

CONTRIBUTION TO ALBANIAN SOCIETY: STUDENTS' CASE STUDIES IN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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Abstract

The issue of growth in relation to development is now the most important topic for the government of any country and hold back on the agenda of development policymakers. The EU is orientating its development policy and practice in the direction of G20's which approach to development is directly and strongly informed by its overall focus on economic growth. This study explores the evidences of the link between economic growth and development outcomes. The focus of this study is to develop answers to the question: "What can be done in order to encourage economic growth and improve the living standards in Albanian society? What are some concrete measures to be taken in this direction? Given the difficulties to answer these questions, this paper takes the case study of 40 students participating in Growth and Development course at Epoka University. These students have been divided into groups and these groups collaborate with other "groups" such as students' clubs, institutions, organizations, etc. These projects are focused on building effective processes and practical solutions for deciding growth policy such as ensure environment sustainability by painting trees in order to protect them from vulnerable diseases as well as making the environment a better and nice place to be; a social volunteer initiative to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; improving the process of collecting milk from farmers and to design a SWOT analysis of economical empowerment of women farmers; Dhurata.com website, innovative and business development; a guide for alumni association formation at Epoka University and save lives: clean your hands.

Keywords: *Economic Growth, Development, Case Studies, Albania*

1. Introduction

During the twentieth century, all Western governments focused to achieve 'development and growth' in their own countries through the Millennium Development Goals by making further efforts in helping the poor countries to enhance their standard of living by undertaking reforms in the systems of these countries and to promote efficiency. But for many people, ideas of development are linked to concepts of modernity. 'Modernity' in its broadest sense means the condition of being modern, new or up-to-date, so 'the idea of "modernity" situates people in time' (Ogborn 1999: 153). Also, development can be considered at a number of

scales and it is something which needs to be measured or assessed. These go from the individual, the local community, the regional, the national and the global (among others).

A very good initiative has taken from a instructor of Development and Growth Course at Epoka University in order to make clear the answer of an important question like “what can be done in order to induce economic growth and improve the living standards in Albania society? Also, these projects help new generation to explore the challenges facing Albania’s society and contribute in those challenges for better future. What follows the study is a review of reasons for an essential contribution in requirement of basic education, economy and social fields.

According to the Report of the Center of Public Education in America, Defining a 21st century education, by Craig D.Jerald (2009), there are three kinds of learning which are becoming important from day to day for students to succeed in work and life:

1- **Traditional academic knowledge and skills.** The belief that students will no longer need to learn the academic content traditionally taught in the school curriculum is false. Students will need strong math and English skills to succeed in work and life, for example. A strong academic foundation also is essential for success in postsecondary education and training, which itself is increasingly necessary for anyone who wants to earn a middle class wage.

2- **Real world application, or “applied literacies.”** Students will need not just knowledge but also “literacy”— the ability to apply their learning to meet real-world challenges. That applies to all subjects, including English, math, science, and social studies.

3- **Broader competencies.** Students who develop an even broader set of competencies will be at an increasing advantage in work and life. Based on employer surveys and other evidence, the most important seem to be:

- a. The ability solves new problems and thinks critically;
- b. Strong interpersonal skills necessary for communication and collaboration;
- c. Creativity and intellectual flexibility; and
- d. Self sufficiency, including the ability to learn new things when necessary.

So, this paper provides a timely summary of some of the key projects done by students for ten weeks and their contribution during this period to improve equity and equality in society.

2. Albanian Students Work Toward the MDG

2.1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Media and social life always draws human attention about the richness, success and achievements of elite or businessmen of Albania. Rarely or better only in emergency cases attract attention for assistance and help. There are sources that say “if all the rich will contribute to eliminate poverty, in the world will not remain none of poorer” The use of a wealth measure to represent development is regarded as appropriate because it is assumed that with greater wealth comes other benefits such as improved health, education and quality of life. Somewhere has always need for humanism and solidarity and therefore it has chosen this topic. Maybe studnets help can be as a small blob of water in the ocean, but do not have to forget that the ocean is made up by many blob of water. Therefore the aim of the project is a call for all, to get all together humanity as blob of water and to end to become a ocean, and

then to wash and clean sufferings of many poor people, and to restore to them a little bit happiness.

- To help the family, the three poor orphans with food and clothes.
- To solve the problem of water
- Co contribute to repair the house.

It is necessary to make people call for solidarity and reminded that sacrifice of one of their cafes, at the end of month they could satiate the stomach of a family.

This project was developed by hardworking, effort, and above all with great desire and love to help the target family. This great desire to help this family, luckily, didn't left without being rewarded. Thanks to wider heart and loving people, all of them managed to change the life of a family. Alto it had a positive impact on all the people who heard it. Where, many of these people, helped in various ways for this project to reach up here. As it mentioned earlier, one of the main goals of this project was solidarity of the people, and in a significant number of their purpose has arrived. Besides the impact that this project had on society, it should be noted the impact of it on the target family. They will not live anymore in a house where what rain outside, rain inside to. They will not live in a house where the cold and frost of winter escorted throughout. As they deserve, they will have a warm and quite comod house. The girls' mother also will not work with in a place where plus ridiculous wage that she takes, will not have to tolerate harassment of its chiefs by working until the middle of the night. They are happy because the spring knocked in their lives. It is important not leave without mentioning the impact of books and conversations, which help them to change their view of life. It's nice to give people hope to live.

2.2 Ensure Environmental Sustainability by Painting Trees with the Motto “ All of us, for a Cleaner Environment”

Nowadays environmental issues are concerning problem everywhere in the world. These issues vary from pollution of environment from factories or people's activities to destruction of forest and lands. Even in Albania, environmental harness is the most concerning issue which has become a problem of every citizen from children to retired people. Students of Epoka University are grouped together to give their contribution to Albanian Development and growth by focusing on environmental section. So, on behalf of one of Millennium Development Goals related with the environment which is not reached yet for Albanian Case, the EcoGreen team has decided to give contribution toward the mention field with the aim of ensuring environmental sustainability by painting trees. So briefly, the volunteer activity consists on painting trees in two popular areas of our capital city, Tirana by support of Ministry of Environmental.

The main aim of this activity is that of protecting trees from vulnerable diseases as well as making the environment a better and nice place to be. The outcome that the group expects from the volunteer project that is going to be implemented for 10 weeks and going on is as follows:

- ✓ Contribute for e healthy environmental and a nice place to live
- ✓ Raise Public Awareness for citizens of our society with the main goal of keeping the environmental clean and safe

- ✓ Serve as role models for other citizens of Albania thus enabling as well as stimulating them to give contribution in maintaining a healthy environmental for a better future of environments valuable for generations to come.
- ✓ Increase the life expectancy of trees because they are a key component which plays a significant role in the process of photosynthesis, reduction of pollution as well as maintain the environmental with fresh air

The impact of the project was great, as it was expected. Therefore, by whitewashing the trees they could transmit the message of saving the values of nature and preventing it from destructive factors. One of crucial actions undertaken by students was the education of community. During the event of whitewashing the trees students stopped some people in the place where the event was proceeding and said to them that they can do the same thing as we were actually doing. They felt surprised as well as inspired in the same time for undertaking the same initiative in the future on behalf of keeping a clean and better environment. Thus, Epoka's students were having a strong impact on educating the Albanian community by our real actions, serving as role models for each person who observed our activity. One of team members, Arilda took the responsibility of interviewing some people who had observed our volunteer work. The feedback was great: some of them felt amazed that students had undertaken such valuable initiative that will be remembered for a long time.

2.3 Eat Well, Move More, Live longer

Today's children focus is on the internet and on fast foods. Their lives are becoming more and more passive. Obesity level and other diseases, related to the strong relationship that children have with junk foods, have an increasing trend. In addition there is also a concentration of focus on the cell phones, PCs and TVs, and its consequence is the huge reduction in the outdoor activities of children. Epoka's Students help those children to increase the awareness of them regarding the dangers that fast foods and inactivity bring. An informational presentation made in presence of the pupils of elementary schools, for increasing their awareness and makes them conscious about the dangers of today's way of living. Beside this, a survey made in order to find the way children live nowadays, their favorite food, hours spent studying, watching TV, on a computer and exercising.

The focus of projects is to create awareness about:

- ✓ healthy lifestyle and its benefits
- ✓ importance of exercising
- ✓ importance of eating at least a healthy meal a day
- ✓ dangers of sedentary life
- ✓ importance of a good sleep
- ✓ dangers brought by the usage of computers/TVs
- ✓ Socialization, which is better done by meeting people in the real life and not online

After fourteen weeks, what drew attention at first is the fact that the average weight of children decreased from 42 kg to 41 kg. There was a reduction in the consumption of fast foods during the week. Most of them now consumed them only a times a week or never. Next, there was an increase in the consumption of vegetables and fruits. A very positive difference was on the hours spent before TV and Pc, where most children only spent 1 hour per day using the computer or watching TV. An increase in the hours dedicated to sports was associated with the above decrease. It increased from 20% of kids who spent more than six hours playing sports to 36% of them playing more hours. Surprisingly, also consumption of food before TV/PC has decreased.

2.4 Women Economical Empowerment: Case of Women Farmers

The demand of national and international consumers for bio products is increasing. Albania has the potential to develop such a sector. This project is a social volunteer initiative to improve the women position in the family by empowering them economically. Joining their efforts together will not only enable them to increase the total revenues but also their personal incomes.

- Train the women farmers to make a SWOT analysis of their sector and develop new ways to improve their businesses.
- Create a network that will enable them to:
 - a. Share experiences and successful case stories
 - b. Join efforts in some production processes
 - c. Be represented as an official body which will facilitate the signing of contracts and agreements, increase the awareness for Bio products etc.

Make women farmer aware of collaboration opportunities, through training them by an introduction of what is Women Farmers Association, its mission and its future planned activities. Also, brainstorming of these women farmers situation and what opportunities could be further explored (following a more simple version of SWOT analyses). Most of women farmers were pessimistic about their situation. They felt the competitiveness of the big farms (since most of them were small farms with 2-3 cows) Lastly, they were willing to sell to other bigger farm for whatever their need as long as they could pay whatever price higher than that of the baxho. They think to ensure interns, at least 1 per farm during the three months of summer. The students of Epoka University organized meeting with Career Fair for Participation in the career fair of the Agriculture University where have a agreement with the university to ensure internships for students in the farms and in the association, also have a pool of 30 students ready to start their 1 month internship in July. In progress, meet the Minister and explain him about the initiative, Officially women farmers join the association, ideally all the 25 of them. Women Farmers gave very good feedbacks and were happy that some students took the initiative to make their life easier and teach them more about theoretical part of managing a business.

In conclusion, after 2 months, 13/25 women farmers of Shijak join the Association. The membership process in excpeted to continue for one more year in all villages of Albania.

The training pointed out that the biggest need for women farmers is the financial support to produce and the need to collaborate with each other. Trainings will now become a monthly tradition that will cover: opportunities to produce collectively, computer trainings (with the possibility to access it everyday for some specific hours), production training from experts and discussion for social issues.

If international and national grants are taken, the women farmer members will gain free food for animals to reduce their production costs, and some fregirators and milking facillities that will improve the quality of the milk. The association is llobing in the comune for the creation of a laboratory. This will enable doing analizes for each farm and having such results will provide ground for more fair competition. The milk will better quality will be bought by the baxho with the higher price.

3 Improve the living Standards in Albania Society

3.1 Alumni Association Formation: A guide for Epoka University

The Alumni Association is an organization of Epoka University to gather and support community and to develop and sustain strong ties with each other and with university. This project presents a guideline for forming an alumni association. It plays a vital role in carrying out the mission of the University. It promotes and encourages the following:

- Enhancement of the university's reputation
- Recruitment helps with prospective students, especially those of high academic achievement
- Sustaining loyalty and enthusiasm among Epoka University alumni
- Keeping the University's alumni office informed of up to date addresses
- Forwarding information concerning prominent alumni to the university's alumni office
- Opportunities for professional development
- Community service
- Social events
- Intellectual stimulation

From the perspective of alumni, alumni associations can have a number of purposes such as the Scholarships Project Alumni Association which exist for the purpose of giving back in appreciation of their exchange opportunity through promoting mutual understanding between the University and other partner universities and their home country. Alumni associations are a great way for alumni to network with one another, both socially and professionally. Association meeting and events provide a forum for alumni to maintain bonds forged during their experience with each other and to build new friendships and connections. By joining an alumni association, alumni automatically plug themselves into a network of high –achieving professionals that can prove to be an invaluable career asset. Many alumni associations conduct mentoring programs between older and younger alumni, hold workshops on leadership and resume writing, organize job fairs for members, and invite human resources representatives from leading firms to meet with alumni.

The Epoka Alumni Association is created in 2014 by Epoka Alumni. All associate members will have access to a broad range of activities, programmes, agreements, discounts and various other advantages that are available exclusively to members. Some of the benefits include:

- i. Continuous in-class learning for all associates who are interested in the functional areas, economic sector and improving their leadership skills, as well as all the other areas taught at Epoka University (Engineering, Architecture, Political Science, Banking and Finance, Business-Administration and Economics) workshops, conferences, roundtables, courses, alumni forums etc.
- ii. Special discounts on all Epoka University Programmes, Scholarships (Masters, Executive Education , Seminars, Courses and Conferences.
- iii. Networking activities
 - a. Networking Days
 - b. Cultural, social and sporting activities
- iv. Publications
 - a. Ideas Magazine
 - b. Presentation of companies created by associate members in Ideas
 - c. Access to the documentation presented in events organised by the Association
 - d. Access to the video of events organised by the Association.
- v. Access to the Library: offering a variety of books in different fields (Economy, Finance, Science, Architecture, Literature etc)
- vi. Access to all Epoka's facilities
 - a. Members also reserve workrooms via the Association
 - b. Associate members are welcome to invite guests to all events organised by the Association. The same conditions will apply.

Students received the design of the clothing from the Indian Company, and have presented them to the staff. Upon agreeing with the company, the design of the clothing will not be charged, only if the members of the board approve to finalize it and ask for the production of the clothes. From the company, students have received these designs, t-shirt, cap, and a sweater, also during these weeks they have finished the draft of alumni association and this can be considered as another success for this project and hopefully they will continue doing the best for it.

The study result suggests that to make it possible that every student to recognize the organization and its benefits and everybody to be part of it, to create relationships with previous graduated students and full participation of the students in the activities of the project.

3.2 Dhurata.com Website, Innovative and Business Development

Dhurata.com is a service which gives the possibility, Albanians and anyone else in the world to order the different types of gifts to surprise their loved ones in Albania, America, Canada,

Germany, Italy, Turkey and Greece. The number of countries covered and the sorts of gifts will always be growing. To order the gift is very simple because people can make it online or by phone within 10 to 15 minutes. Execution of orders is very fast because in most cases the message can be realized today for tomorrow. Order gift from America does not fly in Albania or the opposite, but it is a good or service traded by the best local business customer, with which dhurata.com has agreement. Dhurata.com is an activity initiated in 2005 by Code Passion Internet Services Inc. (or CPIs Inc.), Canadian company with activities in the field of information technology.

Dhurata.com since its beginning in Albania has started its service in Tirana, Elbasan and Durres. This service as the first of its kind in Albania started to have success in these three cities, so company decided to extend the busines in all over Albania. Dhurata.com offers to its customer's obly flowers and cake service but students decided to work in order to add new products. The target groups are Albanian emigrants, all over the world which order gifts for their familiaries in Albania but in the short term in the target group will be also people who live and work in Albania.

In order to achieve the new levels of productivity, sales and exposure is the necessary to use socila media by promoting business in Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Google+ .Every kind of social media allows you to target each group of customers you want, depending on their location. Also another important objective is the diversification of our business partners, the need for new products to service. Since the demand for services was increasing, was necessary to prepare an online survey to know how satisfied customers are with those services and to request new products. New services for this company will be the bio natural soaps in basket & personalized ones, cosmetics and Gifts card which include the restaurant card, SPA, Massaging and Beauty Gift Card. And another important objective is to extend our service territory in Albania.

The project has been developing step by step through students work and other members work. It is a project that is very well accepted by 95% of our target group. This project except the fact that it is students' job let them understand the concept of marketing, business, innovation, and costumer and so on. It is a very successful project; it motivates them through many aspects such are Payment, Work conditions, Work beauty, People who work with them, All are new generation, all young students with full of ideas, efficiency. They work as a team and they share all ideas and impacts. This is the key of success. Another important thing is that today Dhurata Company has 12 employers only in Tirana from 3 that were 5 months ago.

3.3 Improving the process of collecting milk from farmers

Lufra sh.p.k is a milk diary in Albania who produces pasteurized fresh milk and all it's by products. It has a range of more than 10 products in different shapes and sizes. Lufra's activity began in 1992, improvised in a simple workshop, with some limited capacity equipments, up to 1000 liters of milk per day. The second phase of development includes the construction of a new setting which fulfilled 65 % of the needed production. Technology began to advance, generally in the use of new equipments such as furnace which was used to create steam, different capacity equipments, pasteurization, creaming machine, alienation equipments, milk and yoghurt package equipments etc. Daily capacity surpassed 9000-12000 liters per day and improvements were noticed in the production technology. There was a growth in the quality and the products were very competitive in the market, based on

European standards. The idea of this project is to intervene and try to help Lufra in the only area that they told students they had some problems such as collection of raw milk. Since there are only a few big farms in Albania and the majority of the milk is taken from small farmers who have 2-3 cows, there is a problem in collecting the milk. It has to stay cold since it goes out of the cow until it arrives in the factory. Since they do not have were to cool the milk we will create some cooling stations, with cooling tanks inside, which will be built by Lufra.

And the expected outcomes from the project are the better quality of the milk used by the factory. Also Lufra will build these stations in some deep villages and areas where the milk is traded in the street, uncontrolled by no one. This will make the farmers be more interested in selling their milk to the factory rather than traveling to cities and selling it. And finally the quality of the pasteurized milk and its by products will be better and healthier for the end consumer.

3.4 Made4 Impact

This project consists of providing semi-professional and professional assistance to people in need of expertise knowledge in the respective fields. The involved groups of people, volunteers, and different company or institution representatives play a core role in the continuance of an effective relationship between each group. The assistance of our so called service will be provided by volunteers who are part of different areas of knowledge. These people will use their knowledge obtained from high levels of education and personal experience to address diverse need. Students have tried that their project is made up from a broad range of our society we are part off. Conscious of the problems, society has “Made for Impact” tries to help overcome and to some extent solve and increase awareness of problems like poverty, environment pollution, unemployment, inequality etc.

Students are aware that these imperfections have always existed, but if they motivate the society enough to notice such initiatives a significant impact can be achieved.

The primary expectation of Made for Impact is to firstly realize its objectives and then to get ready for an effective future groundwork for such initiatives. Thus making Made for Impact a chief organization and creating social image of what it represents. To make Made for Impact logo as a signature of social responsibility.

Do not talk- ACT!!!

Since Albanian society is characterized of talkers and not does an important impact of this project is to change the way of how people perceive different issues. Most of the people do not react until their interests are touched. In a fast changing world they must be ready to adapt and face new difficulties. The millennium goals are reference point to this project but these goals are not a monolithic policy following a single trajectory. Ultimately, they are nothing more than goals, established by world leaders and subsequently reaffirmed on multiple occasions. Countless public, private, and nonprofit actors-working together and independently have tried to somehow aid in solving these goals. The goals have brought the community closer together. In the end students are all together in this where the main impact of project is to foster the culture of helping each other.

Conclusion

The significance of the “21st Century Skills” and “21st Century Needs”, and the immediate exigency of these two core requirements are the two main pillars in the development and growth course curriculum. This course tries to focus into two main elements; the first is the idea of training students with the critical thinking/improving their skills toward the adoption in the new century, and the second one, is the understanding of the sustainable development/the identification.

The idea of these projects was to lead students to improve their skills and helping them to feel a part of society which cares for the problem around them, and par consequences to try to give practical solutions for really challenges.

By this good initiative, students seem to have learnt a lot from their community service experience. These skills cannot always be measured and the students may not even be aware of their learning. Overall the community service was a positive experience for students, increasing their confidence in themselves and their ability to work with others.

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