

8. CONVENTION OF RURAL DEVELOPERS INITIATIVE

“PREPARE Rural Development Workshop”

Final Report

Convention Date: June 16, 2012

Convention Venue: Kızılcahamam-ANKARA

CONVENTION TOPIC

On the first day of the eighth Rural Development Initiative Convention titled "Alternative Approaches to Rural Development and Participation," the scope of PREPARE—a network of non-governmental organizations in Europe for rural development—and its expectations from the rural development network in Turkey were discussed.

FIRST DAY (June 16, 2012) – PREPARE Rural Development Workshop

First Session, Part 1:

PREPARE: Its Mission, Goal, Activities, Structure and Networking

On the first day, the topic was PREPARE, and the host organizations emphasized in their opening speeches that:

- As an initiative and forum, the Rural Development Initiative had an impact particularly on the local initiatives in Turkey;
- By this initiative, members could freely exchange their views;
- The initiative was launched as a small one in the first meeting held in Diyarbakır, and in this process PREPARE supported us;
- Significant advances were made since the first meeting;
- The group had a diverse set of views on rural development;
- The group had no goal or interest so as to agree on every issue;
- The meetings organized by the initiative helped enrich the group.

After the opening part, in his speech in which he shared PREPARE's mission, goal and activities, Hannes Lorenzen, PREPARE Organization Group President, stated that:

- PREPARE was a network that has been trying to bring together the rural movements for 13 years;
- Europe-wide rural development was quite a recent approach; and rural development was previously understood only as agriculture;
- One of the priorities for PREPARE was to reflect on how to integrate people into the decision making process;
- For this reason, they were making efforts to support all bottom-up movements;
- They were trying to prevent the processes causing the migration of people who would like to continue living in the rural areas to the cities;
- 13 years ago, before PREPARE, there were many dispersed initiatives and groups on the national level, but the relationships between governments and these groups were generally not amicable, the governments then were suspicious of rural-level initiatives and did not think they could support these initiatives;
- PREPARE tried to demonstrate what has been achieved in the local projects and at the regional level by inviting politicians to the rural areas;
- They found the opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses by bringing local, regional and European contributors together;

- Hence, they were able to share the experiences of countries that have become members of—or were candidates for membership in—the EU;
- Formerly, there was so much confusion about the role of civil society in the field of rural development, and after creating a network, they were able to hear the opinions of the members of civil society.

After this general intro, Lorenzen has stated that:

- PREPARE meant partnership before membership;
- PREPARE had two basic fields of work: sharing information, and networking;
- With the annual meetings, they have assessed where they were and in what areas they have achieved progress;
- At the rural community gatherings that were organized, they have managed to unite civil society, and obtain their contribution and relay this contribution to the politicians;
- They have discussed what could be done in socio-cultural areas, and assessed the potential;
- Rural development was a process that required democracy;
- Throughout the whole PREPARE process, radically different viewpoints and discourses were put forth about the concept of rural development;
- The issues of combining environmental protection and rural development in northern countries, rural development and historical heritage as well as democracy and governance were extensively discussed.

Lorenzen stated his belief that Turkey could be a bridge between Europe and southern countries, and that if she could manage to create stability in the rural areas, Turkey could form a strong bridge.

Following Hannes Lorenzen; Goran Soster, General Secretary of PREPARE, took the floor. After mentioning that PREPARE was a movement that expanded from north to south, and from there to the east, he explained what PREPARE members have done within their own countries and that they were trying to figure out in what ways they could get support to address their needs, and to determine how they could help out each other.

After emphasizing the importance of civil society for rural development, Soster highlighted the following points:

- Countries that have become EU members have experienced job losses, issues of equality of opportunity, due to which people have moved to the cities;
- Rural areas have become impoverished;
- Mainstream policies focusing solely on agriculture have failed to solve these issues;
- Agricultural subsidies are not enough for welfare.

He said that PREPARE was concerned with what could be done to fill this gap, and they were trying to improve the quality of rural life bottom-up.

Repeating that PREPARE was a partnership of European NGOs, Soster maintained that

- This network included non-governmental organizations from 10 EU countries;
- Rather than being open to only EU members, the network was trying to include countries beyond the boundaries of EU;
- They were trying to cooperate with civil society and rural development movements;
- They were trying to collaborate with initiatives in different countries.

Saying that they used three methods in their work, Soster stated that;

- These were conferencing (sharing information, experiences and opinions), thematic workgroups, and mobile workshops;
- They conducted activities in many countries;
- They were trying to develop a network and improve collaboration by means of various workshops, web sites, scholarship opportunities, small scale subsidies, etc.
- Similarly, they also shared information via rural assemblies, a movement that has come to the fore recently;
- The network was in contact with the EU Commission and national stage agencies.

Maintaining that PREPARE could also impact agricultural policies, Soster said that;

- Along with influencing common agricultural policy, in parallel to the paradigm shift in the rural areas, they were trying to achieve a bottom-up strengthening and capacity increase;
- PREPARE was connected to various collaboration areas on the European level;
- Although it was only one of the members of European Rural Development Network, it was influential in Europe on rural issues;
- PREPARE brought sections of society together that had difficulty in communicating with each other and has thus created diversity, and they wished to see Turkey as a part of this network.

After this section, in the Q&A part, the following questions were on the agenda:

- Is PREPARE making efforts to create a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)? What are its thoughts on CAP, on the revisions made in CAP in 2013? Is the rural development component being scrutinized in CAP?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages for the network in Turkey in becoming a part of this network in the rural development area?
- What are the sources of PREPARE's funds?
- In general, how efficiently are the funds spent for networking in Europe (approx. €500 mil.); have these investments achieved their objectives?
- Is there an effort, within PREPARE's fields of interest, directed at agricultural production?
- Does PREPARE have a function in the projects to be undertaken by the NGO networks, and if it does, what is it?

In the context of these questions;

- PREPARE has three roles at the CAP reform level: first, being part of the European Rural Development Network, attending the consulting meetings of the European Commission, and being a member of the LEADER sub-commission and PREPARE has a permanent attendance in all three levels; secondly, it is a group that attends speeches and discussions on CAP and it has been advising goal-oriented programs right from the start; thirdly, it is a part of the slightly larger ARC network;
- The greatest return on being part of a network is sharing information and experience, and increasing capacity;
- PREPARE provides a budget smaller than Foundation France;
- PREPARE is heavily focused on rural development; CAP is not the most important topic within that network, and yet it is in constant contact with farmers' unions;

- In European rural areas, interaction and communication with the rural culture is somewhat separate from agriculture; rural development must be an issue related to neighborhood and dialog.

First Session, Part 2:

Experiences related to PREPARE

On the second session of the first day, Liina Saar of the Rural Movement Kodukant from Estonia, a member country of PREPARE, shared their experiences. In this session, we learned the following points:

- Estonia is a very small country, incomparable in size to Turkey;
- Is a noteworthy model in terms of good collaboration;
- Is represented by 15 independent associations in 15 provinces;
- Has 4435 villages, some of them vacant, the largest of them having a population of 1000 people;
- Kodukant is not a political organization, has a good relationship with the government, and has 5000 active members;
- Their rural assembly gather every two years during the summer and approximately 4000 organizations attend this meeting, discuss priority issues related to the rural areas and try to find solutions to these, and new ideas emerge;
- Decision makers are invited to the assembly which thus helps mutual exchange of information;
- As a product of the assembly, a to-do list program covering a period of two years is created for Kodukant;
- Funds are allocated from the European Commission Agricultural and Rural Development Head Office;
- These gatherings are essential to promote civil society;
- During those meetings, a *village of the year* prize is also given.

After this presentation, Esin Candan from Turkey shared her impressions about Serbia and Estonia conventions to which PREPARE had attended; In her presentation, Candan stated the following:

- In Europe, the rural issues can be described mainly as population decline in the rural areas, the emigration of the young from the rural areas, immigration, and employment issues;
- In these conventions, it was emphasized that civilian initiatives and local actors can also participate in strategic meetings;
- It was also emphasized that it is important for the local actors to take action, and that states can no longer play a significant role in this matter;
- The general impression was that agriculture was taking a back seat and rural development received a heavy emphasis;
- The roles that NGOs can play, the impact of EU funds, the advantages of networks and the need to expand them were discussed in the meetings;
- Project experiences on the national level were shared;
- In the tours organized, primarily the rural tourism projects were visited, while not much communication took place with the people living in the villages;
- Economic diversification in the rural areas were discussed;
- Whether the LEADER program could manage rural poverty, and whether each rural region could be turned into a center of attraction were discussed.

After these observations, Candan mentioned the following:

- She believes it is not very easy for civilian initiatives to be active instead of the state in Turkey;
- At least in terms of employment, there are significant differences between Turkey and European countries;
- The rural areas in Turkey are trying to deal with poverty, and it is impossible for civil initiatives to do this on their own;
- The social structure in Europe is very different from Turkey, and in Europe, life in the rural areas is a preference arising from love of nature, whereas in Turkey this is not the case.

After this, the following issues were on the agenda:

- The types of decisions made in the aforementioned rural parliaments;
- The kind of support these parliaments get to manage their sustainability;
- The methods used to elect the parliament members, their powers and the capacity this power is based on;
- How those living in rural areas make their living, what they produce, their food items;
- The criteria taken into account while selecting the "Village of the Year;"
- Even though the examples given indicated that the relationships with the authorities were smooth, this situation was not exactly applicable for Turkey;
- The kind of efforts done by the rural parliaments on cultural heritage.

In the context of these questions, they said that:

- In 1996, they conducted a meeting with the Estonian government to raise the issues in the villages, and thereby had an exchange of information;
- Thanks to this collaboration, Kodukant became an organization with demands instead of an organization forced to do what the government asked;
- Hence, it has become clear that bottom-up management was more significant than top-down management;
- The official bodies needed NGOs, just as NGOs needed official bodies;
- The greatest factor in the sustainability of the rural parliament was the government's consideration of the ideas of the NGOs;
- There are education centers for the local community and these organizations offer an opportunity for NGOs to collaborate;
- Kodukant had no political identity, was influenced by politics only indirectly; nevertheless, it collaborated with politicians;
- The rural parliament decisions could be found in English on their web site;
- The rural heritage was an important issue from the perspective of tourism, and what was essential was to find a way to retain the income from cultural tourism in the region and to make it possible for the whole community to reap the benefits of it;
- Rural tourism must be developed locally, and the local institutions and organizations and the local government must support it.

After these two sessions, PREPARE members stated the following:

- There's a dilemma in all the new member states regarding production of food items, and although food production is at significant levels, in the long run, it is not sufficient to prevent population decline;
- Governments eventually have to cooperate with NGOs for rural development;

- The decisions of NGOs will be crucial in terms of the approach to programs like LEADER that will be implemented in Turkey;
- In order for the government to take NGOs seriously, these organizations have to improve their organizational skills, speak louder, and demonstrate their capacity;
- Progress can only come through the dynamism of clash of ideas.

Second Session, Part 1:

The NGOs in Turkey in the Field of Rural Development

In the first part of the second session, Tayfun Özkan talked about "Turkish Non-Governmental Actors in the Rural Areas and Turkish Rural Policies." In his presentation, Özkan emphasized the following:

- At present, NGOs are an appropriation of the neo-liberal system; in the relationships between governments, NGOs, and companies, only the accredited (tamed) NGOs have a say;
- This situation creates an illusion of inclusiveness; however, the public has no place in it;
- This is nothing more of a sleight of hand to give the impression of a dialog;
- Real NGOs must object to this pseudo-engagement and the policies developed by the partnership between the governments and the corporations;
- In Europe, the problems of rural development and agriculture has been separated, and food production has somehow been pushed outside the rural culture;
- The EU and countries like the US subsidize export-oriented policies that undermine agriculture in countries like ours, and the losses cannot be compensated for solely by tourism;
- Rural culture and agricultural production are inseparable;
- Any genuine rural development work must be closely coordinated with agricultural production;
- The Turkish organizations for rural development must create a counter-hegemony to this;
- Agro-ecological agricultural system and organized contributor certification might be a solution;
- We must determine what our values will be: money or life, hegemony or counter-hegemony, monologue or dialogue, the illusion of engagement or real engagement;
- When we develop strategies for rural development, we cannot disregard state policies, but the state is undermining rural development with the current subsidy system;
- Rural development subsidies generally support the larger scale farms;
- State monopoly has been replaced by private sector monopoly;
- To deal with these issues, pro-democracy organizations must develop a counter-hegemony; community-based, dialog-based initiatives must be created, and food production independence must be defended.

Following Tayfun Özkaya; Aylin Örnek and İlhan Koçulu took the floor and shared information on the Rural Development Initiative that consists of Turkish NGOs, academics, students, and farmers. In this presentation, they stated the following:

- The initiative was launched to fulfill the need to create a communication medium amongst those active in rural development;
- As of date, they have convened eight times (including the present convention);
- In these conventions, topics that involves rural development and that impacts the rural areas were discussed by all the relevant parties; in every convention, a different region was visited and the problems of that region were discussed; moreover, the rural development initiative itself was also discussed;
- The initiative convenes biannually, and this is a significant success in countries like Turkey;
- A total of 72 organizations have attended the conventions up to date, and 17 of these are regular attendees;
- The achievements of the conventions are as follows: to fill the gap for a communication medium; to gather information about the regions; to engage the viewpoints of state agencies and local governments; to improve the relations with rural areas;
- What by “development” and by progress are meant, whether we should support economic expansion or sustainable life were the most contentious issues within the group.

After these observations, the following points were stated in regards to the weaknesses of the group:

- Due to the fact that attendance grows in each convention, and that the attendees have different experiences, the initiative couldn't come up with a description of common purpose for existence;
- The group is still not ready to advise policy and to carry out lobbying activities;
- It does not conduct information gathering activities;
- It faces problems in developing communication skills;
- Yet, the initiative can be an essential means to eliminate the information chaos on rural development, and can become a pressure group.

Second Session, Part 2:

In the second part of the second session, the activities of four NGOs (Development Center Association, Özyeğin Foundation, Tohum İzi Association, Turkish Development Foundation) that are part of the Rural Development Initiative were presented. As the common denominator of these presentations, the following criteria were determined:

- Some of these organizations operate in the rural areas, some in the urban areas, and some in both.
- All of them care about local development, and see rural development as a fundamental human right.
- In the projects, local knowledge is taken as a fundamental starting point.
- The target groups are the rural and urban poor.
- The primary purpose is to strengthen people.
- These organizations perceive rural development from a wider perspective, i.e. beyond an economic activity.
- In general, the work includes activities to make life easier for women and help them integrate in the economy.

- Although all organizations can see the significance of work on rural development, they state that the subsidies address medium to large scale businesses, and this isolates small farmers from production and destroys them. At this point, NGOs must focus on strengthening the small farmer.
- The rural conditions are different from those in Europe.
- The ultimate goal of rural developers is to help the rural populations achieve a steady income, to create a logic that will activate the economic axis.
- The purpose of rural development in Turkey is different from Europe; the goal is to help those living in rural areas, particularly the small farmers that are under threat, to prevail in those areas.
- It is necessary to view participation as participation in one's local community rather than participation in the project, and to make efforts in that direction.
- The clash is not between the traditional and modern, but between the traditional and state. However, the consciousness and the life styles of the people must be respected.
- In Turkey, there are difficulties in developing creative models rather than methods.

At the end of the convention, the participants from PREPARE stated that:

- They were impressed by the culture of dialog in the convention;
- They have acquired an insight on many NGOs;
- The keynote debates were impressive. After adding that they would be glad to see Turkey within PREPARE, and that as PREPARE, they would be happy to support Turkish NGOs throughout the process of becoming a member, they closed the convention.