



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ALBANIA

CASE STUDY

Technology expands university's window to the world

Students and teachers at the Agricultural University of Tirana benefit from information and transparency



Photo: Paul Cohn

Students can now easily access assignments, grades, and other information their professors post through an internet portal.

USAID's \$10,000 grant, with matching funds from Albania's Agriculture University, provides the tools to educate Albania's next generation of economists and professionals.

CHALLENGE: Since 1951, the Agriculture University of Tirana (AUT) has been Albania's leading research, training and extension institution. During the Communist period, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in the world and relied on agriculture production to supply most of all the food that was consumed and was one the country's only exports. For the last twenty years, Albania's agriculture sector has transformed itself from a command-structure based on principles of self-reliance to one that is efficient, competitive and market-driven. In step with this transformation, Albania's universities and research centers have also had to change the way they do business so that they provide relevant services and conduct research to support farmers and agribusinesses.

INITIATIVE: USAID/Albania, through a partnership between the University of Hawaii and AUT, is helping the university prepare a workforce of future agriculture economists and entrepreneurs who are capable of using innovative technologies to respond to market demands. Paramount to this goal is building the university's ICT capacity that will increase access to information and facilitate the exchange of ideas. In 2008, the university embarked on an IT modernization project to purchase and set up the central infrastructure with servers, computers, and management software with the hope of expanding the network to include all five buildings, including the library. With a small grant from USAID, and with matching funds from the university and other private sector contributors, IT tools were purchased and fiber optic cables were run throughout the campus, providing internet and intranet to 95% of university staff.

RESULTS: Today, the university's ICT network is complete and has the capacity to provide academic staff the ability to conduct better and more relevant research to meet the challenges facing Albania's agriculture sector today. In July, with the support of USAID and the University of Hawaii, the university held its 2nd Annual Conference on globalization and its impact on Albania's agriculture and agro-food sector. Albanian professors presented joint papers with colleagues from around the world—an achievement made possible because of access to ICT.