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Turkish Education and Urbanization and Its Impact on Agriculture, Industry, and Economic Stability

Introduction

Turkey, situated in an ideal geographical location for agriculture and commerce, has in recent decades developed economically into an influential world player. The nation's unique location and diversity in landscape and climate make possible the production of an incredible variety of crops, including cereal grains such as wheat (of which Turkey is a top producer and consumer), fruits and vegetables that are frequently exported to the EU and the United States of America, as well as many edible nuts and more exotic vegetables. Because of its wealth in agricultural resources, Turkey is one of the few nations in the world that remains totally self-sufficient in regards to food production.

Even so, the recent shifting trend in economic focus toward industry and away from agriculture has become an urgent issue that the country is continuing to examine. In 1993, agriculture's input to the total GDP was 15 percent, while according to a 2002 article, agriculture's contribution to the total GDP was approximately 11.9 percent. Today, this figure has declined even further to about 9.4 percent. This decrease can be partly attributed to Turkey's recent push to further develop and industrialize, which has lured many impoverished rural Turks to the cities in search of urban jobs. The result of this phenomenon is the continuance of agriculture's decreasing influence in the Turkish economy.

With urbanization on the rise in Turkey, the new demand for industry-based jobs has resulted in the failure of the country to take full advantage of its agricultural wealth. Agriculture, while still employing about 5 percent more of the Turkish population than industry, is beginning to realize the influence of the urban migration. Though agriculture is one of the nation's strongest economical sectors, occupations in the field are becoming less appealing because of agriculture's consistent decrease in contribution to the GDP.

There is currently a widening gap in average income between the rural and urban populations of Turkey. This issue is creating significant economic tension among the two populations. As industry continues to grow and agriculture's influence as an economic contributor recedes, the country may be challenged to maintain adequate supplies for export, which could prove detrimental to the approximately 30 percent of Turks that depend on agriculture and produce export for primary income.

Life in Turkey and the Urban Attraction

The quality of urban life for migrant former agriculturalists is quite poor. By 1980, up to 60 percent of migrants to big cities lived in primitive shelters without electricity, paved roads, or plumbing systems. These living conditions have improved very slightly in the past several decades, but many impoverished Turks still reside in such settlements (Nations Encyclopedia).

Rural life in Turkey has not been changing as drastically as urban life, but it is the *lack* of change in rural living conditions that is introducing what may perhaps be the most significant disadvantage for farmers. For years rural families in Turkey have resided in small houses, which often may be severely overcrowded and poorly maintained.

One main factor contributing to the current divide between rural and urban income is the prominent gap in quality of education. In a larger city, children usually receive some education in public school systems, and on a rare occasion a student may attend college. In a rural or farming community, though, the education system is inadequate in that the nearest school may be miles away, causing many of the poorer farmers to deny their children a formal education. Eight years of education at primary and secondary schools is compulsory.

The rank of urban middle class, it has been generalized, cannot be achieved in Turkey without some form of education, particularly at the post-secondary level. This assumption is becoming increasingly more relevant as the global economy fluctuates and employers are looking more toward the skilled and educated population. The insufficient amount of institutions of education—especially in rural areas—has made entrance into the middle class for impoverished migrants increasingly difficult. Because it is becoming more difficult for lower-class rural Turks to become financially stable upon moving to urban areas without a formal education, and because the rural educational system is somewhat defunct in most cases, agricultural families are thus forced to relocate to urban settlements not just to find a job, but also to receive a formal education.

In retrospect, the migration of rural Turks to urban areas is motivated by many things, including two major influences. The first, as was previously described, is the pursuit of a higher-paying industrial job. The second is the pursuit of an industrial job *and* formal education to make the transition from farm to city more successful. Both of these influences share a common consequence: they both result in distraction from the agricultural sector.

Quality of Education in Turkey

The quality of a Turkish education has been gradually improving for several decades, but defects in the educational system are still a hindrance in the country's efforts to develop—both industrially and agriculturally. Gender-related imbalances in education make for one of the larger problems. In 2003, urban and rural female Turks had illiteracy rates of 16.6% and 30.8%, respectively, while the illiteracy rate of the male population was just 3.9% in cities and about 9% in rural areas (UNICEF, 2003). As is obviously deduced upon considering these figures, women and rural residents get the “short end of the stick,” so to speak. In other words, Turkey's education system has its most adverse effects on the female and rural populations.

Several organizations have acted to promote equal education among genders in Turkey, but it is clear that equal access to education has not been fully implemented and enforced by the Turkish government. The gender gap is most prominent in secondary schools in Turkey. About 96% of all Turkish boys and girls (91.8% of girls and 100% of boys) attend primary school, while only about 66% continue their education in secondary school systems. Of this 66%, 74.3% are male while only about 57.2% are female—leaving a gender gap of over 17%.

Contradictory to the increasing percent enrollment trends in Turkey's primary education system in the late 1990s, figures presented by UNICEF suggest that enrollment decreased slightly in the early 2000s. Luckily, though, despite this slight decrease, efforts implemented by the State have helped Turkey to lower the illiteracy rate from 17% in 1990 to 13.5% in 2002. Though it is evident that the country's quality of education is improving, when compared to the current literacy rate of the United States (99%), Russia (99.5%), or Estonia (99.8%), it is clear that Turkey still has a fair amount of development in the education system left to exhibit in order to rank among the nations that show very low illiteracy rates.

It is required by law that all children have equal access to formal education. Primary school is compulsory, but families with low incomes or that live in rural areas without easily accessible educational

institutions sometimes choose not to enroll children—especially females—into schools. Secondary schools are not compulsory, and therefore, are not utilized the way that they should be. While there are around 46,000 primary schools in Turkey, boasting an enrollment of about 90% of children in the appropriate age group, only about 1300 public secondary schools are currently in use in the country. Needless to say, rural areas of Turkey are often lacking in secondary schools, and middle schools are even more of a rarity (U.S. Library of Congress).

Rural education and agricultural focus are valuable tools for curbing urbanization

In pursuit of a more fruitful life, many Turkish agricultural families have migrated to larger cities to be educated and to enter the industrial workforce. This phenomenon, as was previously stated, results in the decrease of agriculture's impact on Turkey's GDP. This shifting focus from agriculture to industry and similarly from rural areas to cities presents a real threat to the country's future as a self-sufficient nation in terms of food as the population continues to grow.

The Nations Encyclopedia properly summarized the detriment to the Turkish agricultural sector, stating that “the fostering of industrialization by Turkish governments has had a negative effect on the farming communities.” It is commonly believed that the nation is not currently utilizing its agricultural resources to their fullest potential. According a summary of data compiled and presented by the CIA World Factbook and the Library of Congress Country Studies, the decreasing economic influence of agriculture in Turkey has resulted in a widening of the income gap between rural and urban residents. This gap thus creates extreme social tensions and migration to cities. The impoverishment that is shaking many rural settlements in Turkey and the increasing demand for crops and produce for consumption and export coupled with unbalanced development in regards to agriculture and industry have both contributed to the threat of malnutrition in rural populations.

Agriculture is and has for centuries been an influential part of Turkey's economy. This does not mean, though, that all agriculturalists are totally flourishing in their occupation. Agriculture employs a large percentage of the Turkish workforce, but this percentage is decreasing as urbanization becomes more common. Even so, agricultural production has increased in recent years because of the introduction of modern farming machinery and techniques. As a result, the slowly dwindling number of Turkish farmers is producing stronger yields, so the abundance of food is not decreasing. However, unskilled migrants in the country's cities are finding that crossing the barrier from lower-class to middle-class is quite difficult, and though plenty of food is being produced, affording sufficient amounts of it is not always a possibility.

Agriculture in Turkey is a sort of tug-of-war between the advantages and hindrances. Advantages in the industry include the recent implementation of more modern and practical farming practices, favorable climate for production of a variety of crops, and some governmental support and incentives. Hindrances to agriculturalists in Turkey include the State's shift in economic focus toward industry which results in an extreme gap in annual income between urban and rural residents, the unavailability of formal education in some agricultural communities that makes the transition from farm to city more challenging, and the difficulty illiterate farmers face in their efforts to cross the poverty line.

A reason suggested to be the cause of Turkey's social and economic tensions between rural and urban populations is that this figurative “tug-of-war” is not being won by either side. Economic balance in the agricultural sector requires the advantages to outweigh the hindrances. Such a balance would correct the situation by expanding agriculture proportionally to industry (The lack of this balance is what the CIA World Factbook and the Library of Congress state is a main economic problem in present-day Turkey).

This balance would not likely be achieved quickly or easily, but if interest in agricultural occupations increased Turkey's social and economic tensions would begin to mitigate. Re-attraction to farming and

agriculture can be established in three main ways: monetary incentive, agricultural education and field days, and the need for an increase in agricultural production. Many of the migrants to urban areas are doing so in order to seek a more comfortable financial situation. Increasing farmer subsidies and government-funded incentives would help to both retard the urbanization rate and also to draw migrants back to the farmstead. Agricultural education is quite important in ensuring successful crops and effective techniques. Turkey's geographic and climatic location is ideal for agriculture, and a proper knowledge of farming practices could increase the yields of subsistence farmers to the point that a more substantial revenue could be produced, thus decreasing the need to acquire an urban job.

The infrastructure of rural education in some areas of Turkey needs to be improved in order to make agricultural populations more influential as members of the workforce and members of the economy and to create a balance between agriculture and industry. Implementing some form of incentives for school systems in rural Turkey, such as higher salary for teachers in these schools, could possibly draw teachers and public support. Also, providing incentives to construction companies to build and remodel rural school infrastructure and roads would help to increase the quality of education and enrollment. Another thing that could be implemented in Turkish school systems to increase enrollment in rural school systems is an increase in the amount of compulsory schooling. For example, if the mandatory period of schooling was raised from the primary stage to the secondary (or at least part of the way through secondary school), rural families that choose to pull their children out of school after completing only primary school would be less common.

Conclusions

A balance between agriculture and Turkey's growing industrial sector is necessary to ensure future agricultural and economic success in the country. This balance can be accomplished by improving educational infrastructure, primarily in rural areas, and by making modern agricultural occupations more appealing and more practical by providing an increased amount of governmental support and agricultural education. Improving education in rural areas is necessary to close the income gap, especially as formal education becomes an increasingly significant determinant of financial stability in today's rough global economic condition. In order to successfully balance agriculture and industry in Turkey, making a decent annual income as an agriculturalist needs to become more probable. If farmers felt confident in their profession's ability to produce a comfortable lifestyle, less interest in industrial jobs would occur. Thus, urbanization would be reduced and life for Turks in the urban lower-class would become safer, and such residents would have a better chance at career success.

These two things, if implemented successfully, would work in conjunction to reduce the level of urban migration and urbanization, increase agriculture's contribution to the country's total income, raise the literacy rate and improve quality of education making financial stability more certain, ensure that the nation will remain self-sufficient as the population rises, and begin to close the growing income gap.

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