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## **The Role of Eu Funds and Other Partners for Development in Improving Woman Participation in The Development of Rural Sector**

**Jola (Himci) Kepi**

University of Tirana, Faculty of Economy, Marketing Department

Coordinator at Council of Ministers, Albania; E-mail: [jola.himci@gmail.com](mailto:jola.himci@gmail.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Participation of Women in the economy and their empowerment is crucial to strengthen their rights and it enables women to endeavour influence into the society. As elsewhere in the World, Women are key agents for economic development, in Albania there are still constraints of proportion of equality between woman and man. Their equality constitutes a fundamental right for all, and it is of essential value for Albania's democracy and integration to the big family of European Union.

In order to achieve equality between men and woman, firstly it should be legally recognized and secondly, recognition should be applied fairly in all aspects of life; economic, political, social and cultural. Despite many efforts by the Government of Albania on planning strategically and delivering policies for achieving gender equality in the economy participation, as well as its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) Agenda 2030, equality for woman is not yet a reality. In practice, woman do not enjoy the same rights as man do. Some inequalities are a result of social constructs based on numerous gender stereotypes inherited by families in the organization of the society, in political processes, in public life and administrative procedures.

Empowering Women is essential to the Albania's economy to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities; it increases overall economic productivity, given their presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide. This sector creates the majority of jobs in rural areas and is the main source of income for the rural households. In rural areas around 55% of the jobs are created in agriculture, compared to 22% in urban areas. Albanian rural areas are highly dependent on agriculture sector. The Agriculture Sector employs around 54% of active women in Albania and more than 85% of these women support their family workers, classified as unpaid labour. In terms of skills, knowledge and capacities, the rural women in Albania do not represent a homogenous group and they have different needs which requires pro-active approach by policy making authorities while designing programmes and policies for women empowerment in rural areas

JEL Classification: G01; G21; C23.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Woman empowering in rural sector in Albania is considered of high importance as they are considered and accepted as drivers for economic development. However, their participation and or decision making process faces many changes such as education and culture, health care, access to credit, ownership of land etc.

The new Government of Albania in power since 2017, has set clear objectives in its programme<sup>1</sup> for the year 2017-2021 on empowering woman participation in general and specifically in rural areas for fostering economic development. As stated in the government programme, it will create necessary infrastructure and incentive mechanisms for developing rural areas not only and exclusively for farming purposes, but will encourage other

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Albania Programme 2017-2021

forms of development, such as integrated programme for residential centres, areas of tourist attractions, assessment of Albanian traditions and cultural heritage, increasing the level of public services, aesthetic improvement of residential areas that gives the opportunity to certain rural areas to have a positive trend on economic development, diversified and sustainable, creating at the same time the premise for the development of tourism and agro tourism. The Government of Albania has expressed its commitment to address jobs creation and skills development, with particular focus on the employment of youth and women. Woman empowering goal is set also in the National Employment and Skill Strategy 2014–2020, as to achieve quality jobs and skills opportunities for all Albanian women and men throughout their lifecycle.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of EU funds spending in Albania, to support woman empowering in rural sector and to give some recommendations for decision making bodies.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted primarily based on the information provided by the Donor's database managed by the Department of Development and Foreign Aid in the Prime Minister's office. More specifically we observed and analysed the information of the projects related to woman-empowerment and woman-empowerment in rural sector financed by different donors (OECD, UN-Woman and EU) and secondly by statistical data provided by INSTAT. Lack of up-to-date, detailed gender statistics has long been an issue for researchers studying the subjects (e.g. Juzoor, 2010; Unece, 2014), therefore we faced missing data from the donors database on the amount and status of project implementation

The information gathered was used to create an overview of the foreign aid especially EU on the subject as it will be described in the following sections of this research.

## 3. DEMOGRAPHY AND LABOUR FORCE DISTRIBUTION IN ALBANIA

Up to date and in accordance with Census 2014, Albania has an estimated population of 2.93 million, with a gender distribution composed of 49,55% female and 50,45% males. The population growth is shown in the table below from year 2013 until 31 dec 2017.

Table nr.1: Population growth from 2013 to 2017

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>% Male</i>	<i>% Female</i>	<i>Density (km<sup>2</sup>)</i>	<i>Population Rank worldwide</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>
2017	2,930,187	50.48%	49.52%	101.93	139	0.13%
2016	2,926,348	50.50%	49.50%	101.79	138	0.10%
2015	2,923,352	50.49%	49.51%	101.69	139	-0.12%
2014	2.889.000	50.45%	49.55%	106.6	139	0.08%
2013	2.895.000	50.38%	49.62	106.53	137	0.01%

Source: INSTAT

<sup>2</sup> Albanian National Employment and Skill Strategy 2014–2020

<sup>3</sup> Albanian Institute of Statistics

<sup>4</sup> INSTAT- Census 2011

As seen by the table, out of the total number of population we have extracted the employed population according to the official data by INSTAT per year, per sector and more specifically agriculture sector, over the number of employed woman in the agriculture sector as shown in table nr.2.

Table Nr.2: Employed Population vs Employed Woman in rural sector

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Employed Population	1.023.688	1.037.061	1.086.612	1.157.177
Agriculture Sector	44,2 %	42,7%	41,3%	40,2%
Total Employed Woman	460.801	451.382	466.000	506.976
% of Employed Woman in Agriculture Sector	53,0 %	50,2%	47,7%	45,4%

Source: Data from INSTAT and summary of data Author

According to statistics provided by INSTAT, progress has been noted in women's participation in the labour market, however their participation remains outside the labour force due to retirement and other domestic duties. In the Agriculture sector, 45,4 % of employed people were employed in agriculture sector in 2016, by experiencing a decrease as compared to previous years. Also, from the total woman employed in Albania, we can observe that the percentage of woman working in rural sector is decreasing.

Once women in Albania were entitled the right to vote, the first women MPs were elected in the legislature of 1945. The participation rate of women in the Parliament of Albania has been practically constant during the legislatures of 1997, 2001 and with 2005 not exceeding 10 %.

### 3.1 Woman-empowerment in Albania

The constitution of the 1st Albanian Parliament dates back to 1920 composed only of man. Women participation was inexistent. This means there was no power neither woman rights to Albanian woman. Only later in 1945 were given the right to vote to women and very limited number of women were selected as member of Parliament. After the communism collapse, woman participation in the Parliament stayed constant at 10 %.

However, an increasing trend is observed in the elections of 2013 and 2017 of the Parliament compositions, elected woman up to 25%, and an increase of woman participation in local governance up to 50%. Such fact, shows us that woman role in the society is constantly increasing, thus empowering their role into the society. Another, aspect of empowerment is woman access to finance. It has been observed from the national register of loans an increasing number of women applying for loans and investing in education and businesses. The year 2016, it marks around 26.8% of woman in the position of owners or administrator and has almost doubled in the last five years.

Empowerment of woman takes place in different level, and the aim of this article is to assess empowerment in rural sector.

### 3.2 Woman- Empowering in Rural Economy

Despite the efforts by the Albanian Government to reduce gender inequalities in the last two decades, there is a gap between legislation and implementation, and the connection between gender and rural development strategies can still be improved, particularly considering their substantial role in unpaid and informal work. The

concept of woman empowerment in rural economy in Albania, is limited only to on-poverty programmes. On its efforts the Government is continuously supported by donors to achieve such goals.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is committed to reducing gender inequalities through its interventions and also EU through its Budget Support contract in Vocational and Educational Training and IPARD Programme aims at targeting gender equality participation in the rural economy.

Some of the challenges faced by woman participation in rural economy are: gender equality<sup>5</sup>, woman access to technical knowledge on agriculture, unpaid job in agriculture as result of family owned farms or land (informality), infrastructure etc, access to finance, low status of women in rural areas, gender stereotypes and perception of gender inequalities etc. These factors and or barriers include also discriminatory practices by the Albanian society and are related to Culture and Tradition, Health and Education and Training.

### 3.3 EU Financial Assistance in Rural Economy in Albania

As mentioned above, many donors support the Albanian Government to improve woman empowerment in rural economy, however monitoring of their projects have shown in most of the time, to be pilot projects and not move beyond. Different modalities are used by donors in support of woman empowerment in rural sector in Albania such as project based approach and recently budget support. Based on Paris Declaration<sup>6</sup>, donors have agreed to engage in dialogue between themselves in order to avoid duplication of projects within the same policy frame.

Based on the assessment of the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality<sup>7</sup>, Reduction of Gender-based Violence Domestic Violence 2011-2015 and its Action Plan, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth identified the results achieved in order to draft the new National Strategy on Gender Equality, Reduction of Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence 2016-2020 and Action Plan. One of the main findings of this assessment is that limited attention had been paid to the specific needs of women living in rural areas.

Consequently, one of the pillars of this strategy is to improve the lives of rural women. The Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 also includes specific measures to close the gender gap in the labour market.

Supported by the EU through IPA Rural Development programme for the year 2014-2020, one of the main goals of this programme is to increase the income that is generated by women and young entrepreneurs in rural areas. According to information received by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, since 2012, they are implementing gender quotas in two budgetary programmes: 1) Extension services and 2) Subsidies for farms, a programme aimed to allocate subsidy funds to 1 100 women's farms in 2015 and to increase it to 1 400 by 2018

Table Nr.3 No of beneficiaries by Sex

<i>Beneficiaries</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>
Woman	1 100	1 200	1 300	1 400
Man	9 700	10 650	11 700	11 800
% of woman beneficiaries	10.2%	10.2%	10%	10.6%

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

<sup>5</sup> Field research conducted in June 2015 in Korca, Berat and Shkodra for the FAO project TCP/ALB/3402. FAO. 2015. Gender impact assessment of the project TCP/ALB/3402: Identification of de facto burdens for women's enjoyment of FAO projects and extension services. (unpublished report)

<sup>6</sup> Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005)

<sup>7</sup> National Strategy on Gender Equality<sup>7</sup>, Reduction of Gender-based Violence Domestic Violence 2011-2015

Albanian Government with the support of EU in the strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2014-2020 has defined two important visions<sup>8</sup> for rural development; 1) Efficient, innovative and viable agri-food sector capable to sustain the competitive pressure and meeting the requirement of the EU market through a sustainable utilization of resources and; 2) Viable rural areas providing economic activities and employment opportunities, social inclusion and quality of life to rural residents”. The 2nd vision, foresees finances to activities to improve and strengthen woman empowerment in rural sector.

Based on an assessment of the Region performed by European Union, EU has invested in several areas to increase woman empowerment in Albania by supporting; a) in combating violence against woman, b) access to education, c) access to labor market, d) access to economic/finance resources, e) access to and participation in political life with around 5 million Euro.

Another important donor financing and supporting projects on woman-empowerment in Albania is United Nation with several projects. In its commitment to support the Albanian Government under the UN-Albania Cooperation programme of 2012-2016, UN Invested around 132 million US dollars and 109 Million US dollars under the Un-Albania Cooperation programme for the year 2017-2021. Through these programmes the UN have achieved several measures in increasing Albanian woman participation in decision making process and some measures accelerated to advance women’s economic empowerment<sup>9</sup>.

Albania is also benefiting funds from several regional programmes, on the matter one of the projects is: Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkan countries and Turkey<sup>10</sup>: A project with several beneficiary country(ies) including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, Implementation by the UN Women Nature of the initiative Programme with a Total amount (€) 5,000,000 The key aim of this programme is to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence against women. In particular, the programme seeks to offer help to the most disadvantaged groups of women via: the establishment of an appropriate legislative and policy environment consistent with international standards; the promotion of social norms and attitudes supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women, who have been the subject of discrimination

#### **4. Findings and Recommendations**

In general, the issue of woman-empowerment has become a major concern to nowadays national and international agendas. With its efforts on the issue, the Government of Albania has to put more focused activities related to woman-empowerment in rural sector rather than just dealing with gender equality in the rural economy. Many efforts need to focus on education, trainings, health care and infrastructure on rural woman in order to empower them in the role of participating and contributing to the rural economy.

Developing partners (donors) need to focus more activities on the issue, assessing together with the Government in details the situation of rural woman rather than just financing small projects and only in certain region. There is a need of country wide assessment of rural woman and their needs and further to design a detailed action need for finance which requires a long-term planning.

Based on the wide assessment, focus should be also put in the access to finance and government finance schemes in order to build woman capacities to participate in all stages of rural and agriculture economy.

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<sup>8</sup> IPARD II (2014-2020) Programme –Inter Sectoral Strategy for Rural Development, MaRWDA

<sup>9</sup> Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence Programme of the UN

<sup>10</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage/24979/ending-violence-against-women-western-balkancountries-and-turkey-implementing-normschanging\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage/24979/ending-violence-against-women-western-balkancountries-and-turkey-implementing-normschanging_en)

More budget should be programmed by the Government or their partnership programmes with funding donors on the subject aiming at increasing woman participation in labour force thus to improve their position in the society.

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