

The Role of Agri-journalism in Media Contexts and Georgia's Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The study of the place and role of Agri-journalism in Georgian media is undoubtedly relevant today.

Against the backdrop of examples from *Radio Liberty*, "*knews.ge*", *Radio Hereti*, and the *Georgian Public Broadcaster*, this paper examines the role of media in the development process of Agri-journalism.

The examined examples have demonstrated that Agri-journalism in Georgia faces numerous challenges, particularly from the perspective of agrotourism. Meanwhile, tourism represents a significant source of income for the majority of countries, and Georgia is no exception.

The paper describes the barriers hindering the development of Agri-journalism in Georgia and the associated challenges.

It demonstrates that Agri-journalism is undoubtedly a significant instrument for gathering diverse opinions and visions on agricultural topics and subsequently informing society in this direction.

Keywords: *Mass Media; Agricultural; Journalist; Farmer; Sector; Tourism; Problems.*

Our **research area** is the study of the state of Agri-journalism in the contemporary Georgian media space and its analysis.

To ensure our research was thorough and compelling, we employed the **observational method**, which enabled us to make logical and objective assessments.

Our **objective** is to examine Agri-journalism as an emerging field and the role it plays and will play in the development process of agriculture.

We ultimately arrived at the **conclusion** that Agri-journalism still faces numerous problems in Georgia and requires even more serious study.

Mass media exerts significant influence on agricultural development processes. If we consider the fact that the continuous development of civilization necessarily requires, first and foremost, the preservation of agricultural sustainability, the role of mass media becomes apparent. The media determines the quality of communication, increases awareness in agriculture, promotes public engagement in processes, and shapes the public opinion.

This is why particular attention is being paid today to the development of Agri-journalism as a specialized field of media. It covers and analyzes agricultural processes, environmental sustainability issues, problems of in-depth understanding of socio-political contexts, and technical aspects of agriculture. It provides timely and accurate news about trends and challenges in agriculture.

For the state, agriculture is a priority direction; nevertheless, the sector's development does not occur rapidly and in accordance with the times. Moreover, local farmers often struggle to embrace new technologies. Additionally, there is a significant deficit of veterinarians and agronomists in rural areas.

The sector's development undoubtedly requires human and intellectual resources. Education and the introduction of new knowledge are paramount in agriculture; in this matter, media must play the most important role.

However, unfortunately, as Maia Kalabegashvili, editor of the newspaper "Spektri," notes in an interview with Radio Liberty, "journalists lack sufficient education; therefore, agricultural topics are not covered in depth" ⁽¹⁾.

Consequently, addressing the deficit of education among journalists is the primary problem. Therefore, it is essential that the issue be studied and analyzed from this perspective as well. Otherwise, the problem will not be resolved; *Radio Liberty* does not emphasize this process by accident; it pointedly notes - "One-third of Georgia's population lives in rural areas. For a large portion of these people, agriculture is the main source of income, yet processes occurring in the agricultural sector are inadequately covered in central media. This deficit is primarily filled by regional media, but the specific field of agriculture requires certain knowledge" (2).

Radio Liberty actively addresses agricultural topics; not a single significant issue concerning agriculture escapes its attention. In 2021, Radio Liberty covered the closure of one of Georgia's largest dairy product manufacturers, "Shiraki's" livestock farm. It was noted that "dairy farming is the most difficult sector in livestock breeding. This is precisely why state assistance in this area is substantial in Europe and America, including the provision of grants; for such farms, electricity and water are free. This is done so that the population and future generations have access to raw and healthy milk" (3).

Consequently, *Radio Liberty* essentially blames the Georgian government for not facilitating the development of livestock breeding in the country.

Radio Liberty has returned to agricultural topics on numerous occasions; it has noted how important its development is for the region and, accordingly, for the country. It has also noted more than once that regional media must play a decisive role in this process.

Of course, the role of Agri-journalism in regional media is paramount; this is confirmed by "Kakheti's Voice," which intensively addresses these problematic issues.

Maia Mamulashvili, founder of "Kakheti's Voice," notes - "Historically, Georgia is an agricultural country where traditional economies are deeply rooted, yet the dynamics of sectoral development are not very effective. We see that the main problem is farmers' lack of knowledge and information. Against this background, it is noteworthy that Agri-journalism is a completely new field in the country. This is the latest

media direction, which refers to journalists writing about agricultural issues. Despite the fact that hundreds of journalists work to cover issues in this field, both the journalists themselves and the media experience a great deficit of professional skills"⁽⁴⁾.

"Kakheti's Voice" is a leader in Georgian media in this regard; it does not leave any significant event in the direction of Agri-journalism unattended. It intensively discusses journalists' working meetings as well. It is noted that "when we journalists follow news, conveying information to people is easy. Great importance is attached to those media tours, which are a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, and our level of awareness increases. We become acquainted with the situation existing in various corners of Georgia in the agricultural direction" ⁽⁵⁾.

"Kakheti's Voice" undoubtedly devotes an interesting blog to the 44th International Conference of Agri-journalists held in South Africa. It discusses the Agri-journalism guide and its importance - "At the Gori Farmers' Center of 'Kartli Agrosystems,' the 'Association of Regional Media of Georgia' presented the Agri-journalism guide to journalists and the wider public, which was prepared for members of regional media as a manual and aims to assist representatives of media working in or interested in the agricultural sphere" ⁽⁶⁾.

As time passes, it becomes increasingly clear that studying the development trends of the agri-journalism field with high professional standards is essential for journalists and media organizations operating in countries undergoing industrial development.

"Kakheti's Voice" is one of the distinguished media outlets in this regard in Georgia.

Here we must also note the role of Radio Hereti in the development process of Agri-journalism in Georgia; it belongs to that part of Georgian regional media that has separate programs in this direction; twice a week - on Monday and Wednesday, the radio broadcasts a program for persons interested in agriculture - "Agro News," led by journalist Giga Abuladze; the program reviews regional agricultural problems and ways to resolve them.

The *Georgian Public Broadcaster* is also actively involved in the process of agricultural issues. Support programs for agriculture are intensively covered in numerous news programs - particularly in mountainous regions, which is undoubtedly a step forward for the development and advancement of the sector.

The 2019 programmatic priorities of *the Georgian Public Broadcaster* state - "Channel I is interested in significant issues of agricultural development, a clear example of which is not only their coverage in news but also the program 'Ferma' (Farm), which tells viewers about successful Georgian farming and promotes the creation of production within Georgia's borders. The program provides practical advice to farmers and consumers, information on agrotechnological innovations, legislative changes, state programs, and European experience. 'Ferma' offered viewers a new section that encompasses rural development issues, materials about the activities of community leaders, facilitating the implementation of their initiatives and ideas"⁽⁷⁾.

However, on December 16, 2023, seven programs were closed on the Public Broadcaster, among which was "Ferma," which is, of course, a tremendous loss on the path of agri-journalism development.

Meanwhile, "Ferma" was a distinguished educational program on agricultural topics in the Georgian media market. It encompassed all branches of agriculture. It covered how farm management operated, what knowledge was necessary for managing and developing farms, introduced us to successful farmers, modern technologies and their application, studied the development of organic farms; it told us what path products traveled "from farm to table" and, in general, how modern Agri-Georgia was developing.

The closure of the program "Ferma," we believe, was a serious mistake and significantly set back the development of Agri-journalism in Georgia; all the more so because it is the direct function of the Public Broadcaster to actively engage in this direction as well.

The fact is that high engagement of journalists is important for the development of agriculture; therefore, the development of Agri-journalism must become a priority, since the country's future economic stability significantly depends on it.

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