

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF ADVISORY SERVICES IN HUSBANDRY; CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

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Abstract

Interaction among experts of advisory services and animal husbandry farmers is the heart of the practice and the primary challenge for the advisory companies in the efforts to achieve positive results and the accomplishment of their goals. The companies and their experts besides employing the intercommunicating capacities in their approach they must complete winning communication strategies, effective and in compliance with the objectives of the governments. Agricultural production participates more than 50 % in the GDP in Albania, at a time when the quality of their management continues to remain a challenge for the government. According to the survey we have conducted, almost 70% of the respondents accept that they do not understand the contemporary methods of technology and finance, at a time when the structures of the Ministry of Agriculture have contacted almost 1/4 of the farmers in the framework of the extension policies. The model of the good communication implies that different things should be given to different people under different circumstances¹, becomes more important when applied to husbandry. Organization and economic problems that exist in farms have been analyzed in this paper, as well as the methods used to achieve success with the farmers, new concrete strategies of communication that aim to ensure effectiveness. In Albania there are already 350270 farms from which 85% are mixed, agricultural livestock.

Key words: Extension services, effective communication, agriculture and husbandry development, quantity of communication flow, quality of communication flow

INTRODUCTION

Tremendous changes that the world experienced during the last century mostly in the area economic social political etc, affected Albania and influenced in the installation of a new economic structure, moving from one of the most centralized economy among the former-communist countries to a open free market economy.

Just after the collapse of the communism Albania went through very harsh economic crises. Due to various factors most of state-owned enterprises were non profitable. The very old technology or non appropriate management resulted in production of goods with low quality in a very high cost. This situation led to the decisions of closing down the enterprises. The workers ended up unemployed and where treated financially with 80% of their previous salary they earned when working for the state owned companies.

Those steps deepened notably the economic crises in Albania, because they interfered in and destroyed all the economic parameters. In this situation the level of unemployment in Albania raised dramatically creating social and economic problems. As a result changing the economic system was of a paramount importance.

Installation of market economy in Albania started with the privatisation of the land and other agricultural structures. Over the last 20 years, the governments have been involved in the privatisation process of the economy. A very important part of the privatisation strategy was the privatization of Small and Medium Enterprises, among them factories of dairy products. Is it obvious that as the land remained under the ownership of the farmers the dairy product factories went through difficult phases, with changing the ownership and first of all with renovation of the technology.

Agriculture in Albania is the major source of income: nearly half of the working force is employed in agriculture sector and over 50% of the GDP is generated in this sector. Since the privatisation of the land

¹*Effective Communication: Perspectives, Practices and Principles, 2008 Richard Blundel, Kate Ipolitto*

started, agricultural production has risen every year, sometimes with more than 10% per year. Despite the fact that crop yields have not reached the pre-1990 levels, total factor productivity of agriculture increased by 35% in the period 1989 – 1995. Of this 20% was caused by using fewer inputs and 15% by a higher value of the output.

In 1992 the share of livestock in agricultural GDP increased to 42% and in 1997 it was 47%, bypassing the pre-communist level. Data differ much however. Related to the increase in numbers of livestock, the area under fodder crops grew until 1995, after which the area planted declined while the yields continued to rise. The latter can be explained by the rehabilitation of the irrigation system. Over time the relative importance of alfalfa increased at the expense of maize.

In 2009 the total number of the farms is 298496 or 84%, and are owned and led by the former-state owned agricultures cooperatives employees. In this situation the advisory services become very important and very present in the market. Even the roots of extension services in agriculture originate from 18th century, in Albania this notion become known after 1990, and now has a very important role in the development of the agriculture and agribusiness in Albania.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study is undertaken through a very careful study of the contemporary literature and from the direct contacts with the farmers.

We have as well conducted interviews with the persons responsible at the central and local government and with all actors involved in advisory services process.

We have used as well the statistics provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Protection of Consumers.

Communication in advising services is crucial, it is necessary for purposes of control. in order to achieve the desire results² element includes several actors, government and non-governmental such as, persons involved with counselling services in central government and in the field. Agricultural extension services emerged in 1950 as the government sought to bring new knowledge new knowledge and techniques to more farmers³.

In Albania nongovernmental institutions and governmental agencies such as Ministry of Agricultural Food and Consumers protection, scientific agencies that are

responsible for developing extension services for example:

- Agricultural University of Tirana with all faculties involved in this process.
- Non government organisation.
- Farmers, which are the subjects of this consulting process.

The communication model of these subjects can be described as general and complex, and it is evolve to accommodate participatory approaches and recognise that information and knowledge provide a common denominator among farmers, extension workers and researchers. Early studies had shown the communication model of extension services as a linear one. The simplicity of this scheme has some positive impacts, but the last development in different areas, created the ground and imposed the necessity to change model, and to adapt new ones. The linear model embraces the paternalistic mode of acting, or student-teacher environment.

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²*Frans Johan Schuurman. Beyond the impasse new directions in development theory*

³*Denis L Purcell, Jock R Anderson, (1997) Agricultural extension and research. book*

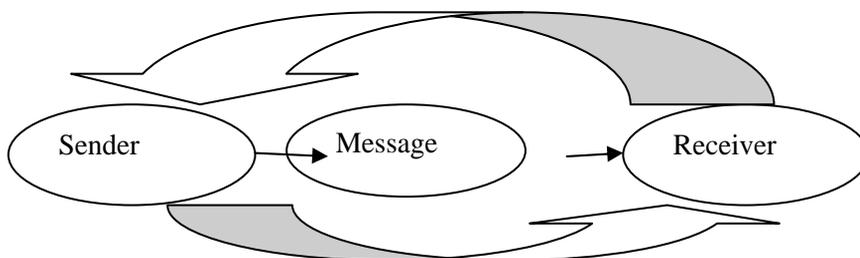


Linear Model of Communication

AS we see in the table above there is no feedback from the receiver, the message is created from the sender and is conveyed as such to the receiver, with no other consideration.

The complex scheme implies a participatory approach which means information sharing, and

joint-decision making. This model is accepted by the scholars and actually is implemented in Albania. The reality is that communication systems are more complex. Most information sources (and destinations) act as both sources and destinations.⁴



Complex model of communication.

As we see the table above there is a circulation of the information and this is very important. This facilitates the process of communication and creates the possibility to convey the proper amount and quality of information to the receivers.

As so there are two crucial elements that define the success and efficiency communication process; the quantity (volume) and quality of information which circulate into this system.

Messages sometimes fail to accomplish their purpose for many reasons. Frequently the source is unaware of receivers and how they view things. Certain channels may not be as effective under certain circumstances. Treatment of a message may not fit a certain channel. Or some receivers simply may not be aware of, interested in, or capable of using certain available messages. Messages sometimes fail to accomplish their purpose for many reasons. Frequently the source is unaware of receivers and how they view things. Certain channels may not be as effective under certain circumstances. Treatment of a message may not fit a certain

channel. Or some receivers simply may not be aware of, interested in, or capable of using certain available messages.⁵

The quantity (volume) and time of the communication process consumed in advisory services are not at the same ratio, from the point of view of quantity and the amount of time involved. The quantity is always larger if we consider as a reference the sender of the messages, for the real fact of that idea, objective and scope of the advisory services are designed on this background.

The communication in the advisory services is extended almost all around the year, but the communicative intensity is much bigger during the certain periods of time decisive for the agricultural productivity.

⁴David Foulgers "Models of communication process". 2004

⁵Dick Lee *Developing Effective Communications, Extension and Agricultural Information CM109, reviewed October 1993 Article University of Missouri USA*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The livestock production in Albania is growing continuously. The same performance

has the dairy production industry, from two major sources, farmers of local businessmen and Foreign Investments. (tab. 1)

Tab. 1

Topic	Small farmers		Medium farmers		Big farmers		
Cattle (lowlands)	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	
Farm size	0.1-2 ha	1-3 ha	2-5 ha	3-8 ha	5 ha-	8 ha -	
% of farmers	90 %	60 %	9 %	30 %	1 %	10 %	
Heads of cattle	2-5	5-10	5-10	10-20	10-	20-	
Milk production	< 1500 l/y	< 3000 l/y	> 2000 l/y	< 4000 l/y	> 4000 l/y	6000 l/y	
Labour	family	Family	Family	Seasonal	hired (20 heads/pp)	hired	
Technology	Extensive				medium intensive		
Fodder regime	very poor	reasonable	Poor	Reasonable	Good	excellent	
A..l.	no/yes	yes/no	no/yes	Yes	Yes	yes	
Milk outlet	home/market	market/banjo's/milk factory				milk factory/own processing	
Fodder	Mixed farms; alfalfa grown on own farm; concentrates grown/bought; no special feeding for calves					concentrates bought	
Fodder surface	>50%	>55%	40-50%	>55%	40-50%	>55%	
Wheat	30%	25%	30%	20%	25%	< 20%	
Productivity			3 t/ha;	6-7 t/ha;	7t/ha;	>7t/ha;	
Maize/Wheat			3 t/ha	3-4 t/ha	3-4 t/h	4-5t/ha	
Other crops	< 20%	< 20%	< 20%	< 25%	> 25%	> 25%	
Sheep/goats (highlands)							
Number heads	20-50	100-200	100-200	100-200	200-500	200-500	
% of farmers	84 %	50 %	15 %	40 %	1 %	10 %	
Production aim	meat	meat/milk	meat/milk	meat/milk	meat/milk	meat/milk	

As we see the data family-run farms make up 90% of the total number of the farms, in this total 30% hire seasonal employees, meanwhile the only 1% is build with employed farmers. Therefore there are different types of farms which ask for different type of advising and extension services. The flow of information and the time that is needed to disseminate it will take shape and will be performed according the structure of the farms. When the farms are structured as businesses with hired persons, experts of the field are as well employed. Anyway this part is only 1% it cannot draw highlights in the way we create the strategy of communication. On the other hand it is obvious that the family owned that have no experts (veterinary or agribusiness experts) need more help than the others.

Regarding the livestock production agriculture there is a permanent need for day to day work from the part of farmers, which brings into place the necessity for intensive

advisory services. Nevertheless there are certain periods of the year when the advisory services are more than usually needed. For example this becomes more important during the breeding time, pregnancy, or during the epidemic periods.

We will draw the attention to the importance of communication of advisory services for the production of quality produce, such as hygienic milk and dairy products, or in the field of marketing and public awareness regarding the dairy products etc which are very sensitive to the quality and selling time. We need to work to avoid the selling of products in inappropriate places. We need to explain that this way of doing business and commercial will put the farmers in inferior position and will put their financial future in difficulty.

Advisory services in Albania are organised in different levels and structures. Actually there are 120 information centers, serving as core

structures for information. Through a structured and planned program the experts contact almost ¼ of the farmers every year⁶.

There is a three level structure. Regarding the quantity ratio our paper is focused in the second level and more in the third one. This is because of the levels of contacts that the experts have with the farmers, and the volume of the information convey in regular basis, upon a designed plan.

All the experts of advisory services are university graduate and this is positive. The extensions convey the information regarding all the matters that the farmers need to know periodically. They are trained for different issues in their specific area of agriculture and in economy as well. We consider these training very important parts of advisory services because they aim to support the production increase effectiveness and efficiency to make them compatible in the market.

According to a survey we have learned that for the extension experts have no training at all specifically in communication field even the training realized in the economy and marketing with have elements of communication, but we think that this is not sufficient. Especially this becomes more important in the case of advising services.

During the interviews conducted with extensions experts answered they do not feel the communication training as important in fulfilling their daily duty jobs, because they had completed the university communication course. Even though they are conscious that during the training sessions the specific details regarding the effective communication was not properly elaborated and they are ready to receive more information regarding the matter. Meanwhile they are not familiar with the channels, models and theories of communication they should apply in their everyday job.

On the other side are the farmers which are from different education backgrounds. According to the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Consumer Protection the total number of farmers that own or lead a farm is 357.027, farmers that had completed high school or university is 115503 or 32% of the total number, farmers that have completed the 8 year cycle of education is 171696, or 48%, the group that has completed only elementary education is 56149 16%, and with no education at all is 13479, or 4%. (Figure 1).

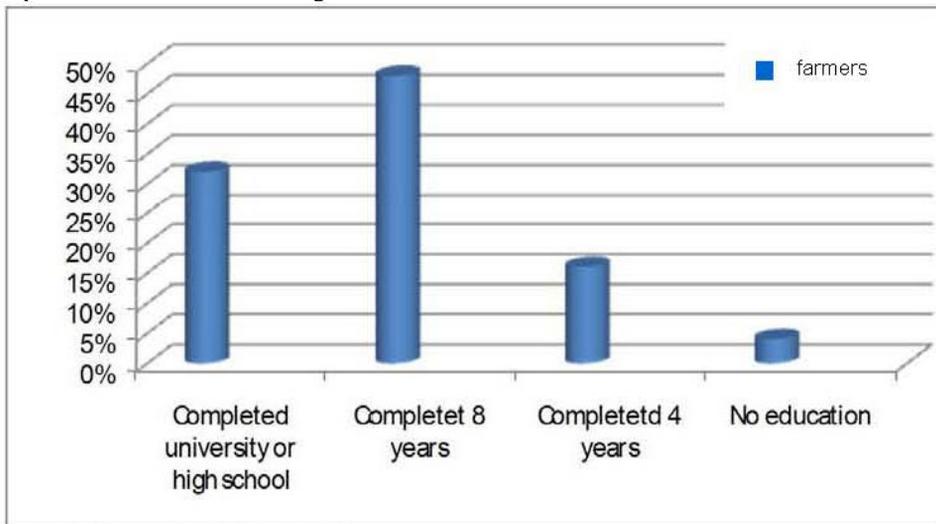


Figure 1 (Farmers level of education)

Meanwhile as is mentioned the experts has all completed the university level.

The farmers, regarding the importance of the communication, have no knowledge about the notions of communication,

⁶Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection of Albania. 2009

channels and styles through them they send and receive information. The ground of this asymmetrical education level between the farmers and experts and among farmers themselves should force the responsible structures to reshape the policies and structures of communication.

Development of technology will increase more and more the presence of ICT application in this sector. Actually these tools are present between the first and second level of advisory services. Nevertheless we are conscious that there is no way for conveying the information from the experts to the farmers. This issue can be considered in mid-term period, we stress this for the simple fact that the farmers have their family business and they do take the risks of the capital. Finding the ways of cooperation is a necessity and a challenge for the improvement of the agricultural sector in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

As we consider the facts and the reality in Albania, but having consider even the academic researchers in this area we conclude that communication in the context of participatory extension cannot usefully be described in a linear manner with distinct groups of senders and receivers. Instead, extension activities take place within a knowledge system consisting of many actors who play different roles at different times.

Although some actors in the knowledge system have more authority than others, communication usually should involve a negotiation rather than a transmission. What should take place in this process is a dialogue, with actors collaborating in the construction of shared meanings rather than simply exchanging information. This means that the paternalistic approach in extension services should gradually being replaced by more participatory approaches, in which the knowledge and opinions of farmers is considered to be just as important as that of researchers or government officials. Participatory approaches involve information-sharing and joint decision-making. The terms "interactive" and "bottom-up" can be used to describe these approaches.

The quality of information must always meet the demands of the farmers and their perception about the extension services, information to improve their prosperity through modern technologies and management.

Considering that most then 20% of the farmers has completed only 4 years of

elementary studies or no education at all (figure 1), should bring into the attention of the policy-makers and extension experts, that for certain groups of receivers of information they should apply tailor programs. Packages on information in this case can be replaced with audio visors means of communication.

On this term the flow of information that will be transmitted should be designed not only upon the decision and studies of the policymaker, but through an open discussion with all actors involved in this process. Bringing the receivers (farmers) into the discussion having feedback from them will help policymakers and researchers to be clearer in their project. At the same time farmers will be felling included; they will be ready to share their experiences not only with the authorities and experts but even with the other farmers.

The volume of information and communication should be at certain amount that can be digested by the receivers. In the case that the receiver face overflow of information they will fail to understand and will misuse it, this will create the same negative effect as if there is no communication. Defining the volume of communication should be through a very careful study and research in the field. Even the quantity of information will be digesting in different ways form farmers with different education backgrounds. In this system the extension experts as a key element in transmitting the messages should be very careful in the way they convey their messages and do their best to understand the mentality and capability of the receivers in this process.

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