

CALL FOR PARTNERS – KA2 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROJECT IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH

A DISTANCE EDUCATION MODULE TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO WORK IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR (AGRIACADEMY)

Project Summary

Agriculture and agricultural sectors will gain more importance than ever because of population growth and food shortages that will be experienced in the next 50 years. The prevalent use of sensor systems and intelligent production mechanisms developed with Industry 4.0 technologies has already given way to the era of Agriculture 4.0. However, technology adoption process in the agricultural sector is slower than other sectors. At this point, the issues of how and at what level farmers will adopt smart farming practices are gaining importance, too. Therefore, for the future of agricultural sector, a workforce that is able to adopt technological developments quickly and to use cutting-edge digital production systems needs to be created. In other words, young people should be educated for this purpose. However, young people are neither interested in agriculture nor working in agricultural sector. The lack of such a young workforce and the academic research, carried out by Mustafa Özsarı in Konya Food and Agriculture University (KFAU) in 2018 with 306 students of 40 different universities in Turkey, is the starting point of this project. This research showed that young people are not motivated sufficiently to work in the agricultural sector. However, the rate of willingness to work in agricultural sector is 80.56% among the students whose father or mother works in the agricultural sector. Moreover, the rate of willingness to work in agricultural sector is 62.9% among the students who started the primary education in a village. In addition to those statistics, willingness to work in agricultural sector is higher among those who participated in any agricultural events or in any stage of agricultural production process. At the end of this research, it is seen that young people who have some knowledge about agriculture or who have little acquaintance with agriculture are more likely to work in agriculture sector than those who have no knowledge about agriculture.

Depending on this fact, as Konya Food and Agriculture University, we are planning to develop a free (and dual language – English & Turkish) Learning Management System to educate both young people who are willing to train themselves in agricultural sector and the farmers who did not have any chance for schooling in their youth. By doing so, we aim to develop a new approach to empower agricultural sector in Turkey. By educating young people on agricultural sector, we aim to increase the young people's involvement and their employment in agricultural sector. As a result, we expect that average age of an agricultural worker will be lowered, average education level of an agricultural worker will increase and the number of new initiatives in agricultural sector will expand. As a result of these, the agricultural productivity will increase in the long term. Moreover, smart agriculture technologies will be efficiently used in agriculture by the educated-young people who involved agricultural sector. By educating the farmers and the ones who work in agricultural sector, we aim to increase their knowledge about soil, plant

production, plant protection, organic agriculture, good agricultural practices, farm management, animal husbandry, animal health, plant and animal diseases and plant and animal characteristics. As a result, we expect a decrease in negative outcomes in agricultural practices and an increase in agricultural productivity.

PHASES OF THE PROJECT

Our project consists of three phases. The first phase is research phase. In the research phase, we aim to implement two surveys for two different target groups. First target group of the research phase will be farmers. By implementing a survey on farmers, we would like to determine the structure of the agriculture sector in Turkey and in the partner countries. In this phase, the demographics of the farmers and their attitudes towards the adoption of new practices and new technologies will be identified. Second target group of the research phase will be young people aged between 15 and 30. By implementing a survey with high school and university students, we would like to determine their willingness to work in the agricultural sector. Through this survey, we also want to find out the reasons behind their career choices. In the research phase, there will also be a deep literature review about topics such as “farmer’s adoption of new practices and new technologies” and “students’ willingness to work in the agricultural sector”. An active participation and contribution from the partner organizations at all stages of the research phase is expected. The expected output of the research phase can be a book or article for each survey. Because two surveys are used in this phase, there will be at least two books or articles from these researches.

Second phase will be about preparing the online education modules, their contents and the learning management system (LMS) that will be used to train participants. In this phase, each partner will be responsible for different tasks. Our partner from Turkey, Anadolu University, has a very long experience about online learning modules and learning management systems since they have the oldest Distance Education Faculty in Turkey. That’s why, Anadolu University will be responsible for developing the system of this project and the modules in the learning management system. The content of these modules will be prepared by Konya Food and Agriculture University and the two other European partners of this project. The number of the topics of the modules, however, will be determined by all the partners. After the completion of system and the modules, each partner is responsible to find at least 5 test users to use the system. These test users will be registered to the system and they will complete all the modules and they will report the system deficiencies and the difficulties they face. After their feedback and recommendations, LMS and the modules will be updated accordingly. The language of the system and the online education modules will be English. But all the content and the website will be translated to Turkish by Konya Food and Agriculture University because English is not frequently spoken in Turkey despite being the second language of the country officially. The system will be a free-to-join system where anyone can register and educate themselves through it.

Third phase will be about educating young people through the LMS. In this phase, every partner organization is responsible for finding at least 100 participants for the online modules. These participants should be between the ages of 15 and 30. At least half of these participants should be selected from young people who are facing or dealing with difficulties in social, educational, financial, geographical and health contexts. The reason behind such a selection is to include

young people from all the aspects of the society in this project. In this phase, Konya Food and Agriculture University will open its one computer lab to the public for 4 days-a-week to enable people from neighborhood to educate themselves through the LMS. In addition, a 40-seat bus will carry young people from rural areas to our university for 3-days-a-week to help them attend the online classes by using the university's computer labs. These lab-teaching sessions will not be monotonous and boring because a trainer from the national agency trainers' pool will be employed as our project's youth worker. He/she will bring the group together through ice-breakers and other activities. The education content will be online but the education given will be non-formal.

There is one hidden phase in this project: Dissemination phase. All of the partners are equally responsible for the dissemination activities of the project from the beginning of the project to the end. And most importantly, after the project ended, every partner will share the system and its results to all local and national institutions to ensure the sustainability of the project and the system.

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