

TITLE: Women of the Mountains Empowerment Network (WOMEN)
COUNTRY: ALBANIA
IMPLEMENTING ENTITY: Reggio Terzo Mondo and Light Steps Association
DURATION: 1 January 2016 – 31 December 2019



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Summary

The Women of the Mountains Empowerment Network (WOMEN) project is part of an initiative to protect women's rights and promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania. The project is funded by the European Union under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The WOMEN project provides support to local informal women's group initiatives to organise themselves at grassroots level and to develop new agribusinesses in the mountainous areas of Vau i Dejës, Pukë and Fushë Arrëz (municipalities in Northern Albania).

The project works closely with local government to promote local policies for economic empowerment of the most vulnerable women. It has reached around 380 women through 24 grassroots women's groups. The project also aims to support improved access to funding schemes for grassroots women's organisations using a tailored community-based approach.

WOMEN addresses the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Gender Equality for Albania 2016-2020, notably economic empowerment as a fundamental prerequisite for attaining gender equality and rural women as a priority group. It also contributes to the implementation of the Local Strategy for the Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II and EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2010) on two levels: (1) technical - strengthening the capacity of women's organisations more exposed to risk, through best practice exchanges with established local and European civil society organisations; (2) financial - ensuring adequate resources for women's organisations active in remote areas.

Finally, this project implements the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local life, aiming to strengthen local democracy and achieve a better life for all members of the community.

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Support for local women's initiatives

The WOMEN project supports local informal women's group initiatives, helping them to organise and develop new agribusinesses in the mountainous areas of Vau i Dejës, Pukë and Fushë Arrëz (municipalities in Northern Albania).

The project goals are to:

- Build a mechanism to enhance economic empowerment of vulnerable rural women in the most remote mountain areas;
- Establish a model to promote women's rights at grassroots level;
- Increase the capacity of grassroots women's organisations to access funding and manage EU-funded actions;
- Engage with women's organisations and government institutions;
- Mainstream gender equality at local level through the use of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local life.

The WOMEN's Fund and sub-granting scheme has provided an economic opportunity to around 380 women in 24 small, remote grassroots women's organisations in mountainous areas of Albania. Close cooperation with local public entities has increased awareness of gender equality in local communities living in these areas. Other achievements include:

- Start-up and management of three WOMEN desks in the northern municipalities of Vau i Dejës, Pukë and Fushë Arrëz;
- Provision of advisory services to grassroots women's organisations (and other rural women) on economic empowerment in livestock farming, agribusiness and eco-sustainable tourism;
- Delivery of a training programme on income-generating activities and business planning for targeted women's organisations;
- Establishment of the WOMEN's Fund as an opportunity for institution-building for local authorities;
- Development of an information campaign on the WOMEN's Fund, targeting grassroots women's organisations in local communities;
- Provision of technical assistance to targeted women's organisations for the start-up and development of pilot initiatives under the WOMEN's Fund;
- Access to basic services for gender empowerment has significantly increased. Specific services are offered to women and their organisations in the areas of counselling, advisory services, training programmes and group study visits. 1,600 women have benefited from other local services;
- Networking among targeted women's organisations through study visits, conferences and pilot initiatives will enable more effective relations between grassroots women's organisations in Albania.

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Local adaptation

The project approach is based on a comprehensive response to local needs and can be adapted to different fields. In fact, it is already used by several other initiatives in the country. The Ministry of Agriculture in Albania is considering introducing a similar practice as part of a project to support rural development. This demonstrates that modest financial support can have a huge impact when combined with initiative, well-thought out ideas and hard work.

Capacity-building and sustainability

The project targets local grassroots organisations based in the mountains, as these are often isolated and mistrusted by the patriarchal structures within their communities. WOMEN focuses on learning and targets local grassroots organisations in a bid to achieve lasting change in local patriarchal structures. The project has plans to develop into a long-term capacity-building programme and to become an institutional practice at both local and national level. This model uses sub-granting, which has proved to be an effective financial mechanism for:

- reaching small/less developed organisations;
- offering solutions to grassroots pilot projects;
- local ownership of local interventions;
- increasing cooperation between civil society organisations operating at different levels.

The model is expected to expand to other groups of women and - potentially - become an institutional practice, supported by local and national government sectoral strategies. The project's overall aim is to effect real and lasting change in local patriarchal structures.

National plans and strategies

This initiative addresses the priorities set in the **National Strategy for Gender Equality for Albania 2016-2020**. The Strategy sets out the economic empowerment of rural women as a fundamental pillar for gender equality.

The WOMEN Project contributes to the strategic priority to increase women's self-employment, as set out in the **National Programme and Action Plan for Women's Entrepreneurship 2014-2020**. It promotes women's participation in the rural economy by facilitating access to training, support services, financial support and networking.

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Implementation of the WOMEN project matches priority objective no.3 of the **Inter-sectoral Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020**. It contributes to achieving balanced territorial development of rural areas by fostering diversification of economic activities, job creation and social inclusion.

The Ministry for Agriculture has launched a design competition for a 'Heart of the Mountains' logo that will help to identify the products from the agribusinesses supported by the WOMEN network. The specific branding will increase visibility of the products and contribute to the development and economic empowerment of women in remote areas.

Additional information

More information can be found at: <http://www.bujqesia.gov.al/aplikim-per-p/>