

Together for each other



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Imre 'Zorro' Mata is leading a community-based local initiative that has established a social cooperative in the heart of Cserehát, one of Hungary's poorest regions. The project aims to improve the standard of living of the local people, mainly Roma, by carrying out community activities, providing educational opportunities and creating jobs.



In 1995 Zorro and his wife Katalin started to cooperate with a foundation of Dutch origin that supports local development in the region. The Dutch foundation gave potatoes to Zorro for the Roma population to grow on his land. Three years later, however, the husband-and-wife team both lost their jobs. Their best option now was to focus on those activities, such as agriculture and forestry, which were formerly secondary occupations. Successful cooperation over the next two years led to the establishment of their own foundation, 'More Together For Each Other', which has served as the parent organisation for all their initiatives since this time.

School for Roma children

One of the foundation's first tasks was to clear away the 'worthless' wood from the forested areas, ahead of distributing the wood among the families of the workers. The foundation also started a Saturday school for Roma children and offered scholarships for Roma and non-Roma young people. It also launched several programmes, including a 'Milk for the child' initiative, classes for women on household skills and weaving, and a community donation scheme (potatoes, beans, shoes, etc.).

In 2005, the foundation became involved in the UNDP-Cserehát programme. Under this programme and in cooperation with the

UNDP resource centre and the community coaches, the foundation was able to develop the skills and capacity of local actors in the area and draw up strategic goals for the future in line with market demands.

Social cooperative

In 2010, following decade of hard work, it became necessary to establish a social cooperative and the team applied successfully for a European Social Fund (ESF) grant. With the help of the EU-financed programme they were able to renew the headquarters of the social cooperative, give the required instruction to workers, purchase new equipment for large work orders, and employ 10 people for a year.

Last year, under another ESF supported programme, the alternate-evening school managed by Zorro's foundation took a major step forward. The school for Roma children became available every day. Today, the social cooperative accounts for 8-31 (depending on the season) jobs in the local community and the alternate-evening school is attended by 45 children.

The social cooperative has also successfully applied for an EAFRD-LEADER grant, which is currently being implemented. The cooperative will use the grant to buy a new tractor, a trailer and a machine for chopping wood. The next step would be to install a

small factory for producing briquettes for the inhabitants of the Cserehát. The main goal is to be able to employ 30 people throughout the year.

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