THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

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Abstract

Although poverty, famine and nutrition problems are still the major problems in the whole world, indifference towards the rural area gradually increases. Today, nearly half of the population in Turkey lives in the rural areas. Moreover, one of the determinant sectors in our country is still the agricultural sector. Therefore, the rural area is the field that most needs economic, social and cultural assistance. However, unfortunately, it is at the top of the list of the most neglected areas.

The communication studies carried out in the rural areas contribute greatly to the people in the rural areas to take more part in the economic, social and political life, to the problems in the rural areas to be brought to the public agenda and to the provision of information exchange and cooperation between people and institutions in the rural areas. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be used to support communities in their efforts for social and economic developments.

Key words: Rural Development, Rural Communication, Information and Communication Technologies

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary reason for Turkey’s current economic problems is its failure to experience the Industrial Revolution—unlike some advanced Western economies—and inability to go through a structural transformation. Rural employment in Turkey is higher than urban employment. This does not apply to any of the European countries (Kılıç, 2007: 209). The majority of the rural workers are employed in agricultural sectors. The share of the agricultural production in the whole production of Turkey is 45 percent, whereas this figure is five percent in the EU countries. Despite this, the magnitude of the agricultural incentives is far below the OECD average with the exception of 1997 and 1998 (Aydoğan, 2002: 180).

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The widespread crises associated with the globalization process also affect Turkey where its impacts on poverty and deterioration in economic conditions become visible. The agricultural sector appears to be one of the most vulnerable ones to the said crises because of its inherent features (Gülbuçuk, 2002: 99). The rural segment of the economic life is being eliminated through the structural reforms implemented under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank and the share of the agricultural sector in the entire production and additional economic value becomes more insignificant. People who detach from the countryside convey their problems to the cities, further deteriorating the urban problems.

A new program sponsored by the IMF and World Bank is being implemented to restructure the agricultural production since 2000. The said program envisages acceleration of the privatization process, restrictions on the functionality of the cooperative organizations and reductions in the amount of agricultural incentives (Oyan, 2006). The TUIK figures show that the agricultural growth was 5.6 percent in 2005 while it realized as 2.9 percent in 2006. In other words, the agricultural production has declined by 2.7 in one year. The data demonstrate that the agricultural segment which constitutes one-third of the total employment in the population makes relatively little additional contribution equal to the increase in the rural population. This implies that per capita income in the rural segment did not increase at all (Kepenek, 2007).

Following the implementation of the structural adjustment programs, there has been sharp decline of 2.7 million people in the agricultural employment between 2001 and 2006 (Boratav, 2007). During this period, 2.5 million rural people were detached from production to become unemployed people whose future became unclear. The Dutch sociologist Jan Breman elaborates the repercussions of the neoliberal structural adjustment programs as follows: “It is a crisis that makes survival of large number of people in the rural areas impossible. The fate of the people who left their villages and may not be described as immigrants is more ambiguous than that of the urban poor people” (Breman; 2006).

A brief examination of the 9th Development Plan (2007E2013) will reveal that the collapse and dissolution in the agricultural segment will continue, that the markets will determine the agricultural production, that the share of the agriculture in the production will decline, that the number of privatizations will increase, that employment will decline, that migrations will remain prevalent, and that the IMF and World Bank policies will dominate the agricultural sector.

Indifference to the rural segments and agriculture is also visible in the academia. The number of researches in this field is on rapid decline. The primary objective of the present...
study is to take a closer look at the notion “rural communication” which plays a vital role in the development of the rural sector. Another objective of the study is to draw attention of the communication scientists to the rural areas and their problems considering that the number of studies on communication in this field is very small. The primary reason for this state of reluctance is the steady decline in the number of researches on social issues and the growing interest in the researches on the markets and their operation. The material and spiritual hardships associated with doing research on rural issues may be cited as another reason for the lack of adequate number of studies on the rural matters.

2. RURAL COMMUNICATION

Rural development is a process of action with economic, political, cultural and social dimensions. To put it differently, agricultural development is a process whereby the farmers possess modern knowledge and information. It is imperative for the farmers to have and accept the necessary technologies, innovations and knowledge for the rural development. Therefore, communication plays an important role in the process of rural development. The communication bridges built between public institutions, rural organizations and people generate the opportunities to ensure share of knowledge and experience needed for rural development.

Advancement in agriculture is possible only through training the farmers for the purpose of learning new ideas and techniques and their firm adoption. Making the farmers embrace the innovations in the rural areas and their firm adoption is made possible via communication channels. There are four major channels to convey the innovation from the universities (or scholars in respective fields) to the farmer: peers and neighbors (informal communication), seller and wholesalers (commercial communication), public institutions and agriculturally specialized university units (public communication, mass media devices (mass communication). The farmers become aware of the innovations and develop interest in learning and adopting them via these channels (Türkdoğan, 2006: 500-501).

In addition to these, the media ensures publication and popularization of rural issues in the general public. It supports the educational and awareness activities; it specifically contributes to facilitating the technical information. The communication networks set up in the rural areas facilitate access by the local people to the service and the information. Therefore, it is evident that communication plays a remarkable role in rural development.

In the rural communication activities in different parts of the world, radio, TV, press, computer, internet, other information systems, videos, films, theatres, festivals, meetings,
panels and seminars are widely used. In the rural areas where traditional relations are prevalent, face-to-face communication is a commonly used method.

The functions of communication in the rural development include the following:
- To facilitate the exchange of views and information between farmers and rural organizations
- To make contributions to the implementation and coordination of the rural development projects,
- To ensure that the innovations are embraced and spread in rural areas
- To raise awareness in the rural areas to promote participation
- To support the activities for education and awareness
- To ensure cooperation and coordination among the rural and agricultural organizations.

3. TOOLS OF RURAL COMMUNICATION

3.1. Media

We may propose two approaches for brief examination of the relations between rural areas and the media. First, the emphasis and attention by the media on the rural areas; and second, the importance of media as a tool of socialization for the rural area. In many parts of the world, media does pay much attention to the rural areas and agricultural sector. However, the fact that poverty and malnutrition still remain the greatest global problems shows that the importance of the rural areas and the agricultural sector cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, the Turkish media does not pay attention to the rural areas where half of the population in the entire Turkey depends on agricultural productions. The primary reason for this state of indifference is that journalism is inherently an urban profession and therefore rural life is not attractive to many journalists (Yıldırım, 2007). Particularly, from 1980s onwards, it might be said that commercial consideration in connection with the new conditions and environment of the new market practices is another reason for the lack of attention to the rural issues.

Media is one of mediators for the process of socialization along with family, school, and peers. Mass communication tools offer role models for the in-family relations, neighbors, and schools. The characters who are publicized by the media become role models for the children. While media as a general concept is undoubtedly very important, particularly the TV plays a vital role in the socialization process (Bozkurt, 2004: 126). TV takes attention and attraction in the rural areas in our country. It is far more popular than the radio in many parts. TV broadcasts reach to even the remotest parts in Turkey. Therefore, TV serves as an important
tool of socialization and as a remarkable device for the rural development. In addition to TV, radio, local papers may also be used in rural communication. Local papers, radios and TVs play notable roles in the raising awareness among the farmers, their training and motivation in the developing countries.

3.2. Information Communication Technologies (ICT)

The needs of the rural people for information become more diverse and imminent. Rapid technological advancements offer new methods and opportunities for the spread and share of the information and knowledge. Information is one of the most important tools and methods to create equal opportunity conditions to struggle with the spreading poverty in the rural areas. Success of the agricultural policies and strategies in the places where information is overlooked is almost zero.

The impact of the developments in the technological and informative systems on economic development cannot be ignored. However, the argument that mere technological emphasis and interest in the development of the information systems will ensure modernization by accelerating the process of development is being criticized. For this reason, the technological deterministic approach that economic development may be ensured via autonomous technology independent of economic system may not serve as a cure to the problems of the underdeveloped countries; a majority of scholars hold that it will fall short to explain the economic-social transformation and technological developments (Atabek, 2001: 24).

The ninth development plan envisages spread and promotion of information and communication technologies in the rural areas. The said plan reads as follows: “The electronic communication will be made more competitive; access to information via effective, rapid, reliable and reasonably priced rates will be made possible with the introduction of alternative infrastructure and services. The information technology sector will be given a priority to become a global player in the region and in the world in the field of software and services. To increase productivity in economy, common use of information and communication technologies will be made possible in business enterprises. The visual and audio broadcast groundwork commonly used to have access to information will be enhanced further.” (www.bilgitoplumu.gov.tr)

It is obvious that access by the farmer to the information in the electronic environment and his or her ability to establish communication will ensure economic, social and cultural revival in the rural areas. Internet may help the farmers publicize their issues and problems and forward them to the relevant authorities by ensuring them to share their experiences and
problems with each other. Farmers may have access to various databases over the Internet and get information on the recent developments that may affect their specific conditions in their areas. They may also rely on the Internet to benefit from remote education and establish communication with the outer world by using e-mail.

3. 3. Face-To-Face Communication

Face-to-face communication is a type of communication where the source delivering the message and the party receiving it share the same environment and the same site. In this type of communication, the message is delivered verbally; and in most cases, the feedback is instant (although it is relatively limited) (Aziz, 2003: 39). A traditional type of communication, face-to-face communication still remains very important in rural areas where old habits are prevalent and influential. Face-to-face communication methods are frequently used in Latin America countryside as more examples given below demonstrate. In the face-to-face communication, the people who act as peers, friends, relatives or opinion leaders are vital. In the common attitudes determined in some fixed situations, the views of these reference groups may become determinative and conclusive. For this reason, we hold that face-to-face communication is very important in the rural development and rural communication.

4. RURAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES

The communication works done in the rural areas seek to make the rural people involved in economic, political and social life more frequently. In the strategies set to combat global poverty, greater emphasis is put on the communication works in the rural areas where most of the poor live in. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) stresses that the strategic communication works and information communication technologies play indispensable role in the elimination of poverty and ensuring public access to information in rural development, creation of employment and other similar fields (www.undp.org).

Likewise, UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization) gives a Rural Communication Award every year. The award seeks to create social agenda in the developing countries and make contributions to the development of the media. Determination of the issues in the rural areas makes contribution to the development of concrete and creative solutions as well as to the enhancement of a liberal and democratic media. For instance, the India-based Mayala Manorama daily paper won the Rural Communication Prize given by
UNESCO in 2005. MM is a local paper with 1.4 million circulations published in Karela of India.

The campaign that earned the paper the said price included publication of reports on discovery of new potable water resources, effective use of rain water, preservation of the rivers and raising public awareness on drought. The campaign was also backed by exhibitions, meetings, video shows and so on. The campaign resulted in the creation of systems to use rain water more effectively by the sponsoring institutions, universities, schools and fire stations. The prize had been previously given to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmer and agricultural organizations, schools that implemented rural communication projects, local radio, TV and papers in the underdeveloped countries which featured innovative works on information share and social interaction in rural areas, elimination of poverty, promotion of participation, and active involvement of women in business life (http://portal.unesco.org).

Latin America which features recent developments in relation to social transformation more recently also deserves attention because of the increasing number of communication works in the rural areas. In these countries where the information communication systems are still at their infancy, the radio plays the greatest role. The respective parties reach to the rural areas via thousands of radio stations across the country in Brazil. Tens of thousands who participated in the march to put pressure on the government to introduce a land reform in 2005 were directed via radio broadcast and made to chant the same slogan. Metin Yeğin narrates the effective use of radio in this long march where he also participated as follows:

“There was a big truck in the middle of the marching convoy. The truck was the broadcast station of Marca FM. The radio station inside the truck broadcast the entire set of speeches and the music. All of the participants in the march were able to hear the broadcast via the small radio devices distributed to them at the beginning of the event. When a slogan that reads ‘When is the land reform?’ is broadcast at the Marca FM, the entire convoy inclusive of thousands responds: JA-JA-JA (Now, now, now). In the resting places, people were also listening to the radio while getting some rest as well.” (Yeğin, 2006: 53-54).

Interesting communication methods have been developed in Venezuela following the revolution led by Hugo Chavez because the anti-revolutionaries were still controlling the major communication tools and channels including the TV, radios and papers. For instance, food wrappings were used to reach out to the people in the countryside. Short, attractive and simple statements on the food wrappings, the caricatures as well as the paintings give information on the revolution, the recent actions, the new constitution and new rights
(Temelkuran, 2006: 63). The experiences in the Latin American countries provide wealthy resources for the works on the rural communication in other parts of the world.

5. CONCLUSION

Development is a multidimensional process of action, organization and communication and involves economic, political, social and cultural factors. As underlined by some of the examples from different parts of the world, it plays a vital role in the development of the rural sections in many countries. Rural communication is one of the most vital strategies for an effective combat against poverty. Communication between farmers, agricultural institutions and public institutions is made possible by exchange of information and experience and effective use of communication technologies and communication devices. Communication tools make it possible to ensure that the voice of the people in the countryside is heard. The examples in the world in regards to rural communication show that Internet along with the local TV and radios is also an important communication option. To this end, the role of the communication in the rural and agricultural development in the developing countries like Turkey should not be ignored and should be considered as an important opportunity.

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