Abstract

The Balkan Region of Southeastern Europe has long suffered from political instability and armed conflict. Among other causes, the Balkan conflict is rooted in ethnic tensions exacerbated by competition for scarce resources such as land. Food insecurity, one outgrowth of this tension, is inextricably linked to political stability. The U.S. Country Paper presented at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 linked food insecurity to its antecedents of poverty, war, trade barriers, inappropriate national policies, inadequate agricultural research, poor health, population growth, gender inequity, and environmental degradation. Preventive development investments in Balkan food security are one element of a humane and cost effective approach to reducing future political conflicts and the concomitant costs of peacemaking and peacekeeping. But agronomic advances alone will not ensure food security. Agricultural education and its long standing ties to democratic processes presents one set of options for utilization in situations where both technical and social change are needed. However, these traditional agricultural education approaches require significant modification to be successful under the heightened tensions in the Balkans. Examples of strategies utilized by agricultural educators from Greece and other Balkan countries are included. The paper concludes with comments on the responsibility of various stakeholders as a key in building trust, stability and prosperity.
Introduction

Social instability in the Balkan Region of Southeastern Europe is attributed to a variety of socio-political tensions, including ethnic differences, authoritarian rule, territorial disputes within and between national borders, and lack of political voice for minority groups. Western media coverage of the region focuses primarily on political news, atrocities perpetrated on civilians, and happenings in urban areas. Access to land, food security, and rural well-being are significant problems often overshadowed by more attention-grabbing headlines. Balkan scholars generally agree that the Balkan conflict is rooted in ethnic tensions exacerbated by competition for scarce resources such as land (Glenny, 2000; Sowards, 1996; Kaplan, 1993).

To illustrate, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, are considered low-income food deficit countries by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. They are accompanied on FAO's list by countries such as Malawi, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, and others. Research by the Oslo-based International Peace Research Institute documented that armed conflicts frequently arose when agriculture, the engine of growth in poor countries, was unable to supply and distribute its products. Their report reminds us that “the rehabilitation of agriculture is a central condition for reducing violence…” (de Soysa et al., 1999). Although a solution to the food security problems will not immediately solve the political problems in the Balkans, the link between food security and political stability is worthy of scrutiny to determine implications for social change strategies that can contribute to the preconditions for peace.

Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of agricultural education in circumstances where food insecurity and socio-political instability exist. Specifically, the case of the Balkan Region is examined, with particular reference to Albania. This paper is based on the premise that some socio-political problems of the Balkan Region are rooted in the scarcity of basic resources such as land and food and the inherent competition such circumstances inspire. This paper briefly describes the Balkan historical context, the current situation, and presents six suggested areas where agricultural education can play a contributing role in stabilizing the region, a role that goes beyond the traditional role of agricultural education as practiced in ethnically homogenous areas of the world. The paper concludes with comments on the responsibility of various stakeholders as a key in building trust, stability and prosperity.

Nature of Paper and Sources

This paper presents a philosophical/historical perspective, outlining the intellectual arguments for investments in social capital and agricultural development as a foundation for peace. It draws on lessons learned by agricultural educators working in Greece and the Balkans. The paper is based on a review of literature on food security and Balkan history, and on participant observations conducted in the Balkans. No formal survey was conducted.

Discussion

The Balkans and Globalization

The phrase “Balkan Region” is used to mean the group of nations within the sub-region of Southeastern Europe, including the countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Bulgaria, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, and Slovenia. The Balkan Region is home to more than 12 major ethnic groups, numerous languages, and a variety of political systems. Within this context, it is dangerous to generalize. Sowards (1996) points out that:

*Even the extent of the “Balkan” region is a matter of controversy. Many scholars, especially those writing in the Cold War era, have included only the Communist states, and linked them with Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany, omitting Greece and ignoring Turkey and the Ottoman era. Other historians exclude Hungary, Croatia, and other Hapsburg lands, because of their “central” European character, supposedly contrary to Balkan themes. But the presence of contradictory themes is itself Balkan.*

The conflicts of the last decade in the Balkan Region are the latest manifestation of regional tensions. These problems began to emerge centuries ago when population pressure (due to natural increases and invasions) on a limited land base created instability in the social structure (Sowards, 1996). These pressures exist today but have been exacerbated by the rise and fall of post-World War II communism and the rise of a dysfunctional political environment that prevails in a number of Balkan countries. While it is not the intent of this paper to provide a detailed history of the Balkan conflicts, it is important to note the context for the current political situation is partly historic.

Tanter and Psarouthakis, in their book “Balancing in the Balkans” (1999), debate two competing views regarding the forces that will shape the future of the Balkans. On the one hand, globalization (in this case referring to the homogenization of cultures) may yield expanded economic opportunities for all. General prosperity, food security and a stake in the success of democratic institution building may be a key to future regional stability. On the other hand, tribalism (in this case referring to the divisiveness emerging from radical ethnocentrism in the void left by strong central government) may yield further separation. Ethnic differences have been the primary social force in Balkan history. Will conditions of stability be more easily achieved through a melting of cultures or through harmonious separateness?

Those who count on globalization as a panacea may be disappointed, for while it has been rapid it has also been unbalanced in its distribution of benefits. Globalization has succeeded in market and business development but has resulted in “grotesque and dangerous polarization among nations and people” (UNDP Human Development Report, 1999). Globalization looks different depending on where on the globe one sits. While for many it offers the possibility of transcending one’s own national identity and participating in a global community, others find that possibility so threatening that they turn towards potentially violent expressions of ethnic identity and xenophobia. Globalization has also tended to weaken national governments who see their power and responsibilities draining downward through decentralization, outward through privatization and upwards through the growing trends towards regional and international convenants in international governance. As a result governments can find themselves either too weak to combat extremist movements within their own borders or worse yet, may come to foment ethnic division and xenophobia as a means of rallying flagging support.
The Land

Today, the majority of conflicts in the world are civil wars. Frequently, these conflicts are based on struggles for access to resources. In the Balkans, access to land is constrained, in part, because arable land is in limited supply. Balkan farmland is generally characterized by two deficiencies: thin, highly eroded, rocky soils, and relatively few flat, arable, non-mountainous parcels (balkan means “mountainous” in Turkish). Food security and access to land resources are closely linked, with access to land and other productive resources a fundamental prerequisite to food security. Under communism, the land ownership pattern precipitously changed, and the vast majority of the population had to adjust to the fact that they exercised little control over the land they worked, the crops they planted, or the food they could find in the market. After 1989, when population dislocations took place, access to the means of food production was limited or curtailed, with immediate impact on indigenous food production. Greece is the noteworthy exception to this historical pattern, and may hold lessons that can be applied elsewhere in the Balkans. Greece has maintained policies supportive of private ownership of land and of individual farmers through extension and research services.

Land restitution is also a complex process in a highly charged environment like the Balkans. “Restitution of property rights is a special technical, political, and legal problem” for countries transitioning from a system of social (or government owned) property to a more liberal system of private ownership rights (FAO, 2000). Attachment to the land is a significant variable in the Balkans. White (2000) argues effectively that a nation’s sense of territory and the accompanying emotional attachment to the area are “integral components of national identity.” Understanding the biophysical landscape is an important first step in land restitution, land planning and social change. However, in areas of longstanding conflict, understanding the emotional and cultural landscape is also a necessary prerequisite.

Food Security and Democracy

For the purposes of this paper, food security is defined as follows: “When all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life.” This was the definition utilized in 1996 in “Strategies for Enhancing Food Security: US Presentation to the World Food Summit – A Plan of Action”. The U.S. presentation included a list of factors contributing to food insecurity. The list included poverty, war, trade barriers, inappropriate national policies, inadequate agricultural research, poor health, population growth, gender inequity, and environmental degradation (U.S. Government, 1996). The first of the seven commitments of the World Food Summit of 1996 is the establishment of an enabling environment for development. First among the objectives of this element of the action plan is the prevention and resolution of conflicts peacefully. The inclusion of such language in a food security action plan underscores the role of the variety of strategies and approaches (beyond production and distribution) necessary to achieve global food security.

Further evidence of the link between food security and governance is found in a report released in 1999 by the US Central Intelligence Agency examining determinants of state failure (http://ecsp.si.edu/pdf/Report5-Sect2-a.pdf). Among other findings the report described the high correlation between government stability and the well-being of citizens in terms of health, hunger, and economic prosperity. A related and more elegant argument is made by Amartya Sen who points out that no substantial famine has ever occurred in a democratic country (Sen, 1999). Sen points out that countries with multiparty elections and
vibrant, independent media have strong political incentives to prevent famines and safeguard economic freedom and the freedom to survive.

Over the past 50 years, development has focused on economic development, largely ignoring the role of governance and rule of law. Agriculture has played a significant role as an engine of national development particularly among food insecure nations; frequently cited successes include India, Mexico, and Korea. But reforms without attention to economic equity issues frequently leads to long-term instability. In the rural Balkans, agricultural development projects can be an effective tool for introducing democratic values and processes as well as for improving economic well-being.

Since the end of the Cold War, multilateral, bi-lateral, and private donors have turned their attention towards various forms of “democracy development.” The experience, however, has been mixed. While the relationship between democratic forms of government and the development of free and more equitable societies seems evident, proactively promoting democracy has proven extremely difficult. The first lesson that seems to be emerging is that aiding in the (re)construction of democratic societies needs to be comprehensive—it is not enough to change property laws and liberalize the economy thinking that an invisible hand will take care of the rest. Second, efforts must be long-term and sustained—there is no known formula for overnight democracy. Third, “democracy” comes in many shapes and sizes—Uganda’s experiment with the “no-party” state accompanied with a considerable degree of civil liberties has sparked an interesting debate in this regard. Fourth, and most relevant to this paper, is that many of the “wholesale” aspects of democracy promotion (economic policies, judicial reform, political engineering, etc.) must be accompanied by efforts to renew and strengthen a strong and independent civil society. For it is precisely the kinds of values learned through participation in village-level agriculture projects that can be the building blocks, at the “retail” level, of a strong civil society.

Investments in development assistance such as in agriculture, infrastructure, and education, often referred to as "preventive" development, are now understood by many foreign affairs and defense experts as a less expensive stability seeking strategy than armed intervention. The rising costs of curative measures such as peacemaking, peacekeeping, refugee assistance, and infrastructure rebuilding provide additional rationale for preventive development. One need only look to the astronomical costs of conflicts and subsequent refugee and peacekeeping investments in Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique to understand the logic of investments in a preventive development approach.

The Role of Greece in Balkan Stability

Greece, having chosen a very different political route over the past 50 years, is in a unique position to be of assistance in the Balkan Region. Greece seems to have understood the relationship between rural development and national stability as evidenced by a comment from the Director of Extension in the Greek Ministry of Agriculture “we have survived all of our political upheavals only because of our bolstered agricultural economy” (The Farm Quarterly, 1966, as quoted by Brenda Marder in “Stewards of the Land”).

For example, several institutions in Greece have actively developed partnerships with Balkan institutions. These include the American Farm School, the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) in Thessaloniki, and the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. These institutions understand the important link between education, prosperity, and socio-political stability and realize that Greece can make a unique regional contribution. These three institutions have worked to develop model secondary schools, have opened their doors
to students and officials from Balkan countries, have offered short-term training to leaders of numerous Balkan institutions, have provided support in a variety of forms to agricultural universities in several countries, have trained non-governmental leaders, and have helped to establish a modern extension service in one country. They have always partnered with appropriate local counterparts wherever they have worked. They have also partnered with other institutions such as the University College Dublin, Queens University of Belfast, Virginia Tech, and Cranfield University. This is not to suggest that Greece is the only country involved in the Balkans; there are donors and NGOs from many major industrialized countries, with Western Europe particularly well represented.

Innovations in Agricultural Education Relevant to the Balkans

Along with their colleagues in other Balkan countries these institutions experimented with the modification of several traditional agricultural education interventions in an attempt to answer the question: How can agricultural education contribute to food security in politically unstable regions? The following is a summary of lessons learned based on field experience.

1) Rural development relies on leader development. Many rural problems require external resources to expedite their solution. But all rural problems require local leadership to develop consensus on priorities, advocate with higher levels of government, mobilize citizen action, and other tasks. The methodology from Cultivating Inspired Leaders: Making Participatory Management Work (Lansdale, 2000) has been used in non-governmental organization workshops in Croatia, Kosovo and Albania with an aim to training the trainers of such local leaders. This methodology stresses that rural development a) depends on management training for both volunteers and professionals; b) must recognize that rural populations will dwindle in size and must concentrate equal if not greater efforts on training for non-agricultural occupations; c) must assure adequate credit both for those remaining in agriculture and those working in non-agricultural occupations; d) must place particular emphasis on training women in cooperative and credit management to encourage them to develop small businesses in their rural setting; e) must emphasize training of local leaders in the skills of management which are foreign to peoples who have been dominated by communist regimes for half a century (e.g. a USAID/ORT program has proven very successful in Bosnia/Herzegovina); and, f) must be aware of the historical impact of 500 years of Ottoman occupation which has left a distrust of government authorities as well as a suspicious view of one's neighbor.

2) Development is enhanced through the democratization of information access. Rapid agricultural development depends on producers and marketers having access to information on technologies, on support services and on markets. Empowerment of disenfranchised citizens can be enhanced though the improvement of rural communications. Growth in Internet usage and access to cell phones has helped to expand access to relevant information in the Balkans where literacy rates are relatively high. Exposure through the Internet can introduce students to the nature of international agribusiness, while simultaneously bringing them into contact with democratic institutions and a diversity of ideas. These experiences also help to interest students in English language study and in making contacts throughout and beyond their region.

3) Investments in education are a good starting place. Long-term prosperity depends, in large measure, on the development of social capital. Investments in human resource development in the Balkans are essential and donors around the world have invested heavily
in this area since 1991. One significant example is the development of Korca and Berat Pilot Agricultural Secondary Schools and the development of a department dealing with agricultural education and extension at the Agricultural University of Tirana in Albania. Through the European Union funded project named AVATAR (Alliance for Vocational Agricultural Training in the Albanian Region) significant investments were made in curriculum development, teacher/staff development and infrastructure rehabilitation during the period of 1993-96.

4) Development of a culture of agricultural entrepreneurs can help to counter historic reliance on centrally planned governments. For example, market information development and training of agricultural entrepreneurs has been successful under the USAID-supported Small and Medium Business Center in Korca, Albania. The development of a private extension service organized through the Albanian Fertilizer and Agribusiness Dealers Association (AFADA was established in 1993) has also added to the support network for entrepreneurs, an effort led by the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) and supported by TEI Thessaloniki, and the University College Dublin. The work by the IFDC-led team demonstrated a successful alternative to public sector extension services that are often inefficient and expensive to operate. A key component of this system is the continuing education provided to the AFADA members.

5) Rebuilding of social organizations is as vital as rebuilding roads and bridges. Rural cooperative organizations and other citizen associations can provide excellent first hand experience in group formation, needs assessments, and group action. For example, in Albania where the population resisted cooperatives of any kind following their liberation from a centralized economy, USAID and ACDI/VOCA worked through local leaders to organize the National Farmers Union, which stands out as a success in organizing Albanian producers.

6) Help young people to develop democratic values. The greatest casualty of totalitarian regimes and armed conflict, especially ethnic conflict, is trust. And without the fundamental ability to trust one’s neighbor, trust in community, in institutions and, ultimately, in government, is impossible. Students from war torn communities, need to learn about the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, community stewardship, citizen participation, and to re-discover the values of sharing, fairness and solidarity that exist in all societies. Such mechanisms as rural school-community service experiences help to expand inter-ethnic and interracial understanding as well as how to work together with diverse groups. The Soros Foundation has invested heavily in FYROM and Albania through Schools in Community Service, involving parents, students and teachers in community service projects. International experience can also introduce students to the cultural diversity of the world and to government, community, and academic approaches in other countries. For example, globalization of Balkan students is supported through one of the many European Union TEMPUS and other projects providing mobility in the form of study visits and semester exchanges. Such experiences give professional and youth populations throughout Europe and beyond insights into other nations, other cultures, and the workings of democratic institutions within and outside their region. Another example is the Dimitris Perrotis College of Agricultural Studies at the American Farm School that is now recruiting students from Albania, Bulgaria and FYROM as a way to encourage exchange within the region.
Responsibility of Governments

It is difficult to avoid the reality that sustainable development, stability and peace in the Balkan region will require strong governments that are democratic in nature. At the same time Balkan governments are suffering from the ravages of war and from the pressures of globalization discussed earlier in this paper. In an ideal sense, Balkan governments have the responsibilities of all governments to protect human rights, promote economic development and provide security for all their citizens. In the short term, however, their ability to do so is limited. The international community must be careful to not be so impatient, that it usurps the responsibility of Balkan government in the name of development “results”. This will require true partnership and a long-term view. The “crisis” in the Balkans goes back many centuries and sovereignty is a fundamental part of that crisis.

It is clearly in the interest of the Greek government to support initiatives that enhance peace in the Balkan region. The European Union is the source of considerable support for Balkan aid and the Greek Foreign Ministry and other ministries are engaged in implementing programs funded by the EU. Greece has a key role to play in the future of the Balkans. The European Union, NATO and the United States would be wise to work through Greece as an intermediary to take advantage of their deeper understanding of the forces that have shaped the Balkans. One very positive development along these lines is a technology transfer program now being established linking the donor resources of the US with Greek technical expertise to assist neighboring countries in the Balkans. The leadership of President Clinton and US Ambassador Burns was central to the development of this program.

Responsibility of Non-Governmental Organizations

There is an NGO community in the Balkans though, it too, has been seriously weakened by the political history and conflicts of the region. Its growth and health is fundamental to building civil society and democracy. Donors and international NGOs must be careful not to smother or otherwise weaken local NGOs in a flood of development efforts and dollars. This problem has already arisen in Kosovo where the most talented of a limited pool of local NGO workers were quickly employed by international development agencies and NGOs to speed the relief efforts. Like government, the local NGO community has to be a long-term engine of agricultural and other development. Moreover, if democratic transitions in the Balkans occur as in many other parts of the globe, governments will look to NGOs as partners and/or as a talent pool for filling public sector positions.

Responsibility of Agricultural Educators

No one would logically or convincingly argue that agricultural education alone can solve the seemingly intractable socio-political problems of the Balkan Region. Agricultural educators need to explore expanded roles for agricultural education on the world stage. It won’t be enough to rely on traditional agricultural education approaches; new approaches will need to be designed and field tested. The role of education in promoting democratic institutions will offer agricultural educators a leadership role should they choose to accept such a role. Models for responsible and responsive education are needed.

Summary

Glenny (2000) warns that: “… if the great powers fail to seize the present opportunity by investing heavily in the region, the suffering of the Balkans will surely continue for several decades into the new millennium.” It is in our global collective interest to invest in activities that enhance political stability rather than have to spend much larger
sums on peacekeeping and post-conflict democratization. Agricultural education can play an important role in this process.

References


