

Article #2

NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH PRIVATE SECTOR STRENGTHENS HIGHER EDUCATION IN KOSOVO

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Cassie L. Barnhardt, project director (right) and Armand Krasniqi, rector of the University of Peje "Haxhi Zeka."

For more photos on this article go to this link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1hmkX04nuQfv5m32cskBF5GNtI3LDKxyW>

The latest USAID-funded activity entitled *Private Sector Partnerships to Strengthen Higher Education* (PSPSHE) in Kosovo kicked off Monday, April 24, 2023, at the National Library of Kosovo. The activity is being implemented by the Iowa Consortium, which is led by the University of Iowa (UI), in cooperation with its partners Iowa State University (ISU), and the Kosova Education Center (KEC).

Following the launch event, the activity team held a series of meetings throughout Kosovo to begin work with partners. A key aspect of launching the activity was interacting with university leaders, research staff, and career services staff to plan and discuss details of the collaborative initiatives.

The kick-off week was led by **Eli Gashi**, *chief of party* of the activity, and **Cassie Barnhardt**, UI associate professor of higher education and student affairs, and *activity director*. They were joined by technical advisors from the UI and ISU, including **Russell Ganim**, *associate provost and dean of UI International Programs*, s; **Daniel Clay**, *dean of the College of Education at UI*, and **Curtis Youngs**, *Ensminger Endowed Chair of International Animal Agriculture* at ISU.

The project's overall objective is to better connect universities to the private sector, with specific attention on the agriculture and Information and Communications Technology sectors. Following the launch activities, the team met with campus partners from the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina," the University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka," and the University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti."

The rectors and members of the administration warmly greeted the Iowa Consortium team. Together, they discussed plans to take action on the set of agreements outlined in the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed on April 24th at the launch event.

During the visits to the partner universities in Kosovo, the Iowa Consortium toured spaces and facilities on the campuses where students and professors will engage most directly with activity initiatives. Through this activity, each campus will grow its career services administrative units to better support students and companies. Additionally, universities will more closely link their teaching and research activities to industry.

“There is remarkable talent nested within our three partner universities and research institutions in Kosovo. We identified the three partner, public university campuses in Prishtina, Peja, and Prizren because of the willingness of their university leaders, and the eagerness of their professors and administrative staff to pursue changes that will fundamentally shift their approach to industry and student professional success. The University of Iowa is proud to be USAID’s implementing partner on the PSPSHE activity, because it provides an opportunity to help universities unleash their potential for assisting the prosperity of youth and the companies where they work. - Cassie L. Barnhardt, Project Director and Associate Professor at the UI College of Education.

All three universities showed great commitment to work alongside the activity’s team of experts and have expressed enthusiasm to share their latest achievements, while also communicating a sincere commitment to push themselves to transform in ways that provide students with better preparation for their careers.

Samedin Krrabaj, former rector of University of Prizren, Ukshin Hoti, says the university is committed to this project.

"Signing the MoU with UI and ISU was one of the best things that could have happened to us at this point. Our main objective is to offer our students the best agriculture and ICT programs that respond to the latest market-needs and challenges for farmers, agriculture enterprises, and ICT companies in the region. The UI and ISU's models and experience in preparing students for the market are our inspiration, and we are grateful and excited to learn from their expertise and establish systems and curricula that address this objective." - Samedin Krrabaj, former rector of University of Prizren, Ukshin Hoti

In addition to visiting campuses, the team visited the Agriculture Institute in Peja; this is Kosovo’s primary scientific agriculture research facility managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Agriculture Institute is an important resource for professors, students, farmers, and the agriculture private sector for its role in assuring the quality and favorable conditions for cultivating crops and livestock in Kosovo.

“We’re excited to extend our support to this activity, as our institution is a go-to destination for students, businesses and local institutions to acquire technical support and knowledge in agriculture. With 76 years of experience, we’re committed to continuing our legacy of serving agricultural development in Kosovo. We look forward to collaborating with the UI and ISU to create lasting links between universities and businesses that benefit generations for years to come. Our expertise, resources, and knowledge will be fully committed to ensuring this activity’s success” - Fehmi Geci, Director of the Kosovo Agriculture Institute.

As part of the kick-off week, the activity team organized a workshop with representatives from partner universities and private sector organizations. The workshop was led by Dr. Daniel L. Clay, where he engaged participants in discussions on strategic cooperation between industry and universities. The workshop emphasized how universities' Industrial Boards, in particular, can activate transformation within universities and across sectors.

"These past few days in Kosovo have been incredibly insightful and uplifting for our activity team. We feel extremely fortunate to have such committed partners from both public universities and the private sector who have already accomplished remarkable work in advancing the development of the country's agriculture and ICT sectors. From what I observed, Kosovo has made significant strides towards entering the international market with a bang, and there are many students who are eager to acquire knowledge and work opportunities.

I am thrilled that this activity is taking place at the opportune moment to bridge the gap between students and businesses. I firmly believe that this partnership will pave the way for Kosovo to become a model country for growth and excellence in the ICT and agriculture sectors." **Dr. Daniel L. Clay - Dean and Professor at the College of Education, UI**

The launch week of the activity was filled with events directed towards deepening relationships between partners. The visits, meetings, and workshops began the process of creating new ways of operating and relating with a focus on strengthening partnerships between universities and the private sector. Shkumbin Talifaj, staff member of the Career Services Center at the University of Prishtina, expressed his enthusiasm for the project, stating, *"During the launch week of the project, we had the opportunity to collectively discuss partnership opportunities with private sector businesses. We are grateful to the PSPSHE Activity for affording us the chance to forge and strengthen relationships with some of the leading businesses in our country. We learned a great deal about the exciting new projects that businesses in the ICT and agriculture sectors are currently undertaking. I was particularly impressed by IPKO Telecom's latest work in developing software products that offer Agriculture Information Management Systems to local farmers. I am pleased that we discussed the possibility of engaging our agriculture and ICT students in experiential learning so that they may contribute to this remarkable high-tech initiative."* **Shkumbin Tafilaj, Senior Advisor at the Career Services Center, University of Prishtina.**