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IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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Date	Author	Description
17/10/2006	Theodoros Ioannou	Overall supervision
17/10/2006	Doros Theocharides	Desk/field research and report preparation
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1 Introduction and background

1.1 An introduction to rural employment

In Cyprus in recent years unemployment has not been an issue since the rate is low and approaches the full employment rate. Those who are unemployed are temporarily out of work due to seasonality of their occupation or due to the restructuring of some sectors of the economy.

The rate of unemployment in Cyprus, as shown in the table below, is one of the lowest of the Euro fifteen countries.

Table 1: Economically Active Population, Gainfully employed Population and Registered Unemployment 1999 – 2005

	Thousands						
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Economically Active	318,8	325,1	330,6	335,3	340,1	347,0	355,5
Economically Active to Total Population (in %)	46.4	46.9	47.1	47.3	47.2	47.1	47.1
Gainfully Employment	298,1	304,8	311,4	314,7	318,8	325,3	333.6
Unemployed	11,4	10,9	9,5	10,6	12,0	12,7	13.1
Unemployment rate (in %)	3.6	3.4	2.9	2.2	3.5	3.6	3.7
Other Economically Active Population*	9,3	9,4	9,7	10,0	9,3	9,0	8.8

*temporarily working outside the Republic of Cyprus or in armed forces

In 2004 the rate of unemployment for the whole of Cyprus for men was 2.6% and 5.1% for women. Rural unemployment was slightly lower at 2.5% for men and 4.9% for women. In agriculture the number of persons registered as unemployed for the past four years averaged less than 100 persons.

Rural unemployment is expected to remain at par or somewhat lower than urban unemployment for three main reasons.

- Younger people (especially those with education higher than secondary) are likely to move to urban areas. They are more likely to accept jobs that are relatively less prestigious or rewarding than those of urban peers. This has been the case for quite some time and is illustrated by the percentages of the age groups in Table 1 of the Annex.
- Older people in rural areas are more likely to be under-employed in agriculture and handicrafts. Coupled with the lower cost of living they are less likely to actively seek a job than their urban peers are. In addition, under-employment or part-time employment of older people in urban areas is rare due to the prevalence of cheaper labour force (college students and especially foreign students). This leads to a higher percentage of urban older people being registered as unemployed.

- As far as women are concerned, women in urban areas are more likely to work due to the higher cost of living and the wider choice of jobs. On the other hand, women in rural areas are less likely to be registered as unemployed due to part-time employment in activities such as agriculture, handicraft, making of traditional food etc, coupled with more home responsibilities (lack of nursing homes and greater social emphasis on a traditional wife role).

The most important factor affecting rural employment in Cyprus is the employment of foreign seasonal and full – time workers as well as the «illegal» employment of persons who visit Cyprus as tourists and remain behind.

1.2 Agricultural employment

It is estimated that foreign workers account for more than 70% of the agricultural workers of Cyprus. It is no exaggeration to say that if the Government did not grant work – permits for foreign labourers, the growing of potatoes, grapes and citrus would be abandoned. Other sectors which managed to survive due to foreign labour are pig farming, cows farming and poultry farming.

According to the 2005 Labour Force Survey, 4.7% of total labour was employed in agriculture. Males outnumbered females as 5.7% of the male labour force population was employed in agriculture compared to a 3.5% for females. Agricultural employment in rural areas makes up 9.5% of total employment compared to 1.2% for urban areas. The latest figures for Jan-Aug 2006 show that unemployment in the field of agriculture was very low as it made up just 0.6% of total unemployment. Agriculture workers were 0.2% of the unemployed. The findings of a 2004 survey showed that there had been an increase in the number of those unemployed in agriculture between 1995 and 2000. Then there was a steep decrease in 2001 and their number remained somewhat stable thereafter. Percentage-wise, there was a modest increase from 1.3% in 1995 to 1.4% in 2000, followed by a decline to 0.8% in 2001 and a further decrease to 0.6% in 2004. The number of skilled unemployed agricultural workers was relatively stable during those years with the exception of a drop between 2000 and 2001. All those unemployed in the agricultural sector had an education that did not exceed upper secondary.

According to the same 2004 survey, 43% of those in agriculture were self-employed, 30% unpaid family members, 21% employees and 6% employers with employees. As far as skilled agricultural workers are concerned, 86% of them are males. Moreover, female skilled agricultural workers have decreased considerably both in relation to males and in absolute numbers. On the other hand, foreign skilled agricultural workers have increased considerably as their number doubled between the years 1999 and 2004. Foreign workers provide cheap labour and are crucial in some low profit markets. In particular, vines provide a very modest income for farmers resulting in the abandoning of land. Many of those in this market are either very old, and working to supplement their pensions, or do this as their second job. Cheaper foreign labour slows down the abandoning of vine land. As more and more younger people move out of rural areas to urban ones, the presence of foreign workers is expected to increase. This may be more prevalent in the vine and mountain areas than in the coastal and dry land areas as the percentage of land owned by older people is significantly higher.

There have been incentives for younger farmers to obtain land and move into agriculture and for older people to retire and make their land available to younger people. Both of these schemes have been moderately successful. Their success, though, must be repeated if they are to enhance rural life, otherwise it would have been a one-time boost to the declining rural economy.

According to a Ministry of Agriculture Natural Resources and Environment official, the next few years would indicate whether more younger people are ready to move to rural areas and whether younger people already living in rural areas would remain there.

According to a 2004 survey, agriculture is the main choice for those having a second job. More specifically, of those having a second job 44% has agriculture as their second one. The numbers are very different for males and females. Agriculture is the second job for 50% of the men and just under 18% for women. 99% of the men and 100% of the women are self-employed for their agricultural second job. A good example would be a primary or high school teacher who owns a plot of land and spends his afternoon in the fields.

On the other hand, of those having a second job, agriculture is the first job of just 6% of the total. Once again males outnumber the females as 7% of males have agriculture as their first job as compared to 2% of females.

For those who are full-time self-employed, those in agriculture work more hours per week. Both males and females in agriculture work more hours than their equivalents in other sectors but males exceed their peers even more. This is shown in Table 2 of the Annex.

For those employed, male and female difference is small. Still, their hours of work per week are amongst the highest and the numbers have been stable for the past years. As far as wages are concerned, males are paid 73% more an hour than females. (2004 – males: 8.23 Euros, females: 4.75 Euros).

The Agricultural Economics Report number 40 –September 2001 highlighted some interesting findings of a 1999 survey. The mean age of full-time workers in agriculture is higher than for part-time workers. Regarding the type of off-farm jobs, 61% of the respondents were employed in the public sector, 33% in the private sector as employees or self-employed and 4% were agricultural workers. Those that also have employment in other sectors are less likely to seek loans for investing in agriculture. In most cases, unless part-timers are self-employed, they become full-time farmers after retirement from their off-farm jobs. Part-time farmers are less likely to continue in both jobs, as they get older. The tendency was to let a successor take over the farm after retirement as they have more resources to afford retirement than full-time farmers.

1.3 Non-agricultural employment

Employment in the secondary sector in rural areas makes up 28% of total employment in rural areas (urban 21%) whereas the tertiary sector makes up 62% of total employment (urban 77%). 29% of total employment is in rural areas. The sectors that exhibit rural employment higher than this are:

- Hotels/restaurants 43%
- Construction 37%
- Manufacturing 32%

Non-agricultural employment is more limited in some rural areas. Generally it is true that the more adjacent a rural area is to an urban one, the higher the non-agricultural employment is. Dealing with rural areas as a whole the following distinctions can be made (figures for the years 2000-2004):

- The most important sectors in descending order for rural areas are:
 - Hotels and restaurants (by far)
 - Manufacturing
 - Wholesale/retail trade
 - Construction

- Of medium importance
 - Education
 - Other activities
 - Transport/communication
 - Public administration/defence

- Of least importance
 - Health/social work
 - Real estate
 - Financial mediation
 - Electricity/water supply
 - Mining

Real estate and construction have exhibited the highest growth in terms of employment but this was not limited to rural areas. The boom in property prices and construction was nationwide, and given the number of permits obtained, the growth in these sectors is expected to be sustained for at least two or three years. In the sector of construction though, the rise of cheap foreign labour is expected to slow down the rise in employment for native workers. Despite the steep rise in the full-time equivalent employment for the real estate sector, it still remains greatly lower than in urban areas.

Wholesale and retail trade have also exhibited a very big increase and their rate of increase is accelerating. Still, these sectors are less important for rural employment than they are for urban employment.

The hotels and restaurants sector has exhibited a steady increase in absolute numbers and has remained steady in its percentage contribution. It is by far the most important rural sector in terms of employment. In terms of full-time equivalent employment it makes up more than a quarter of non-agricultural rural employment. It is noteworthy that the so called “tourist villages” have increased from 1(one) in 1995 to 22 in 2004 and the bed places have increased in the same period from 222 to 6926.

This sector is far more important to rural employment than to urban employment. It must be noted, though, that most of this sector (especially the hotels sector) flourishes in areas that are somewhat adjacent to coastal cities. Thus, important as it may be, it mostly relates to areas that are adequately developed and could, to an extent, be considered as extensions of the urban areas.

The sectors of manufacturing and transport/communication have exhibited increases in employment but their percentage contribution has decreased marginally. They differ in

importance in relation to the urban sectors. Manufacturing plays a much more important role in rural areas employment than in urban areas employment. On the other hand, transport and communications remain of less importance in the rural areas.

Health care and social work employment remain very low in rural areas. The problem this situation creates is somewhat alleviated by the small distances to urban health and social care and the good road networks, but is aggravated by the poor public transportation system and the issue of the ageing rural population.

Financial intermediation and public administration remain of lower importance in rural area employment and have a declining percentage. This may be an indication of future possible problems to the rural economy due to the importance of these sectors in providing the means and know-how needed in establishing and maintaining a competitive economy.

2 The context of rural employment

2.1 New employment opportunities

There have been instances when factories have relocated to rural areas in an effort to obtain adequate and cheaper labour force. They were mainly targeting for the immobile female rural population. In most cases though (with the clothing industry being the most notable), these industries were dying ones mainly because they were unable to compete with lower cost products from Asian countries. If this effort were to be repeated the same bad ending would follow mainly due to the following reasons:

- Their costs would still be higher than that of industries in other countries
- Most young people prefer to seek for a job in the urban areas, thus reducing the pool of a fast, strong and versatile work force
- The female population that used to work in factories has aged. They would need additional training and would not be very efficient

The level of education has risen significantly resulting in young people looking for white-collar jobs in the urban areas. Nowadays, younger people are more mobile and move easier from industry to industry and from company to company. Thus, they prefer to move to the urban areas where they have more options regarding the job they choose and keep looking for higher paying jobs.

There have been instances of wine factories moving from urban to rural areas (for example SODAP) and from one rural area to another. If cheaper foreign labour continues to be employed in vines then more wine factories may open up in some areas. On the other hand, if vineyards continue to be abandoned due to very low profit margins, then even the existing wine factories may be reduced.

The different schemes aimed to support the establishment of small businesses in rural areas by craftsmen have been somewhat successful but still a lot needs to be done. Most of the applications are for local wine factories, making of dairy products, making of traditional food/clothing/pottery and so on.

Agro-tourism seems to be the most promising sector for new employment opportunities. Most of the successful existing establishments are near urban areas or concentrated in the southeast part of the island. What these have in common is that they are located in coastal areas and aim for the summer season. The government's effort is for more small hotels and apartments to be established in the inland rural areas. These would mainly be small and perhaps family businesses that would aim for tourists that are of higher age, more culturally and environmentally interested and that are not limited to the summer season. If such an effort is successful, then more employment opportunities would be opened in traditional products making, small shop ownership and other services needed to fulfil the needs of an increase in tourism such as transportation, financial intermediation, gas stations, restaurants, traditional entertainment and so on. An increase in agro tourism seems as the best bet for boosting dying rural areas.

The possibility of establishing by the University of Cyprus a Faculty of Agriculture in one of the mountainous areas was examined and rejected. If at a future point, an action of this kind takes place then the local area would get a boost in terms of its economy and also (together with adjacent areas) in terms of access to education and employment.

2.2 Education and skills – levels, access and provision

The level of education in rural areas is considerably lower than in urban ones. For the age group 20-39 one in five persons in rural areas had education higher than secondary whereas the figure in urban areas is four in ten. In rural areas those completing tertiary non-university education were very slightly more than those completing university education. In urban areas university graduates outnumbered those completing tertiary non-university education. This could in part be explained by the higher cost incurred for those seeking university education. There is only one university in Cyprus but many colleges. Those opting to attend a university overseas incur a much higher cost and urban families can afford those higher costs easier than rural families. For people aged 45 and above, just over 5% of those in rural areas have completed education higher than secondary. The figure for those in urban areas rises to 19%.

As far as the rural population is concerned, females are more educated than males. For the age group 20-39 just one in six males has education higher than secondary. In contrast, one in four females had completed tertiary education. Males are split between university and non-university tertiary education whereas females in most cases choose non-university education.

When it comes to primary education the picture is mixed. There is a higher fraction of females than males completing just primary education for the ages 35+. This is reversed though for ages below 35 years of age with proportionately more males with no more than primary education.

As far as access to education is concerned, rural areas have adequate access to primary and secondary education. The main difference relates to the number of students per school. The number of primary schools in rural areas is the same as the number in urban areas. The pupils of primary schools in rural areas, though, are just under half of those in urban areas. Schools in urban areas have a slight problem of overpopulation but schools in rural areas have fewer students than what is needed to provide the growing children with a diversity of interactions and stimuli. The pupil/teacher ratio for public primary schools is 15.9 for urban schools and 12.6 for rural ones. In addition, according to the 2004 educational statistics, 27 private primary schools existed in urban areas with 3174 pupils whereas only 1 private primary school existed in rural areas with 278 pupils.

As far as training is concerned, Centres of Agricultural Training exist in many regions either in governmental buildings or by using the buildings of the National Union of Government Employees as a base. Most courses need between 150 and 300 hours for completion. Those qualifying for allowance are paid 70 Euros per day. Younger persons below the age of 40 are entitled to an extra allowance of 17 Euros per day. According to the Agricultural Economics Report 40 –September 2001 the larger the farm size the more the agricultural education of the owner. Those who have followed training courses own an average of 30% more land.

As far as Research & Development is concerned agricultural sciences get 20% of the pie with 95% of that coming from the government. In 2003, the Ministry of Agriculture Natural Resources and Environment (MANRE) allocated 65% of the R & D budget to agricultural sciences, 27% in natural sciences, 4% in engineering and technology and 3% to social sciences. Current R & D expenditure by MANRE made up 74% of the total R & D governmental expenditure. 10% of that was allocated to basic research, 74% to applied research and 16% to experimental development.

According to a Life Long Learning Survey of 2003, 6% of agricultural and fishery workers had non-formal training compared to an average of 24.7% for all workers. The picture for informal learning is the same with 11.5% of agricultural and fishery workers having any, compared to an average of 33.6% for all workers. Agriculture and veterinary subjects made up just 0.5% of the total hours of non-formal education.

As far as foreign workers are concerned, 21% of those employed in rural areas are in agriculture/hunting/forestry out of which 90% has not gone beyond secondary education. However, it is not unusual to find university graduates mainly from eastern European countries (physicists, chemists, engineers, nurses) working in agriculture doing the work of labourers.

2.3 Other key factors in employment (if any)

The issue of foreign workers has become very important. The cost of harvesting has increased considerably and permanent or seasonal workers from abroad are employed due to their lower wages. In areas that the employment of foreign workers is more difficult the yield is often left unharvested and this is most obvious in the vine areas and olive groves. The proportion of foreign workers to total workers in agriculture has risen from 14.4% in 2000 to 19.4% in 2003 and currently exceeds 22%.

Employment in the primary sector as a percentage of total employment is predicted to fall from 5.1% in 2005 to 4.3% in 2015.

Relating to the above is the predictions made by the Human Resource Development Authority that the demand for skilled agricultural workers will fall by 13% by the year 2015 whereas the demand for unskilled (and therefore much cheaper) agricultural workers will rise by 17% by 2015.

The Government of Cyprus has made various attempts to encourage women living in rural areas to become entrepreneurs by offering them grants and subsidies to start their own business. This was additional to the incentives of the Rural Development Plan for young farmers aged 18 – 39 which applied to both men and women. The results of these attempts were very disappointing, because women living in rural areas have to care about their small children, help their husbands

in agricultural jobs or are wives of business people who are successful and do not want their wives to work.

Entrepreneurs who decide to locate their factories in rural areas get a subsidy of 30% of the costs of buildings, machinery and equipment from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The evaluating committee gives priority to applications which plan to employ unemployed male and female labour as well as persons for quality assurance and for environmental protection.

3 Specific rural employment issues

3.1 The nature of under-employment

Under-employment is more prevalent in the case of women and older men. Women laid off from closed factories may be somewhat active in handicrafts but mainly for providing for their own family. The small market, their inefficiency and lack of capital prohibit them from becoming a part of such a market. In the case of older men, they may have passed ownership of their farms to their children and became less active in the farms. Younger people may suffer less from under-employment since they are more likely to work full-time in their families' farms (mainly dairy farms) or rent more land if they do not own a sufficient amount. In addition, younger people are more likely to have higher education and thus be employed in either the secondary or the tertiary sector.

The issue of under-employment is more prominent in mountainous or semi-mountainous regions. Approximately half of the families in those regions have no alternatives other than the agricultural sector. The movement of a higher proportion of young people from these areas to urban areas escalates the problem as these communities have reduced access to modern technology and information as well as to a more versatile and innovating work force. In these areas, most of the people are occupied in agriculture for the equivalent of half a year's work.

A recent phenomenon which affects the under – employment issue is the increased unemployment rate of the university graduates with a first and possibly second and third degrees. The rate of unemployment for this category is around 10% as these persons wait to be employed as government employees or secondary school teachers which offer salaries twice as high as those paid by the private sector.

Some of these graduates, of course, get temporary employment in the private sector, in urban and rural areas or give private lessons to students but for statistical purposes they are considered as unemployed although in fact they are under – employed.

A small number of university graduates have recently started establishing small business in rural areas which are either based in a high level of technology such as greenhouse cultivation with advanced irrigation systems or organic farming (grapes, olive oil, and wine). This trend is likely to be increased.

3.2 The scale of semi-subsistence farming

Semi-subsistence farming has been a necessity and a hobby. Before 1974, a considerable proportion of the rural but also of the urban population used to have their own citrus trees,

vineyards, fig trees and so on. They also owned pieces of land on which they grew wheat, barley and vegetables. Each household had a small number of animals such as chicken, goats, sheep, pigs and even one or two cows. In the fields they grew dry fodder crops to feed their animals. All the family was working and most household in the rural areas were self – sufficient.

The invasion of Cyprus by Turkey in 1974 and the displacement of 40% of the population, deprived the people of the possibility of semi – subsistence farming and at the same time provided the farmers with farms in the non – occupied areas with relatively cheaper labour.

The construction boom in the late seventies and the establishment of light industry (clothing, footwear, plastics) presented employment opportunities to farm labour who at the same time remained weakened farmers to supplement their incomes and grow the food supplies for their families.

The semi – subsistence farmers of Cyprus sell their produce from the farm gate or in open air markets, but most of them use their produce to satisfy the needs of their families or share them with friends and relatives.

As far as livestock farming is concerned in Cyprus all dairy, pig, sheep, goat and chicken farms are operated on a commercial basis. However, in rural areas some household, practise semi – subsistence farming by keeping a small number of goats and sheep in order to make milk products for their own needs or for sale in the neighbourhood.

3.3 The implications of the ‘Lisbon Strategy’

The Lisbon Strategy puts emphasis on certain goals which include the achievement of full employment, the raising of quality standards at the workplace and the achievement of social cohesion.

In Cyprus there is no need in general to promote employment in Agriculture, since as mentioned already in the report there is no unemployment in agriculture and on the contrary some thousands of foreign workers are employed seasonally or full-time in agriculture or in non-agricultural rural employment.

The employment of foreign labour in rural areas has created problems of social cohesion especially with those who are granted visas to stay for four years and even stay permanently if they get married to a Cypriot national. Problems have also started to be created when a foreign labourer is hired to replace a local labourer.

Until now the situation is under control, because the employment of foreign labourers is done with the conditions contained in the agreement which has been prepared and approved by the farmers unions, the Employers’ Organizations and the Government.

Further accomplishment of the goals set by the Lisbon Strategy is in part dependent on adequate Research and Development expenditure. As noted above the 2003 current R & D expenditure by the Ministry of Agriculture Natural Resources and Environment (MANRE) made up 74% of the total governmental expenditure in R & D. It is therefore unlikely for more money being invested in R & D for agriculture or rural development.

4 Overview and prospects

Since 1975 the importance of the Primary Sector of Cyprus declined as evidenced by the number of persons employed which decreased from 37 100 in 1974 to 24 400 in 2004. Of the 24 400 persons employed, 22 500 work in agriculture, hunting and forestry, 1300 in fishing and about 600 in mining and quarrying.

At the same time employment in the secondary sector increased from 34 600 persons to 68 900 persons and the employment in the tertiary sector increased from 63 300 persons to 229 200 persons.

The rural areas suffered the most since in these areas the activities carried out are mostly of the primary and secondary sectors.

Unemployment in rural areas is low and non – existent. On the contrary a large number of foreign workers is employed on a full time or on a seasonal basis. This potentially might create problems of integration and social cohesion.

Many attempts by the Cyprus Government to stimulate the primary sector and keep people in rural areas have not been successful with the result that the number of persons employed in agriculture to become less and less. As more and more local workers leave employment in agriculture to live and work in the urban areas foreign labour is given permission to work in Cyprus in order to enable farms and agro – industry to survive.

Relocation of enterprises of the secondary sector or location of enterprises at the tertiary sector in rural areas had some success but did not create any lasting impact due to a combination of factors such as:

- Lack of semi – skilled and skilled labour
- Lack of infrastructure and facilities
- Distance from raw – material sources and from export ports
- Unwillingness from workers to reside in rural areas
- Lack of educational and recreation facilities for the children of the workers.

So, possibilities of revitalising the rural sector are beginning to emerge with the promotion of tourism in rural areas and the offering of generous subsidies for the creation of agro – tourism enterprises.

The success of the policies to revitalise the rural areas and stabilise the situation in agriculture will depend to some extent on the success of the measures which had been included in the Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013.

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