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Agricultural Cooperatives and Unions of Cooperatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Opportunities for Improvement in Providing Services and Educational Programs for Farmers

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Abstract

There have been major changes in the agricultural structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The remade cooperatives and the unions of cooperatives are struggling. This paper examines the needs of the agricultural cooperatives in order for them to be more successful, and identifies what support will likely come from the unions of cooperatives and what support must come from other sources. Data were obtained through: 1) questionnaires to a large group of cooperatives, 2) focus groups with a smaller number of cooperatives, and 3) personal interviews with union of cooperatives representatives. The findings indicate that the unions of cooperatives are working on issues such as registering and auditing cooperatives and resolving land ownership conflicts. The cooperatives also need help in business management, marketing, legal services, and organizational effectiveness. The unions will not be able to help in these areas so nongovernmental organizations will need to provide these educational programming for farmers.

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Key Words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, agricultural cooperatives, union of agricultural cooperatives, agricultural development, agricultural extension, non-governmental organizations.

Introduction

There have been massive changes in the structure of agriculture since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the ensuing war. Prior to the breakup, the dominant organizational unit for Yugoslav farmers was the general agricultural cooperative. These cooperatives were not state-owned, as in much of the former Soviet Union, but rather were state-supported and sanctioned. Farmer-members farmed their own land, but the general agriculture cooperatives provided the vast supply of inputs that these farmers needed and marketed most of their production. For these services, the farmers were required to make a payment to the general agricultural cooperatives' investment funds. After the breakup and the war, the general agricultural cooperatives were eliminated. The current model for agricultural cooperatives is one based on the rule of its members, not the sanction and support of the state.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ (BiH), these new, smaller cooperatives are attempting to survive in a free market economy. However, the market economy is still a new concept to most farmers and members of these new cooperatives do not have the requisite skill sets to ensure their success. Navigating a market economy is difficult for farmers who, if they had been members of cooperatives under the Yugoslav system, were told what crops to grow and what price they would be paid. Or, who after losing their guaranteed livelihoods as factory or office workers in state-owned companies, resorted to agriculture as a survival strategy. The membership of any given agricultural cooperative is often a mix of returnees to pre-war rural homes, displaced people who have chosen to 'start again' rather than returning to pre-war communities where they would remain as minorities, and so-

1 The Dayton Agreement (Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.) was the peace agreement that ended the 3½ year war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). It was officially signed in Paris, France on December 14, 1995. The Agreement divided BiH into two halves or entities that are approximately equal in geographic size. One entity is the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and contains mostly Bosniaks and Croats. A second entity is the Republic of Srpska (RS) and contains mostly Bosnian Serbs. These two entities have their own second-tier level of government and oversee internal funds and functions. BiH has the top state-level tier of government. The city of Brcko, located in the northeastern corner of BiH, is under international supervision and considered part of RS and FBiH.

called ‘domicile’ families who remained in place. Many of a cooperative’s members may be fairly new to agriculture as a livelihood and all are relatively new to the market economy. Farmers, whatever their background, would like their agricultural cooperatives to provide the same level of expertise and service as they experienced in the former Yugoslavia.

The leaders of the agricultural cooperatives, recognizing the limitations of their own cooperatives, want these services provided by the union of cooperatives. There are three unions of cooperatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one for the national level and one each at the entity-level (e.g., Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Srpska.) The cooperatives belong to their respective entity unions and all cooperatives belong to the national union. But, it appears that the Unions are not up to the task. This paper identifies the information needs of farmers and explores different alternatives for meeting these needs.

Objective and Purpose

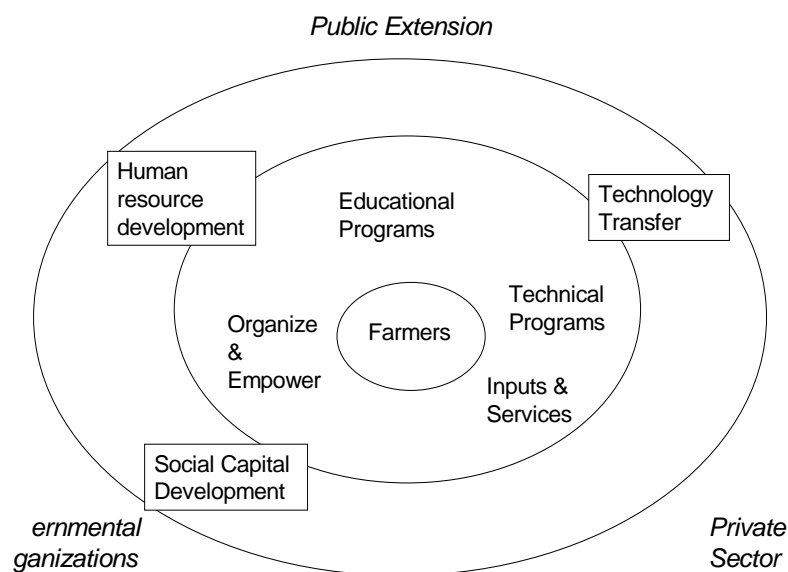
Daku et al. (2005) offered guidance on redesigning the agricultural extension services of South-Eastern Europe, a region of the world that includes Bosnia and Herzegovina. They focused on institutional design and suggested there should be a partnership of public and private extension, but that with agricultural development, there should be a movement to a greater role played by private extension. At the present time, agricultural extension in all of the countries in this region has suffered from budget limitations and lack of experience. Those countries of the former Yugoslavia have suffered additionally from the destruction of war.

The Swedish Institute for Food and Agricultural Economics (2006) noted that a major explanation for the low productivity of BiH agriculture was the lack of education and training for its farmers. They recommended that the extension services should be improved. Also, the Institute, as one of its benchmarks, noted that government of BiH employs much less agricultural staff than comparable countries and that this low financial support for agriculture contributes to its low productivity.

Swanson and Sammy (2002) broadened Daku et al.’s view of the public-private partnership for agricultural extension by including nongovernmental organizations. Specially, they offered a conceptual framework for the partnership among public extension, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector in meeting the needs of farm families (Figure 1). In this framework, public extension provides educational programs, mostly to small and medium-sized farmers, in such subjects as marketing, leadership, natural resource management, and farm management. Public extension would partner with the private sector in technology

transfer and with NGOs in human and social capital development. Within this partnership, NGOs would primarily work with the smaller farms in organizing and empowering their associations and cooperatives, while the private sector would work with the larger farmers to provide inputs and services.

Figure 1. An integrated approach to supporting the farm community by public extension, private sector, and non-governmental organizations
(Adapted from Swanson and Samv. 2002.



The objective of this study was to identify and quantify the demands of the agricultural cooperatives and the services being supplied by their cooperative unions and determine which of the cooperatives' needs are and are not being met by the cooperative unions. Consistent with Figure 1, these tasks could be assigned

Background and Literature Review

The role of cooperatives in the newly independent countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, has changed dramatically from its role in the former Yugoslavia. However, expectations and traditions generated under the old system still affect the performance of cooperatives in the new countries.

Yugoslavia

Agricultural cooperatives offer a way of overcoming some of the problems that the countries of the former Yugoslavia face such as small scale, fragmented holdings, lack of production capacity, and better access to inputs (Heijman, Moll, and Wals, 2002). Experiences from the former Soviet republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) indicate that opportunities for cooperatives lie with marketing and input supply rather than production. The negative connotations usually associated with cooperatives across the former USSR are less prevalent for Yugoslavia and Poland where collectivization had not been forced and agriculture was based on individual peasant farms (Gardner and Lerman, 2006). As argued by some, rebuilding social organizations, such as agriculture cooperatives, are as important as rebuilding roads and bridges (Acker, Androulidakis, Lansdale, Lansdale, Smith, and Warner, 2001).

Historically, the socialistic aspects of Yugoslavian agriculture were largely limited to the state sector and cooperative holdings (Hoffman, 1959). The state sector included state agricultural farms and agricultural institutes. The largest component of the cooperative holdings was the general agricultural cooperative.

Even though their production acreage was small, the role that the general agricultural cooperatives played in Yugoslavian agriculture was large (Hoffman, 1959). For example, in 1957, the state sector and cooperative holdings occupied 5.9% and 3.5% of agricultural land, respectively. Private holdings, mostly less than eight hectares, were located on 90.6% of agricultural land. Most of these peasant farmers lacked the assets and knowledge to productively farm their land. The general agricultural cooperatives provided the peasants on these private holdings with seeds, credit, fertilizers, equipment, technical information on farming and marketed most of their products. In 1956, general agricultural cooperatives purchased 86% of the wood, 84% of medicinal plants, 80% of poultry, 78% of alcoholic beverages, and 61% of the cereals produced by the peasants. As payback for these services, the peasants had to provide the cooperatives obligatory investment funds.

By 1987, there were 2.6 million private farmers and they occupied 84% of all agricultural land in Yugoslavia (U.S. Library of Congress, 1990). State farms and general agricultural cooperatives still held the preferred place in agricultural society. Only these organizations received state subsidies and investments. However, these investments were a mixed blessing for the country. The state operations were more productive than private farming because of the investments. Conversely, this investment strategy led to an inefficient allocation of resources between the private and public sectors generating a weak food distribution system and overall low farm income for the nation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina covers a land area of 5.1 million hectares and has a population of 3.8 million. Fifty percent of the land is arable land and 48% is forested. Of the agricultural land, 20% is located in river valleys and is suitable for intensive agricultural production. Forty-five percent of the agricultural land is hilly and suitable for semi-intensive, pasture-based livestock production (Custovic, 2005).

Bosnia and Herzegovina was traditionally a net exporter of livestock products, wine, and fruits and vegetables. After the war, agricultural export activities lagged and import activities increased significantly because of production problems. In 2001, for example, agricultural production was 70% of 1989-91 levels (Csaki and Zuschlag, 2004). In the same year, 25% of food and agriculture were imported in the country and only .5% were exported.

Besides the devastation to the agricultural infrastructure due to the war, another major problem to farmers in today's BiH is land tenure and ownership. Approximately 80% of the agricultural land is privately owned (Csaki and Nucifora, 2002). However, the average farm size is only 3 hectares and that is fragmented among 8 to 10 plots (Custovic, 2005). It is difficult to establish legal title to this land because many of the records were destroyed during the war and also there are different land titling situations between the Federation BiH and the Republic of Srpska. Besides these impediments, there are additional problems associated with the former cooperative land that had been state-owned. Even with the 2003 Law on Cooperatives, it is not always clear who the previous owners of the state-owned land were. The Law on Cooperatives returned state-owned land to the cooperative that operated it. Also, not all of these cooperatives are operational now and it may be that previous members are using the land for their private benefit. In addition, displaced people that were removed from their lands during the war, sometimes are now on land that is not their own. Finally, land mines are still a major consideration throughout the country. As a result of all these factors, only 50% of the arable land in the country is being farmed (Bojnec, 2005).

One advantage of agriculture, even subsistence agriculture in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the safety net that it provides to poor people. For example, approximately half of the households in BiH are agricultural households. It has been estimated that each of these households has an unemployed member looking for employment off the farm. The farms form a social buffer by providing subsistence food security for those without incomes – either to those living on farms or to relatives and friends in towns (Bojnec, 2005). Any support that more functional cooperatives could add to the agricultural sector would be beneficial to improving this social safety net.

In an effort to overcome many of the problems associated with the previous cooperative system in Yugoslavia, the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH passed the Law of Cooperatives (2003). This law replaced the two entities' laws on cooperatives (Republic of Srpska (RS) and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)). This new law was created to instill principles of cooperatives as accepted around the world, such as voluntarism, democracy, freedom, and transparency. In addition, this law covers all aspects of the cooperative operations such as new cooperative creation, membership, recordkeeping, operations and management, property rights, and distribution of profits and losses. This Law on Cooperatives is based on the principles of "genuine" cooperation from the International Cooperative Alliance in 1995 (Couture et al., 2002). However, as research findings in this paper will demonstrate, the difference between the possibilities offered by the new law and the reality in today's BiH are very different.

The new model for cooperatives is based on the rule of its members, not like the former state-run cooperatives. Specifically, "a cooperative is a form of organization of voluntarily associated members (hereinafter: cooperative members), for the fulfillment of their joint economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations, through joint ownership and democratically controlled management of business activities (Law of Cooperatives, 2003, I, art 1).

The two types of cooperatives unions are business cooperative unions and public interest cooperative unions. "Business unions of cooperatives provide the same activities for their members that cooperatives provide for cooperative members, and regulations on cooperatives apply to them also, unless otherwise stipulated." (Law of Cooperatives, 2003, I, art. 5). There are three public interest cooperative unions. They are two entity cooperative unions with one each for the Republic of Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and one for the country entitled, Bosnia and Herzegovina Union of Cooperatives.

The Law also lists the thirteen activities that cooperative unions should provide its members (Law of Cooperatives, 2003, XII, art. 69). However, five are specifically delegated to the entity public interest cooperative unions (RS and FBiH). They are providing help in the establishment of new cooperatives, advocating on behalf of cooperatives before public bodies, organizing research, education, and marketing activities, deciding on transfer of property should a cooperative be terminated, and conducting audits of cooperatives. There is one task that is only assigned to the state-wide BiH union and that is the authority to represent cooperatives outside of the country.

Results

The objective of this study was to identify and quantify the demands of the agricultural cooperatives and the services being supplied by their cooperative unions and determine which of the cooperatives' needs are and are not being met by the cooperative unions.

Information was gathered in three ways: 1) questionnaires to a large group of cooperatives, 2) focus groups with a smaller number of cooperatives, and 3) personal interviews with cooperative union representatives. In the initial phase, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), with two partners, the local NGO, Nesto Vise, and the BiH (state-level) Cooperative Union, sent questionnaires by mail to sixty cooperatives in both entities of BiH in November 2006. Seventeen responded by mail and twenty-five by interview for a total of forty-two completed surveys. Twenty-five cooperatives were located in the Republic of Srpska and seventeen cooperatives were located in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As noted above, agriculture in BiH is at a low ebb. Not only has the country suffered because of the transition from a command economy to a market-based economy but the subsequent war savaged the country. It was felt that a mixture of survey and interviews was the best way to gather information. The focus groups² allowed us to confirm findings from the surveys and, importantly, to better assess attitudes and opinions through these small group meetings.

Individual interviews were conducted with the presidents of the Union of Cooperatives of Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka and with the State-level Union of Cooperatives in Sarajevo on December 14, and 15, 2006, respectively. The President of the FBiH Union of Cooperatives responded to the interview questions in writing in early January 2007.

- 2 Focus groups, with an average of 12 participants, were conducted in Mostar (FBiH) on December 11, 2006 and in Kostajnica (RS) on December 12, 2006. In Mostar, there were representatives from Nesto Vise and five cooperatives from the municipalities of Nevesinje, Jablanica, Mostar, Tarcin, and Trebinje. In Kostajnica, there were representatives from the five cooperatives of Derventa, Kostajnica, Dubica, Donji Agici, and Knezica. The same topics were discussed at both locations. The participants were asked to provide comments and/or suggestions to improve: a) information sharing between cooperatives and unions, b) agricultural marketing, c) the reputation of the cooperative sector, d) organizational and technical services provided by the unions, e) agricultural laws, and f) the role of the cooperative before and after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Overview

Currently, there is not effective communication between the Unions of Cooperatives (two entity unions of cooperatives and state-level union of cooperatives) and the agricultural cooperatives. A permanent and continuous flow of quality information between cooperatives and cooperative union is needed. Although it does not appear that cooperative unions have the capacity to provide such programs, educational programs should be provided to cooperative members on the topics of markets, marketing principles, and quality standards. In addition, a marketing database should be developed that charts recent prices for different commodities, trends in commodity yields, and trends in levels of production (e.g., crop hectares and livestock numbers).

Also, cooperatives need training in legal issues and business management. One of the major sources of uncertainty is land ownership by the cooperatives. Cooperatives need legal advice in terms of property ownership, titling, and registration. The unions need to continue their cooperative audits and help in the legal registration of cooperatives. Similarly, the cooperatives need advice about business opportunities and economic analysis.

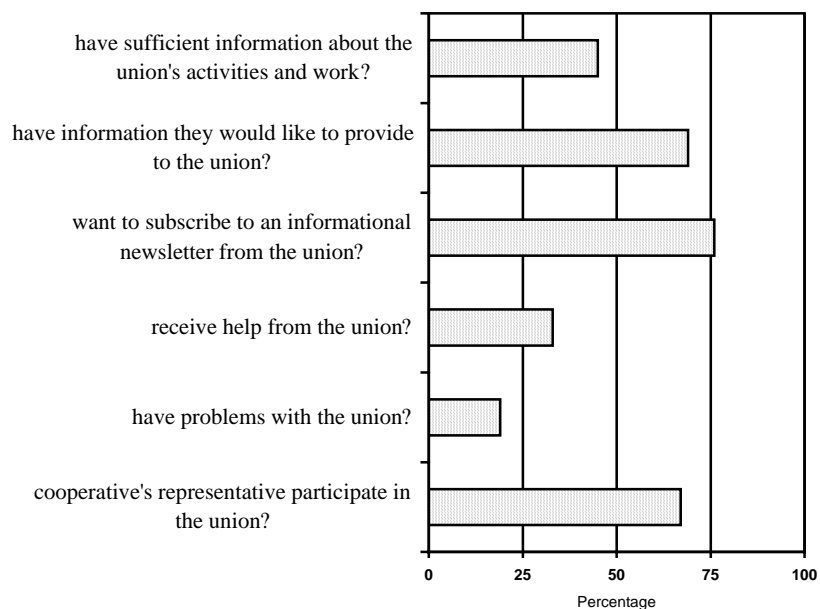
Cooperative principles should be promoted in Bosnian society. Advocacy and lobbying are activities that the union of cooperatives should pursue jointly with their member cooperatives. The unions and cooperatives should work together to develop strategies and partnerships among cooperatives. Currently, the cooperative business center approach allows cooperatives to market together. This approach should be encouraged throughout the country.

Interactions between Cooperatives and Unions of Cooperatives (Figure 2, Panel A)

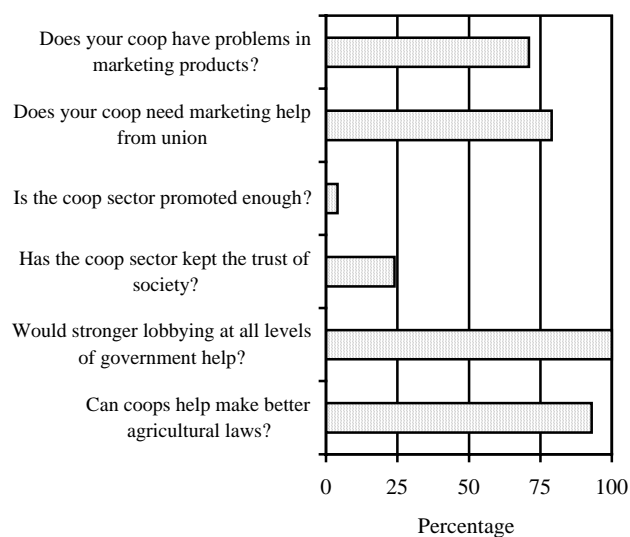
The cooperatives provided input from their perspective on the interactions between Cooperatives and Unions of Cooperatives. Forty-five percent of the cooperatives do have sufficient knowledge about the activities and work of the unions of cooperative. A majority of the cooperatives (69%) would be willing to send information to the Unions. If they were to send information to the Unions, the cooperatives would like to tell the unions about their goals and objectives, current activities, and share with them problems that they are having with their municipalities. In return, 76% of the cooperatives would like to receive an informational newsletter from the union, such as Zadrugar, a popular cooperative newsletter that was previously published. The cooperatives would be willing to share with the unions in the expense of this publication. Newsletters are effective ways to share educational material (Richardson, 1989). Some cooperatives had access to the internet and thought that a webpage that provides market prices, lists of buyers, organization attributes of cooperatives, and other business-related information, would be helpful.

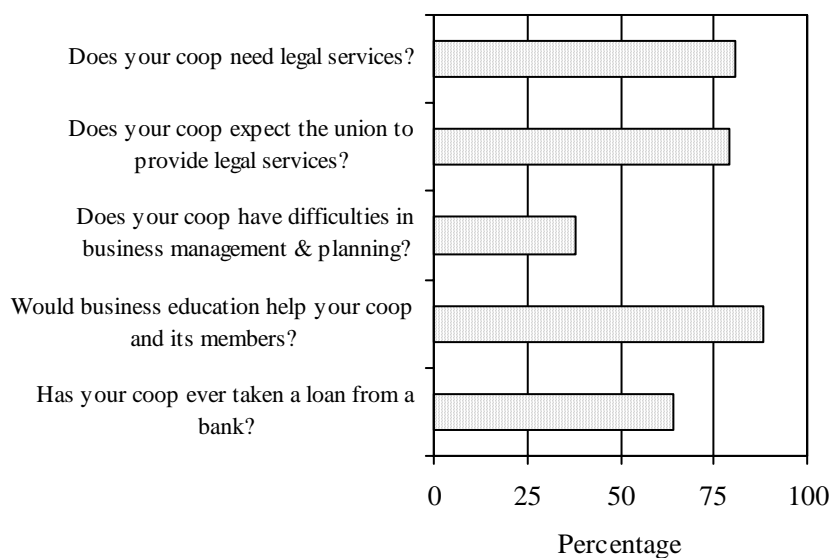
Figure 2. Survey responses

Panel A: Does your cooperative:



Panel B: Marketing and role of cooperatives



Panel C: Legal and business issues

Notes: the figure is based on responses to questions by 42 cooperatives in BiH regarding their relationship with their respective cooperative unions, marketing of agricultural products by cooperatives, role of cooperatives in society, and supply of legal services and business management by their respective cooperative unions, 2006.

Only one-third of the cooperatives have received any help from their union and 19% have had problems (approximately 60% of those who received help). For those that have received help, they noted that the union helped them in registering the cooperative, mediated on behalf of them with government officials, and organized roundtables regarding land ownership. The unions have not developed a strategy to encourage the new law on cooperatives to be applied in BiH. Also, it is difficult to get concrete answers from the unions to the questions. Sixty-seven percent of the cooperatives' representatives attend union meetings or serve on a board.

Marketing: A Cooperative Perspective (Figure 2, Panel B)

Marketing agricultural products is a major problem for 71% of the agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives are frustrated with the low and fluctuating price of agricultural products. The cooperatives produce small quantities of agricultural

products and the buyers want large quantities. The cooperatives lack storage and processing facilities and they have difficulty finding buyers. The majority of the cooperatives (79%) look to their union to improve the cooperatives marketing success. Unions should help cooperatives to market jointly so that they have sufficient production to meet the needs of the buyers. Also, cooperatives need help from their unions in developing an overall marketing strategy that captures their comparative strengths and an accompanying database that contained information such as prices and buyers.

Role of Cooperatives in Society: A Cooperative Perspective (Figure 2, Panel B)

Only five percent of the cooperatives think that the cooperative sector is promoted enough. Open forums and media campaigns should be established at all levels of government and society. The campaign should be based on the results achieved by the cooperatives and focus on the most successful cooperatives. Seventy-one percent of the cooperatives thought that the sector had lost the trust of society. To repair the trust, the capabilities of the unions should be improved and the status of those non-performing cooperatives should be resolved. Cooperatives should hold themselves to international standards of performance and the public should understand that a well-operating cooperative system will help in joining the European Union. All cooperatives (100%) thought that lobbying on behalf of the cooperative sector would make a strong impact at all levels of government. An effective cooperative sector can make positive influences in the improvement of agricultural laws and policies and an equitable enforcement of those laws (93%).

Legal and Business Support: A Cooperative Perspective (Figure 2, Panel C)

Eighty-one percent of the cooperatives said that they needed legal services. The cooperatives are having difficulties in resolving land ownership issues, registration and re-registration, and in making contracts with buyers and input providers. The cooperatives expect the union to provide this legal assistance (79%). Most cooperatives do not face difficulties in business planning, investments, and organization (38%) yet cooperative members would still benefit significantly from business education (88%). Those cooperatives with economics problems do not think that their personnel are adequately trained to provide good business plans and are unsure of how to reduce their risk in a free market economy (e.g., low and fluctuating prices). Many cooperatives have loans that need to be repaid (64%) and mastering good business practices are important to them.

Cooperatives before the Breakup of Yugoslavia and Now: A Cooperative Perspective Gathered from Focus Groups

Statements from cooperative members during the focus group sessions, comparing their experiences before the breakup of Yugoslavia with the current situation, tended to emphasize today's problems. While the new role of cooperatives may be positive, this changing role has caused unanticipated social problems. For example, "Then, farmers had benefits such as pensions and health insurance, today they don't have any." Or, "Today, the relationship between the cooperatives and their members has been reduced to sales." In terms of production and marketing of agricultural products, "It is much more difficult now. In the past, there was a monopoly, there was not any private production. Everything that was produced, the cooperative could sell." And, "Then, we had all the services we needed and the whole system was organized."

Also, land reform may redress historical wrongs, but for the person who grew up on these socialist cooperatives, "Today, we are tenants on our own property." Or, in terms of the relationship between the cooperative and the union of cooperative, then, "The cooperatives were much bigger in the past." "Then, the cooperative union was not very important." "The union is more necessary now if it (the cooperative system) is to function well."

Priorities for the Unions of Cooperatives

The Republic of Srpska Union of Cooperatives was established in 1999. According to registration records, there are more than 500 cooperatives, of which, more than 300 are agricultural cooperatives. However, these data are out of date. Currently, there are approximately 100 member-cooperatives (paying dues). The current President of the Republic of Srpska Union of Cooperatives was elected in 2004. In addition to him, there are 3 employees that include a full-time manager, auditor, and a book keeper who works part-time. All three employees have not been paid for the last four months (prior to this interview) and there was not any money to reimburse for operating expenses such as fuel. Their major accomplishments during 2005 and 2006 were that 77 cooperatives were audited according to the specifications of the 2003 law. Their priorities for 2007 included the following: create a strategy for the development of the cooperative sector, permanently finance the cooperative auditing process, develop a process for cooperative registration, and resolve property issues.

The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Union of Cooperatives was established in 1998. In the FBiH there are approximately 200 cooperatives. The Union of Cooperatives has had an acting President since 2006. When he first took office, the financial situation was not satisfactory. He has repaid some debts, but there are still a few to settle such as former employees' salaries, pensions, and

health insurance payments. Currently, there are two full-time and one part-time employee in the Union. His priority has been to familiarize himself with the situations in each Federation cooperative. He has had a series of meetings with representatives of the ministries and international organizations, taken the opportunity available to visit some cooperatives and agricultural markets, and has attended a number of seminars.

The state-level Bosnia and Herzegovina Union of Cooperatives was created in the 1970s. The 2003 Law on Cooperatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina updated the Union of Cooperative's role in Bosnian society so that it now has exclusive authority to represent cooperatives abroad and collaborate with international organizations. Three representatives of the state-level Bosnia and Herzegovina's Union of Cooperatives participated in the interview. They briefly described their recent efforts in resolving the land ownership issue, introducing a database on cooperatives in the country, and representing the BiH cooperative sector abroad. An important initiative has been the development of a cooperative business center approach. In this initiative, individual cooperatives work together either to increase the efficiency of their input buying or marketing of products. While cooperatives have advantages of size over the average farm of three hectares, most cooperatives are still not large enough to compete on a world market.

Conclusion

With varying degrees of success, the three unions of cooperatives are working on institutional issues facing cooperatives such as registration of cooperatives, cooperative audits, resolution of title disputes to land, and new organizational arrangements such as business centers. However, given the smallness of their staff and their meager funding, it is unlikely they will be able to increase their level of service to the cooperatives.

Figure 1 can be adapted to illustrate a new strategy to meet the needs of the farmers in which there is an expanded role for NGOs. In this new strategy, NGOs continue to work with farmer organizations, such as unions of cooperatives, to facilitate social capital development. In terms of BiH, they will organize and empower the unions of cooperatives as they conduct audits of cooperatives and resolve land title issues. Currently, public extension is not providing business, marketing, or production educational programs to a satisfactory level. The cooperatives are asking for this help from the unions of cooperatives but it is unlikely they will be able to provide it. As a result, NGOs, by substituting for public extension where needed, can provide these educational programs directly to cooperatives and their farmer-members.

Similar to the public – private agricultural extension partnership advocated by Daku et al. 2005, there should be an NGO – public agricultural extension partnership while development aid monies continue to flow into BiH. Following the publicly-financed, privately-delivered model of agricultural extension as described in Honduras (Hanson et al., 2006) or in various case studies around the world (Rivera and Alex, 2002), NGOs, funded by international agencies, could be contracted to deliver the educational programs that farmers need. In the future, when BiH has recovered sufficiently, then a handoff could occur with public extension assuming more of these responsibilities.

The growth in the agricultural sector will lead to improvement in the cooperative sector. In the former Yugoslavia, it was a top down system, where the managers of the cooperatives provided services to the farmers. The farmers were receivers in the process, not leaders. The current frustration felt by farmers for their cooperative leaders and for the unions of cooperatives reflects their unrealistic dependence on the ‘old worldview’. This contrasts to the post-Yugoslavian world where the cooperatives are run their members. Stated another way, the performances of today’s cooperatives are dependent on the quality of its members. Educational programs provided by NGOs, agricultural extension, and ministries of agriculture will not only benefit farmers but will also provide a needed boost to agricultural cooperatives and their unions of cooperatives.

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