal and ecological aspects of the sustainability of the cooperatives system as "the third sector" of the economy and rural areas in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, with a reference to the legal, economic and ecological ambience of business doing performed by cooperatives and other enterprises in the Republic of Serbia – with a special reference to obligations which, when sustainability is concerned, emerge from the need for harmonizing with the European Union's legislation.

Key words: *sustainability, social entrepreneurship, social responsibility, farmers' cooperative system, Vojvodina*.

JEL*:* Q12, Q 32 , Q 57

1. Introduction

The term "sustainability" takes a significant place in the strategies of an ever-increasing number of economic subjects, as is accounted for in the annual UN Global Compact Research (UNGC) conducted in 2010.

Sustainability has greatly evolved from the determinant of "the character of an

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economy as an assistant to the human race and nature, rather than vice versa" (E. F. Schumacher, 1993). Researchers investigating sustainability today believe that the issues determining this concept are of the key importance not only for the future of the ecology of this planet of ours but the present and future successes of the overall economy as well (UNGC, 2010).

In practice, the application of efficient and permanently sustainable strategy of the development of cooperative business is reduced to the following two key questions:

- How do cooperative leaders understand their task and act according to the task?
- How does the way cooperative leaders understand the task match what is really needed for sustainable cooperative business and the cooperative sector of the agro-economy?

If managers in cooperatives are not in full control of the maintenance or destruction of today's and tomorrow's human and natural resources, they can be considered to have a big influence on the creation of sustainable cooperative system and economy in general, especially in rural areas.

The general definition of "economy" is simple: "a system of production, distribution and consumption" (Wordnet, 2010); however, the impact of business which it is exposed to is certainly not simply understandable and clearly defined.

A big change is necessary from "doing business as usual" to the creation of a global economy that will be committed to, rather than opposing to, a long-term sustainable future. A radical approach to development and practical changes within the current manner of business doing is needed. For that reason, starting with incomparably more comprehensive researches in the sustainability of economy in general, this paper should formulate and provide answers to the following questions and dilemmas in the development of a sustainable cooperative sector of agro-economy in Serbia:

- What should a sustainable economy look like from the aspect of the cooperative sector of agro-economy?
- What does the current model of the cooperative sector of agro-economy represent and how is it compared with the idea of a sustainable economy?
- How big is the gap between ideal and real in the sector of the farmers' cooperative system?

While formulating the above stated, the following questions should be paid special attention to:

- What is the role of the farmers' cooperative system in the creation of a sustainable economy from the perspective of the agro-business sector?
- What has been done so far to achieve a sustainable cooperative sector of agro-economy in practice?
- How to assess what it is we need to achieve a sustainable sector of the farmers' cooperative system in Serbia's agro-economy?

2. Research methodology

The research is based on the "mixed method", using quantitative methods to ensure accurate and confidential data through qualitative ideas and conclusions.

Three approaches have been used for that purpose:

Firstly, research includes directors of 40 farmers' cooperatives in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The choice was made on the basis of the list of 100 most successful cooperatives out of 400 cooperatives in Vojvodina's agro-economy which – for the needs of the declaring of the best farmers' cooperatives performed by the Association of Cooperatives of Vojvodina in 2010 – was prepared by means of the software package prepared by informaticians from the "Baćo" Farmers' Cooperative, Vrbas, was used. The basic criteria for ranking the farmers' cooperatives were the following ones: the year of establishment (temporal aspect of sustainability); the number of members of the cooperative, sub-contractors and workers employed (quantitative aspect of the sustainability of human resources); size of the estate cultivated by the cooperative, the value of the property and the annual turnover of the cooperative (quantitative-qualitative aspect of the property-financial sustainability). The questions in the questionnaire are adapted to different levels of education and the managerial experience of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives, and are asked in such a manner to comply with the methodology used in scientific papers analyzing managers' attitudes in the non-agrarian sectors of the economy and in other countries as well, which the similarities and differences of attitudes regarding the sustainable future of the agro-economy's cooperative sector are compared with. The questionnaires with the filled-in answers to the asked questions were sent back by 31 directors of the farmers' cooperatives, which makes 7.26% of the total number of the farmers' cooperatives in AP Vojvodina – excluding those undergoing the bankruptcy proceedings. In order to ensure an appropriate comment and conclusions resulting from the analysis of answers in the filled-out questionnaires, the attitudes about the sustainability of the cooperative agro-business found in available literature and the proposals generated on the basis of the empirical knowledge of researchers investigating the cooperative sector of agro-economy in Serbia and the world are also additionally considered.

Secondly, in interviews, the following pieces of information are collected, especially those about the visions of cooperatives, their strategies on and activities in the promotion and application of sustainability. Both the primary and the secondary researches are set using, first of all, the following sources: Accenturov '2010 UN Global Compact Survey' (UNGC. 2010), the Economist's research (Economist Intelligence Unit. 2007) and 'McKinsey and Company' (Oppenheim et al. 2007). The sources have been selected to ensure the basic materials for covering socio-economic and ecological sustainability, on the one hand, and to provide a more detailed review of the business strategy and business performance, on the other. On the basis of that, gaining a holistic insight into the subject of the research is enabled.

Thirdly, in the paper, we also use the so-far-reached results of researching the sustainability of agriculture (Ševarlić, M., 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003. 2012), (Ševarlić, M., Vasiljević,

Zorica, 2003) and (Veljković, Biljana, Ševarlić, M., 2010), as well as recently intensified researches in the field of the cooperative system and, especially, the farmers' cooperative system in Serbia (Ševarlić, M., Krivkapić Skoko, Branka, Nikolić, Marija, 2007), (Ševarlić, M., Nikolić, Marija, Simmons, R., 2009, 2010), (Ševarlić, M., Nikolić, Marija, 2009, 2010, 2011-a, 2011-b, 2012).

Fourthly, by means of a comparative analysis of all the mentioned, we have confirmed the assumptions of the socio-economic, legal and ecological sustainability of the farmers' cooperative system in Serbia's agro-economy. We consider that this research offers a more detailed analysis of the state and perspective of the sustainable development of the farmers' cooperative system in Serbia. Due to a relatively small number of the surveyed directors of the farmers' cooperatives, the number of the selected indicators of sustainability is also reduced so as to gain an insight into the business trends within the researched sample. For that reason, the results of this research are compared with other researches, for the most part with those in studies gaining a broader insight into the problems of the sustainability of the economy.

The collected primary and secondary data, analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, the assessment of sustainability in business operations based on the values, strategy and business priorities of farmers' cooperatives in Serbia's agro-economy is made.

3. What does sustainability mean?

Today, expressions containing common characteristics, descriptions, relations and, most frequently, temporal determinants are frequently used. Their authors indicate the preservation of human and natural resources, describing their internal relations and the balance between them now and in future (Brundtland (1987), CPSL (2007), "Association of Certified Chartered Accountants" (2010) and "World Business Council for Sustainable Development" (2010). Out of these definitions, the definition contained in the "Dialogue on Economic Sustainability" in the Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership) is the most appropriate one for our research. The definition contains an explanation which concisely describes the balance necessary for a "good economy": "The basic purpose of a good economy is to constantly enhance the welfare of all people now and in future, respecting rightfulness, nature's restraints, through an active engagement of all participants" (CPSL, 2007). This attitude also calls for a full engagement of the society, including the Government, the economy and citizens' associations.

4. Research

In this section of the paper, we account for the results of the research we have conducted in the selected farmers' cooperatives in Serbia's agro-economy, presenting the frameworks of sustainability on the basis of the statements produced by their respective directors and comparing them with what business firms should generally dedicate their efforts to in order to ensure sustainable development.

Once we have defined the core goals of a sustainable economy for the future and recognized the current economic restraints on the way towards it, on the basis of the results of the research (Table 1), we have assessed the fundamental activities carried out by the farmers' cooperatives which can make a contribution to a sustainable agro-economy and economy of AP Vojvodina and the Republic of Serbia.

Table 1. The attitudes of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives regarding sustainability

Item No.	Questions	Possible answers	Percentage
1	Do you think the sustainability issue will be of the key importance for the future success of the business operations performed by your organization?	Yes	46%
		Maybe	43%
		No	11%
2	Which of the following factors do you deem important for making a decision on commencing an initiative to solve some of the problems of sustainable development in the cooperative system and the development of rural areas?	Brand, trust and reputation	29%
		Cost reduction	16%
		Growth of incomes	11%
		Personal motivation	11%
		Engaging employees and employment to a greater extent	11%
		Impact of slow-downed social life on business doing	11%
		Political and legal environments	11%
		Pressure by investors/coop members	0%
3	Which of the stated issues of sustainable growth do you consider to be the most critical for the future success of your cooperative's business operations? You can claim more than just one.	Education	37%
		Poverty	26%
		Health	22%
		Climate changes	9%
		Lack of professionalism on the part of the state organs	6%
		Sex difference and non-discrimination	0%
		Social cohesion	0%
4	In the time period of next 5 years, which stakeholders' group do you think will have the biggest impact on sustainability-related decisions? You can claim more than just one.	Governments	21%
		The media	18%
		The employed	14%
		Workers' organizations and associations	14%
		Investors	8%
		Communities	8%
		Consumers	8%
		NGO organizations	5%
		Regulators	4%
		Suppliers	0%
		Boards and committees	0%
		Other	0%

Item No.	Questions	Possible answers	Percentage
5	Should these questions be completely incorporated in the strategy and business operations of cooperatives?	I agree very much	55%
		I agree	45%
6	Boards and committees should discuss and work on these issues?	I agree	49%
		I agree very much	31%
		I do not agree	10%
		I have no attitude to this issue	10%
7	Cooperatives should take care of those issues through their supply chain as well?	I agree	45%
		I agree very much	35%
		I have no attitude to this issue	12%
		I do not agree	8%
8	Cooperatives should be more active in the agro-economy sector, cooperation and partnership with all participants in attaining the sustainable development goals	I agree	46%
		I agree very much	43%
		I do not agree very much	11%
		I do not agree	0%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
9	What are the main obstacles in the implementation of an integrated and strategic approach to sustainability in cooperatives?	Failure to recognize values for all users	26%
		Lack of an efficient communications infrastructure	20%
		Complexity of strategy implementation	11%
		Lack of skills/knowledge of the middle – higher management	11%
		Different definitions and interpretations of sustainability	9%
		Lack of boards' support	9%
		Interpretation difficulties with external groups	5%
		Financial markets' failure to acknowledge sustainability values	5%
		Competitive strategic priorities	4%
		Employees' resistance	0%
10	Will governments and decision-makers increase their interventions regarding the sustainability issue?	I agree	43%
		I agree very much	29%
		I do not agree	14%
		I have no attitude to this issue	14%
11	My cooperative would welcome an increased aid by the government regarding the sustainability issue?	I agree	47%
		I agree very much	43%
		I do not agree very much	10%
		I do not agree	0%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%

Item No.	Questions	Possible answers	Percentage
12	My cooperative will have an influence on the government to promote a sustainable future?	I have no attitude to this issue	39%
		I agree	33%
		I do not agree	17%
		I do not agree very much	11%
		I agree very much	0%
13	My cooperative will have an impact on the civil society to promote a sustainable future?	I agree	36%
		I have no attitude to this issue	32%
		I do not agree	16%
		I agree very much	16%
		I do not agree very much	0%
14	Should the government provide clear guidelines and be fully supportive of the sustainability concept?	I agree very much	26%
		I agree	26%
		I do not agree very much	26%
		I do not agree	13%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
15	Do the majority of consumers demand products complied with the sustainability principles?	I agree	49%
		I do not agree	25%
		I do not agree very much	13%
		I have no attitude to this issue	13%
		I agree very much	0%
		I do not agree very much	0%
16	Is there a need for the investor's estimation of sustainability in long-term investments?	I agree	67%
		I agree very much	25%
		I do not agree	8%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
		I do not agree very much	0%
17	Do you consider that the education system should be developing the knowledge and skills needed for future leaders in the cooperative system and the economy in order to enable them to face sustainability challenges in as efficient a manner as possible?	I agree very much	62%
		I agree	38%
		I do not agree very much	0%
		I do not agree	0%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
18	Do you deem yourself and the cooperative's management responsible for the attainment of sustainability goals?	I agree	30%
		I do not agree	30%
		I do not agree very much	10%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
		I agree very much	30%
19	Do you think you should take sustainability elements into consideration and include them when preparing financial reports?	I agree	60%
		I agree very much	25%
		I have no attitude to this issue	15%
		I do not agree very much	0%
		I do not agree	0%

Item No.	Questions	Possible answers	Percentage
20	Do you consider the recognition of a sustainability concept to be a critical differentiation in staff recruiting?	I agree	86%
		I agree very much	14%
		I do not agree	0%
		I have no attitude to this issue	0%
		I do not agree very much	0%

Source: The calculation made by the authors on the basis of the questionnaires received through researching the attitudes of the directors in the farmers' cooperatives in AP Vojvodina, in the time period from October to November 2011.

4.1. Education

What is needed? The NGC examination comes to a conclusion that 72% of the directors see education as an issue of the world's development which must immediately be responded to in order to ensure a sustainable future (UNGC, 2010).
What have we achieved? Our research is indicative of the fact that concerns of education (37%), poverty (26%) and health (22%) are the most important individual issues concerning the directors of our farmers' cooperatives.

Conclusion: Education is a global issue seen as the fundamental element of the development of a sustainable economy. The farmers' cooperatives also recognize the significance of this theme; however, they frequently invest their resources in education or training programs only to broaden their employees' professional capabilities within their respective cooperatives, and only rarely those of their cooperative members. Everybody agrees that there is a need for additional efforts to be made to reduce poverty; however, the most needed efforts are still those related to true and constant initiatives from within the society to create this goal.

4.2. The Government

What is needed? The UNGC review indicates that 39% of the company directors consider the government to be one of important decision-making factors influencing social expectations for sustainable business doing, whereas 24% of the directors deem the government's regulations to be the main motivational factors leading to sustainability (UNGC).

What have we achieved? Our research demonstrates similar results. The government can be observed as "inefficient"; however, 21% of directors considers Government significant in supporting decisions linked to sustainability of cooperative sector. However, given the problems of the unregulated status of the so-called "social property", the lack of the political will to reach a new act on cooperatives and the second question is whether the representatives of the Serbian Government are willing to be partners for enhancement of the sustainability of the farmers' cooperative system. If they joined forces in a synergy, they could direct their joint forces towards better results in sustainability not only in the farmers' cooperative system but also through the system and the entire agro-economy of Serbia.

Conclusion: The role played by the government in designing an appropriate framework and polices is predominant for the development of a sustainable farmers' cooperative system as a special ownership sector in the Serbian ago-economy and its entire economy. The activity carried out by cooperative leaders can and should be supportive of and encourage the government to increase the application of sustainability. One of the biggest challenges is the one of integrating farmers' cooperatives' long-term business plans in a relatively short-term nature of the government's political electoral cycles – especially when issues related to the associating of cooperatives in order to form cooperative enterprises as a form of vertical integrations in the field of the cooperative system intended for the elimination of numerous intermediaries in a chain "from the tilled field to the dining table" are concerned.

4.3. Long-term strategic planning

What is needed? The review of the UNGC indicates that certain directors believe that recession reduces the speed at which their sustainability strategies and activity plans could be realized, and the majority of them agree that recession has not disturbed their long-term plans in these fields (UNGC). The "Economist's Intelligence Unit" (2007) highlights the fact that companies believe that sustainability will be ensured by different and long-term competitive advantages.

What have we achieved? Our research reveals that there is a need for a precise assessment made by the investor and the government regarding long-term investing in the sector of the farmers' cooperative system. Even 67% of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives "agree" and 25% of them "agree very much" that value of the application of sustainability can contribute to business doing, building reputation and positioning the commodity brand of a cooperative product.

Conclusion: The directors agree upon the fact that the sustainability of the farmers' cooperatives in AP Vojvodina is closely connected with the long-term planning of long-term investments and believe that it can have an impact on the reputation of cooperatives and the positioning of their commodity brand, which would contribute to an increase in the sustainable production of goods for these reasons. So far, farmers' cooperatives must still do business within the economic model significantly restraining this category of subjects in Serbia's agro-economy with respect to their receiving even short-term stimuli, which the government can regulate in a manner complying with the constitutional principle of the equality of all the property and entrepreneurship sectors, i.e. that "Everyone has an equal legal position in the market" – as it is defined by Article 94 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 83/2006).

4.4. Rightfulness

What is needed? Researches into a sustainable economy are clearly indicative of the fact that there is an imbalance of possibilities, powers, goods and welfare in the now

economy and that changes related to that are a necessity for the establishment of a rightful society.

What have we achieved? The directors of our farmers' cooperatives understand the need for a more rightful and sustainable economic model where all cooperative members can do business at a profit. Our research indicates that the majority of the surveyed are supportive of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Workers' Standards of the International Labor Organization, OECD's Directions for Multinational Companies and the principles of human rights arising from the UNGC. This provides a common framework for communication where they can act.

Conclusion: When "enterprises" belonging to the cooperative sector – which is the usual terminology for cooperatives in European countries and the world, international declarations provide each one of the "five capitals" with the basis for accession to rightfulness. In any case, they cannot fully be dislocated from the current economic model. New values, new ways of thinking and different directions in measuring economic growth are necessary, and declarations at the international level make a contribution to commencing that.

4.5. Responsibility

What is needed? The UNGC research indicates that 93% of company directors consider sustainability to be of an essential importance for their future success. That requires that prosperity and growth should be separated from each other as well as that their negative impacts on the society and the living environment should be alleviated (UNGC). Business circles see this as part of their own responsibility; however, they also know that doing business with awareness can be lucrative in the financial sense.

What have we achieved? The majority of our cooperatives have indicated the same significance in the cases of all the three pillars of sustainability. Their rules of behavior give priority to economic issues and social justice issues. The current economic crisis has shed light on the greediness and selfishness of business in non-cooperative sectors, pointing out a broad gap between what has been said and what has been done, especially in relation to social justice. This has generated a wide mistrust in the model of a liberal economy and an ever-increasing critical approach to production globalization processes and trade liberalization.

Conclusion: Humans, the planet and profits must be balanced with each other. Economic subjects understand that there is an urgent need for an efficient approach to the concept of the Triple Bottom Line. Now, when only growth is valued, the current economic model does not take into consideration the responsibility towards humans and the living environment. Apart from their dedication to the "ultimate product", business circles should defend a sustainable responsibility, especially among all those who are involved in the offer and demand network. This is currently a rare phenomenon in practice; however, it is a possible one.

4.6. Motivation

What is needed? One of the five fundamental conditions enabling us to put things where they should be, which directors believe in, is a regulated environment making clear clues and stimuli for including sustainability in strategies and operations possible (UNGC, 2010).

What is it we have achieved? Our research indicates that 60% of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives believe that the government should ensure a clearer support and clues leading to sustainability. They agree that there is a need to generate more rules, especially those leading to progress towards greater rightfulness and a sustainable financial environment. The directors of the cooperatives we have surveyed expressed different levels of wishes for partnership with the government in order to solve these questions, some of them requiring higher standards, on the one hand, and the others sticking to the now standards, and in that way find a solution to a competitive market for them.

Conclusion: Cooperatives value the existence of clear rules and stimuli in order to include sustainability in their performances. In any case, stimuli are still difficult to transfer towards a financial model based on capital and competition. Businesses' initiatives will remain unnoticed unless governments allow business circles to be autonomous in changing the market.

4.7. The outer side

What is needed? In the UNGC review, the analyst and investor community has essential significance, as directors assert. In any case, it is difficult for companies to make more significant progress towards the implementation of sustainability as an integral part of business doing if the assessment in the review does not take such efforts into consideration (UNGC, 2010).

What have we achieved? Our research indicates that 65% of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives "agree" and 25% of the directors "agree very much" that it is important that data about sustainability and finances be joined together and entered into a common report.

Conclusion: New forms of reporting are significant in the creation of an economic model inclusive of all possible influences on the performance of farmers' cooperatives as a form of social entrepreneurship in rural areas. This will also change the way in which investors and financial analysts calculate a return on invested money.

4.8. Purpose

What is needed? The UNGC review indicates that 78% of directors believe that companies should become engaged in industrial cooperation and partnerships of more shareholders in order to respond to development goals (UNGC).

What have we achieved? In compliance with development goals, the leading question for the surveyed cooperatives is the one referring to their contribution to a development partnership. To them, the majority of the world challenges regarding sustainability should

be solved through multi-participant partnerships. Within the framework of our research, 46% of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives "agree" and 43% of the directors "agree very much" that partnerships should be established with all participants in order to attain the goals of sustainable development. On the one hand, the directors of our cooperatives appear as good ones in establishing a partnership, as it is the case when everybody stated that they were cooperating with other organizations on small philanthropic projects within their respective cooperative acting as a socially responsible one in the local community.

Conclusion: Sustainability will only be achieved through a common vision of all participants in the society. The farmers' cooperatives are aware of the significance of a partnership with an aim to respond to the challenges of the creation of an economically more sustainable cooperative model of business doing. A lot of things are yet to be done in order to make widespread and long-term influences arisen from a common vision visible.

4.9. Values

What is needed? The research of the Dialogue for a sustainable economy indicates that the values supportive of the current economic system can be incompatible with sustainability. In any case, the UNGC (2010) review says that 81% of directors – compared with only 50% in the year 2007 – believe that the questions of sustainability are completely integrated in the strategies and their respective companies' activities.

What have we achieved? The majority of the directors of our cooperatives have stated that "a failure to recognize values for all users" (26%) and "a lack of an efficient communication infrastructure" (20%) represent the main obstacles in the implementation of an integrated and strategic approach to sustainability in farmers' cooperatives.

Conclusion: Sustainability cannot be the only one theme. Those farmers' cooperatives which stick to the principle of sustainability must include the principle in their respective strategies and activities in order to stimulate the development of an economic model of sustainability. The main challenge is to find new manners of business doing so as to maintain the values of sustainability until the economic model of cooperative business has been transformed in a sustainable type. An important segment is to always bear in mind the financial element of the "five capitals" – which is becoming ultimate goal, not a goal per se.

4.10. Measuring

What is needed? The UNGC study indicates that business circles are making progress, and that it is clear that directors are also the ones to be doing their best to establish a more efficient action on the part of the management in their business units by concretely measuring the emission of gas, water and and wastes – as well as non-tangible assets, such as shareholders' trust, reputation and efficient management.

What have we achieved? The surveyed directors of the farmers' cooperatives mainly agree that the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) of economic, natural and social business questions should be included in the strategy and performance of the management. In

the TBL triangle, the living environment tends to be the word which the most attention is paid to in sustainability. The preservation of the living environment is regulated by law, so it is formally legally secured; however, innovations in this field represent competitive advantage.

Conclusion: Sustainability indicators are of essential importance for the valuation of business activities and the creation of a valid sustainability index. Farmers' cooperatives should take the rural economy to new economic measurements valuating the other capitals as an addition to the financial one.

5. Final considerations

The economy of the future and our future are for the most part dependent on what we will do in the present. We have experienced the results of the economic model of unsustainability and we understand negative effects of this model on humankind in the long run very well.

All the data used in the writing of this paper have been cross-referred to each other in order to make them produce a clear picture of the role of business doing in the modeling of a sustainable economy; the type of organization anticipated as necessary for such an economy; and what it is we should do in practice with respect to business doing and the economy.

The conclusions drawn from the research we have conducted are clear. The majority of the directors of the farmers' cooperatives understand and appreciate sustainability as the main guideline for a future economy and its survival in the future. They mainly agree that certain activities are necessary to carry out so as to achieve sustainability; however, there is still a big gap between the consensus about the need for those activities and their implementation.

It is time all companies throughout the world went beyond the boundaries of the now model of business action. They should fully understand the process of sustainability and include the reduction of the influence, not only compensate for their social and natural influence on the processes of sustainability.

It is necessary that uniform and global rules of behavior inclusive of transparency, moral and the most honest of all approaches to communication with social players be created amongst different sectors. Implementing this in an efficient manner should improve the question of education. Leadership in sustainability will then be a factor creating trust and a perspective for a sustainable future.

The reduction of poverty is a broad and sophisticated theme to be transformed into an efficient activity; otherwise, it is no more than just a common statement of intention. Having in mind enormous differences among businesses, companies should dedicate their time and resources both jointly and within their respective industries to finding out a way how to contribute to the achievement of a fair economy.

Education is represented as the main question in the creation amongst the players, and is about to be of essential importance in ensuring equity and its promotion.

The mandatory accounting system with tax incentives and the public acknowledgement of the commodity brand can fully contribute to the ZERO impact program. For that reason, the employed should be trained and stimulated to be one of the two chief players, capable of influencing company decisions on sustainability.

At the national level, too, "Funds for the Planet" should be formed from the percentage of companies' earnings so as to solve social problems and those related to the protection of the living environment incurred by industries' activities. The consortium of the citizens' associations involved in this question should allocate where and how money should be invested.

A sustainable economy requires a new business model as well as a new organizational model in which awards and stimuli should stimulate "an attitude of sustainability", differently from the model with clear production awarding established during the industrial revolution. Sustainability should become part of the strategy of human resources management, where the valuation and appreciation of professional performance are in connection with the total approach based on and around the question of sustainability. Farmers' cooperatives and enterprises from within the agro-economy should form a "pro-sustainable network" amongst all economic subjects from within the same sector so as to create and share knowledge of sustainability. This collective database should help us find solutions and innovations that can bring investments to a maximum and shocks/risks to a minimum. In that manner, cooperatives will create their standard positioning, improve their results and protect their special form of business doing as the new paradigm of a sustainable economy.

The concept "the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts" is the one that farmers' cooperatives must keep in order to maximize their activities. That can be achieved through connecting cooperatives into associations of cooperatives and other modalities of cooperative systems. Simultaneously, it is important that we point out the fact that there is no competitiveness once unsustainability has come to surface because, then, an old cooperative rule that also counts is: one for all and all for one.

Risking finding oneself in a situation when we will not connect our personal and moral values with our professional obligations is the same as a compromise with good results of our business doing and our family's failure. The role of business doing in building a sustainable economy is in connection with our role as individuals. Business doing can and will have an influence on the future of the human race. That will depend on any one of us – our creating and applying necessary changes towards achieving a sustainable future.

Finally, farmers' cooperatives used to be, are and will continue to be in the future the generators of the economic, social, cultural and ecological sustainability of rural areas in AP Vojvodina, i.e. in the Republic of Serbia.

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ODRŽIVI RAZVOJ ZEMLJORADNIČKOG ZADRUGARSTVA U AP VOJVODINI

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Rezime

Na osnovu sistematizacije relevantnih stavova koji danas dominiraju u pogledu održivosti na globalnom nivou, autori su koncipirali upitnik, sproveli anketu i u radu prikazali rezultate istraživanja stavova direktora zemljoradničkih zadruga o socio-ekonomskim, pravnim i ekološkim aspektima održivosti zadrugarstva kao „trećeg sektora" privrede i ruralnih područja u Autonomnoj pokrajini Vojvodini, sa osvrtom na pravni, ekonomski i ekološki ambijent poslovanja zadruga i drugih preduzeća u Republici Srbiji i posebno obaveze koje u pogledu održivosti proizilaze iz potrebe harmonizacije sa legislativom Evropske unije.

Direktori zemljoradničkih zadruga se veoma slažu (55%) ili slažu (45%) da održivost treba da bude implementirana u strategiju razvoja i poslovanje zadruga. Istovremeno, pored drugih relevantnih rezultata istraživanja, oni smatraju da će na budući održivi razvoj i poslovanje zadruga najznačajnije uticati obrazovanje (37%), siromaštvo (26%) i zdravlje (22%); a da će na odluke koje se tiču održivosti najveći uticaj imati vlade (21%), mediji (18%), zaposleni (14%) i radničke organizacije i udruženja (14%).

Ključne reči: *održivost, socijalno preduzetništvo, društvena odgovornost, zemljoradničko zadrugarstvo, Vojvodina.*

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UDC 338.43:63 ISSN 0352-3462

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