

# Promoting Gender Equality

Good Practices of Swiss Cooperation in Albania



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

**State Secretariat for  
Economic Affairs SECO**

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## Introduction

*«Gender equality is the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. The aim is not that women and men become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances become and remain equal.» (OECD, DAC, 1998).*

This quote is taken from a document dating more than 10 years ago. In spite of the positive developments, initiatives and successes over the last decade, we are well aware that inequalities between women and men persist, making discrimination a widespread form of exclusion. This is also true for Albania and this is also why supporting Albania in promoting equality of women and men, as an integral part of development, is key for the activities of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

For years, SDC has been working in mainstreaming gender equality, since the reduction of gender based discrimination is both, a goal and a pre-condition for development. It needs two legs to walk. In the same way social, economical and political development can only be achieved with full and equal participation of both women and men in decision making process. SDC therefore understands that the reduction of inequalities is a key contribution to social justice and sustainable development. Both, Albania and Switzerland have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This Convention provides an excellent framework for ensuring that the good experiences and practices developed by SDC and its Albanian partners, through various projects, continue to guide their action which aims at fostering gender equality throughout the development process. The National Strategy on Gender Equality, developed by the Albanian Government, is also critical in this regard.

On behalf of the Swiss Government, I am happy to present this brochure which will highlight some principles on gender mainstreaming, aiming at sharing policy guidance, tools and good practices developed so far in various areas of Swiss cooperation in Albania with partners and stakeholders.

We all know that Albania's path towards European integration is a difficult one. Big progress has already been achieved, but more needs to be done. It will be an easier journey if men and women walk together at the same pace sharing responsibilities and efforts and, once the goal has been reached, successes and rewards.

*Yvana Enzler  
Ambassador of Switzerland*



## Necessary Measures for Ensuring Gender Equality (Art. 7)

In order to ensure gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination, the government agencies in compliance with their competencies, shall be committed to:

Ensure practical implementation of gender equality principle either by means of legislative measures or by other suitable means.

Ensure prevention of any type of gender-based discrimination either by means of legislative measures or other suitable means accompanied with sanctions as the case may be.

Ensure alternation or repeal of any legal acts, customs or practice which pose gender discrimination, by means of legislative measures, by means of legislative measures or other suitable means.

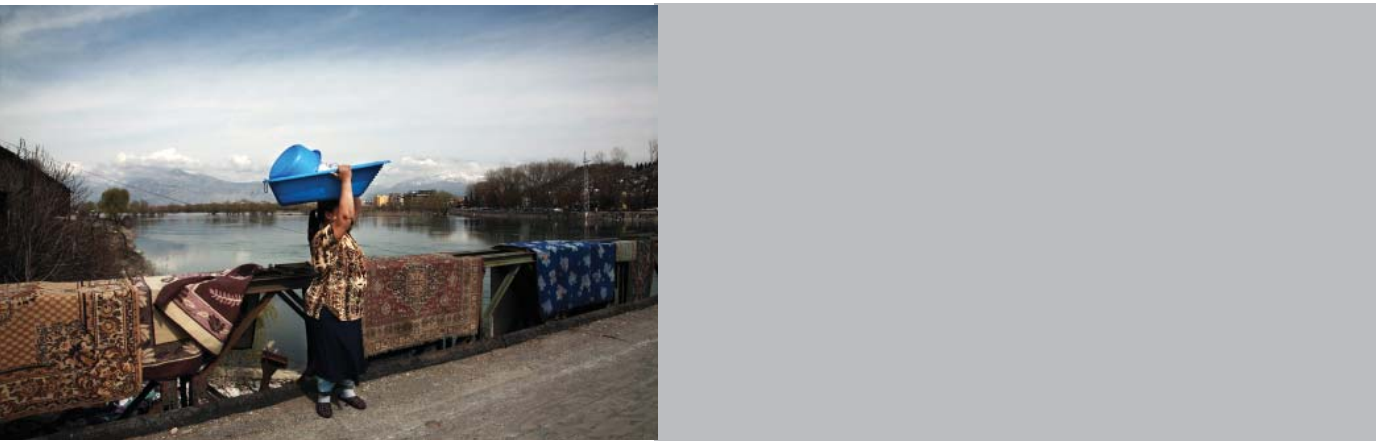
Take all appropriate measures to create the necessary and legally objective facilities aiming at guaranteeing equal chances and access to both genders.

Ensure effective protection for both genders against any discriminatory action through public institutions and national courts.

*Source: Article 7, Law on Gender Equality in the Society (Law No 9970, date 24.07.2008).*

## Empowering women...<sup>1</sup>

Gender equality issues comprise the core of social policies of the EU member countries and one of the requirements to be fulfilled by the countries that have joined the European integration process. Overlooking or failure to properly address these issues, would result in having approximately 50 percent of the population not being able to fully benefit from the progress achieved through the social, political and economical reforms. If the issue of gender inequality, that is apparent in all aspects of social life in Albania, is not made the focus of social policies it will undercut Albania's efforts to achieve sustainable development. The reason behind this being, the country's full human potential will not be drawn upon and not all social groups will enjoy the achievements. Hence, gender mainstreaming should be part and parcel of all social, economic and political policies in Albania, so as to ensure achievement of sustainable development with full use of the country's human potential and guaranteeing enjoyment of these achievements by all social groups.



### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Several strategic priorities, in line with the areas it covers, may be enlisted as follows:

1. Reinforcing the protective legal and institutional mechanisms so as ensure gender equality in Albania.
2. Empowering women through their increased participation in decision-making.
3. Ensuring women's economic empowerment and their increased opportunities for employment and vocational training.
4. Promoting women's equal access to quality education.
5. Improving the social situation of women at risk by enhancing their access to quality social services.
6. Improving population health by boosting the health system's response to specific health needs of men and women.
7. Ensuring the media's upgraded role in introducing a new, modern approach to gender equality in the society. Ensuring women have a significant presence in the media.
8. Raising awareness of the phenomenon of violence, legal and administrative protection, and support for individuals affected by domestic violence as well as for the abusers.

<sup>1</sup>Source: *National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence 2007-2010*  
[http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2008/07/32216\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2008/07/32216_en.pdf)

The new cooperation strategy of Switzerland in Albania.

## Gender equality mainstreaming as crosscutting theme



Switzerland is supporting Albania's agenda towards a sound and prosperous economy and a society by balancing the dynamics and disparities in order to reach the standards for the future European Union (EU) membership.

Tangible results have been achieved by Swiss Cooperation in Albania (SCO-A). The comparative advantage of Swiss Cooperation was well recognised as a result of its dedication, specific know-how, and experience, thus being perceived as a reliable and flexible partner. Building upon positive results so far and further aligning with the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013 (NSDI), the new strategy of Swiss Cooperation in Albania 2010–2013 concentrates on two domains of intervention with related sub-domains:

In *Democratisation and Rule of Law*, SCO-A will concentrate on supporting to democratisation and decentralisation and social inclusion. In *Economic Development* SCO-A will focus economy and employment in particular on VET, and for infrastructure on energy and water.

A strong focus will also lay in mainstreaming gender equality as a cross cutting theme through out the future activities and programming, thereby supporting the implementation of the Albanian national cross cutting on gender equality and building upon good practice achieved so far.

On an average, Switzerland (SDC and SECO) will provide, over the next four years, grants of about CHF 14 million/year (equivalent to almost 10 million Euros annually).



Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women:

... a bill of rights for women



The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW - adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The Convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

By ratifying the Convention, Albania commits itself to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in its legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

Gender policy of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation:

## Promoting equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men<sup>1</sup>

The aim of SDC's gender policy is to ensure that all SDC interventions increase women's and men's opportunities to exercise their rights equally and gain equal access to and control over the benefits of development. The policy developed in 2003, identifies five guiding principles: i) mandatory use of a gender analysis; ii) flexibility in implementation; iii) multi-level strategies linking international, national and local partners; iv) specific action on gender inequality; and v) promotion of equal opportunities in SDC and partner organisations (SDC, 2003).



### Why is SDC committed to Gender Equality?

- Gender equality is embedded in human rights: Women and men experience differences in exercising their socioeconomic and political rights, because of structural inequalities and unequal power relations in society.
- Gender equality through the empowerment of women and men is critical for good governance: In order to increase women's and men's opportunities to exercise their rights equally, women's and men's equal access to decision making must be promoted.
- Women's and men's dynamic contribution to society as individuals, workers, and citizens is critical for sustainable development: Women often have limited access to economic resources and decision making. At the same time, men do not share the tasks associated with household management and social reproduction equally with women. While equally valuing women's and men's contribution in every sphere, exclusion of women or men from some of these spheres contributes to inequalities, exploitation and unsustainable development. Development interventions that provide opportunities for women and men to constructively engage in changing existing gender roles, unequal access to and control over resources as well as decision-making, are critical to achieving gender equality and sustainable development.
- Empowerment of disadvantaged groups is a key strategy for poverty alleviation and social change: Often, women and men experience and fight poverty in different ways. Women are increasingly at the frontline in the fight against poverty, at household and community level. Increasing women's participation in defining development priorities and strategies alongside men both empowers women and brings new perspectives, resources and dynamics to reduce poverty and empower the poor.

<sup>1</sup>Extracts from SDC gender policy, Bern 2003



- The integration of gender is part of broader empowerment strategies and impacts on development interventions: Because it focuses on addressing and monitoring inequalities and social injustice, gender aware analyses and planning helps organisations to develop a vision of change, and to create the conditions, methods and competence to achieve it. By so doing, it promotes values of quality and equality in organizational culture.



### What are the Guiding Principles?:

- **All interventions are based on a gender aware analysis**  
No context is free of gender relations. Therefore, a gender aware analysis at all levels is mandatory for the formulation of any country programme. Gender needs to be incorporated at the project design stage and reflected in the project cycle.
- **Flexibility in implementation**  
Like any social change, changes in gender relations challenge traditional forms of power. Approaches to gender must be flexible and context-specific. It is important that interventions should build on endogenous strategies and incorporate women's and men's common as well as different/conflicting interests.
- **Multilevel approach**  
The promotion of gender equality is effective and facilitates social change when the different levels of intervention are tackled: policy dialogue and framework conditions at the macro level, institutional development and relations between and within organisations at the meso-level and women and men in households/communities at the micro-level.
- **Specific Actions for Gender Equality**  
Specific actions to reduce gender inequalities and/or to address gender issues (e.g. women trafficking) reinforces the impact of working with women and men in interventions or complete a cross cutting approach.
- **Equal Opportunities in Organisations**  
According to Swiss national policy, SDC commitment to equal opportunities must be reflected at Headquarters and in cooperation offices. In addition, SDC promotes equal opportunities within its partners, whether public or private.

DLDP – Promoting gender equality in support to Decentralisation and Local Development:

## Being flexible, building alliances, strengthening women's participation



The project on Local Development and Decentralization (DLDP 1), implemented by Intercooperation, started in 2006. Goals of the project were to support partner communes and municipalities in strategic planning, service improvement for citizens and in capacity building in financial management and budgeting, public procurement and urban planning. Furthermore, the project also provided support to develop new mechanisms of information and communication with citizens.

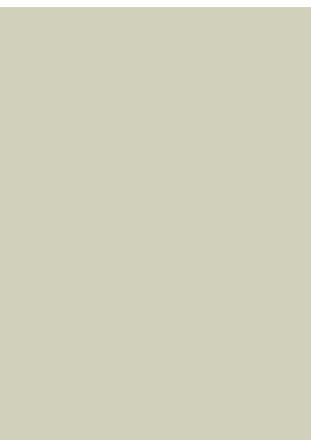
Given the weak women representation at the local government unit (LGU) level and the need for enhancing women's participation and women's voices in northern Albania, the promotion of gender equality was from the very beginning considered as important.

Major challenges faced were:

- Democracy and culture deficit of gender equality: The gender representation level in the local commune councils is quite unbalanced in both number and participation.
- Harmonized policies: There is a gap between efforts at the national level on gender equality regarding the legal framework, strategic policies and monitoring efforts and their implementation at the local level.
- Disparities in socio-economic and cultural development between large urban areas and rural areas (small municipalities and communes), which are not considered by the policy-makers and designers of instruments for applying them.
- Analyses and planning: LGU's do not apply planning instruments, which would ensure a coherent and appropriate structure in order to mainstream gender.
- Sex disaggregated data at the local level are missing, thus gender sensitive analyses influencing policy level, are difficult.

Based on the SDC policy guidance, the DLDP staff decided on a strategy for implementing gender equality mainstreaming (GEM) through:

- Allaying with specialized local and international institutions/organizations on gender issues, such as UNIFEM and Equality in governance (EiG) Project for developing skills.
- Re-enforce the support to gender equality by coordinating with national and local gender focal points.
- Building on "champions of governance" for integrating GEM in the scheme of economic assistance;
- Integrating GEM in some of the services of the one stop shop (OSSH)
- Replicating good practice from DLDP 1 in the planning process of DLDP 2, including impact indicators for GEM;



DLDP followed an innovative approach of gender mainstreaming by aiming at creating conditions for planning as well as building models of success.

The two main preconditions of success are awareness and education, which certainly are a “life-long” process. Some GEM actions undertaken by the project were i.a.: informing local leaders on the legal obligations towards gender equality and building capacities on GEM; enhancing the relationship between civil society and local leadership/administration; organizing public consultations on needs of women (vulnerable groups and leadership) and building internal capacities and reflect on internal procedures of organizations.

DLDP chooses to build some models of success related to instruments through which any LGU might mainstream gender:

- Increased number and women’s say in participatory processes of local development planning (Strategic Development Plans);
- Establish gender-sensitive decisions making and monitoring bodies (Commissions for Planning and Monitoring of Investments);
- Establish gender-sensitive criteria for various procedures (Economic Aid);
- Support services from a gender perspective (Small Investment Projects in Puka);
- Build models of disaggregated data on social services (OSSH in Dajc).

#### **Some lessons learnt:**

Mainstreaming gender is a step by step approach - continuity and sustainability count. The representative and decision-making bodies, such as local councils, are good entry points to start a mainstreaming gender approach.

Gender mainstreaming goes along with planning and constitutes an awareness building on gender equality. It is easier to implement GEM when already considered in the planning, but it is also possible to introduce in the implementation stage. In practice, it happens both ways.

Ally with others: vertically with the national initiatives and horizontally with other programmes/movements, because coherence and professionalism counts. Gender equality is still at the stage where advocacy and lobbying is needed.

*Valbona Karakaci, Deputy Programm Manager DLDP*

Experiences of the Swiss Cooperation in Albania in Gender Equality Mainstreaming:

*“Be practical, be modest, just do it...”*



Swiss Cooperation in Albania (SCO-A) started in 2003 with a basic training on gender awareness. SDC's tool-kit, providing practical instruments for Swiss field offices, was translated and adapted to the Albanian context and project implementing partners were trained in applying some tools, like on gender sensitive context analysis and on including gender in monitoring.

However, after 4 years it was felt that efforts to integrate Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) in projects were still somehow scattered, lacking visible progress and a strategic approach. In 2007, based on an internal review as well as on a broad consultation with national and international development actors, SCO-A systematized its approach to GEM by introducing on the one hand continued and mandatory training with project partners, implemented by Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), and on the other hand by supporting GEM at national level through UNIFEM. In the annual trainings, staff members and colleagues from implementing organisations defined concrete actions for enhancing gender equality in projects and programmes. This contributed to having GEM increasingly reflected in the project's yearly plan of operations. In addition, GADC provided tailor made on the job training, assisting project partners in eventually integrating gender sensitive indicators in monitoring. A gender focal point was appointed being responsible for coordinating activities on GEM and linking it with the newly established learning network which brings together all gender focal points of Swiss Cooperation world wide.

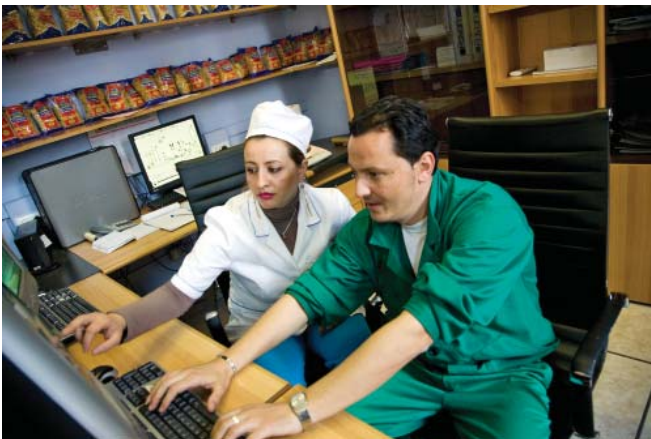


### Some preliminary results:

- SCO-A staff and partners have a better understanding and increased commitment as well as capacities for promoting gender equality.
- GEM indicators and activities are reflected in the overall project cycle management in the domains SCO-A is working in. The overall monitoring system of the Swiss Cooperation strategy includes gender sensitive indicators.
- Monitoring at project and country strategy level has resulted in some practical actions including new projects for consequently supporting increased gender equality, e.g. for increased women's representation at local government level, activities for promoting women in development, such as creating a new women's NGO in Puka, increased girls representation in Roma inclusion programme as well as in VET, and support to sex disaggregated data collection at national level.
- Linking Swiss gender policy with national priorities, commitments and duties under international and national law has contributed to a good acceptance and increased interest of the majority of project partners.
- Continued learning has brought partners and SCO-A staff regularly together: peer learning is enabled, new synergies between projects are identified also in other fields of work. Sharing knowledge and learning from each other has been a continuous process that is considered useful by all parties involved.

### Some lessons learnt:

- Gender mainstreaming in development is a process of change. It takes time, commitment and efforts from all actors involved in the development process.
- Commitment of the management is a key element for keeping gender mainstreaming a high priority. Field offices need continuous experts support which can also be identified at national level and contributes to national ownership.
- The complementary approach, combining overall training with practical on the job training and experts support in yearly planning and reviewing, has proved effective and should be continuously applied.
- Strong gender inequalities in the areas SCO-A is working are persisting. Ensuring consistency of policy implementation, sustaining the momentum witnessed with several partners will be challenging and needs continuous support.
- Adequate resources: GEM needs time and resources; in order to make a gender focal point fully functional, additional resources are needed. In a context of high gender imbalance, particular funds are needed for promoting women in development.
- Networking with other donors, knowledge sharing and harmonized combined efforts are very important, but still time and resources for doing so is often missing.



### Potentials for the future:

- Reliable Data for adequate planning and monitoring: sex disaggregated data are a key element for an effective planning promoting gender equality. Supporting national and local institutions in collecting such data should be approached as a contribution to gender equality and adequately integrated into planning; capacity building in collecting sex-disaggregated reliable data is an excellent awareness raising opportunity and long term investment for policy making.
- Policy guidance is a key element and precondition for strategic and coherent GEM; tools are considered an important elements for making GEM reality in projects. Focussed training of national and local trainers would increase the effective use of these tools and enhance national ownership.
- Continued education in GEM for all staff members of both, donor agency and implementing partners is key for success – it does not only contribute to enhanced GEM, but also results in increased overall methodological coherence and contributes to harmonizing efforts as a precondition for integrating gender equality in programm based approaches.
- The established government-donor coordination mechanisms provide a supportive framework for more systematic and coherent GEM. SCO-A can re-enforce partnerships with other donors, civil society and government on promoting gender equality.
- Promoting gender equality is country owned: As SDC's policy commitment is anchored in rights and duties set out in the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination CEDAW, it is naturally linked to Albania's own priorities, including the national legal framework.
- Gender equality is part of good governance: Mainstreaming gender equality can be directly linked to mainstreaming good governance through a rights based approach: key principles on non-discrimination and inclusion, equal participation, transparency and accountability are shared, linked to rights and duties and can hence be integrated more easily in programming and the yearly planning.

Overall, in Albania there is a good framework and some good potentials and capacities for promoting increased gender equality and "small steps can make a difference, so let us be practical and modest and – just do it!"

*Rahel Boesch, Deputy Country Director, Swiss Cooperation Office Albania*





## Empowering women's roles and profiles in the Roma community

The project "Alternated Education and Vocational Training" (CEFA) is dedicated to the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minority through promotion and enhancement of their rights as citizens. It supports the implementation of national strategies for *Improving Roma Living Conditions* as well as for *Social Inclusion* and directly contributes to the implementation of the international initiative "Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015". This project is implemented by *Ndihmë për Fëmijët (NPF)*.

The project aims at the further enhancement of social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities through formal education in public schools and vocational training and at empowering the community through promoting their rights.

Main challenges are:

- Lack of knowledge and poor understanding related to gender inequalities among the staff and target groups;
- Early marriages;
- Roma women face the highest unemployment rate in country, striving to support their families, which live in poor and extremely poor living conditions;
- Roma women are the voiceless and powerless members of the community. Both the mentality and the other economic, social and education factors "nurture" the stereotypes of limiting their involvement and initiative.





The integration of the gender perspective in the CEFA project served as a meaningful mechanism for building a clear understanding on how to include gender- based interventions in the project activities.

The NPF staff pays special attention to keeping, both, Roma girls and boys at school in order to complete the full 9-year education cycle and also further education. The number of Roma and Egyptian girls that have enrolled in school has increased. In the four project locations, 131 girls and 199 boys are receiving education support.

Vocational training is another activity where the participation of young men as well as women is strongly encouraged. Only during the first year, 23 young women and 21 young men have completed vocational training courses. In order to decrease the burden of looking after children at home, 10 mothers are supported through facilitation of pre-school registration and monthly payment for their children. Roma and Egyptian women are also encouraged to initiate, plan and manage small economic initiatives, supported financially by the CEFA project. During this year (2010), 13 men and 12 women are running initiatives such as handcrafting, repair services, etc.

Project local advisory boards, in each of the four locations, have almost an equal representation of Roma women and men; in total, out of 13 members, 6 are women.

NPF, through the CEFA project, has considered and implemented gender aspects by encouraging access and empowering both, women and men in the project services through the implementation of specific activities for Roma women. Family planning workshops and Roma women celebrations have served as forums where Roma women discuss and share information and knowledge among each other.

Introducing gender perspective and making it a reality and common practice, especially among vulnerable communities, requires continuous support through awareness raising activities and implementing proper practices with a specific focus on empowering women's roles and profiles in the community and providing equal access to both women and men.

*Shpresa Spahiu, Executive Director, Ndihmë për Fëmijët (NPF).*

## Promoting women's opportunities in remote areas



Switzerland has contributed to the promotion of agriculture in the district of Puka over the last nine years. This project has been focusing on the empowerment of farmers and has brought hope to these rural areas. It has supported the establishment of the farmers association AGROPUKA, recognised as an inspiring and unique model, for other regions in the country, related to the rural development of poor mountainous areas.

AGROPUKA association has contributed to the improved livelihood of the rural population and has had an impact on bringing change of mindset as well as increased women entrepreneurial spirit. AGROPUKA had a good impact on gender awareness, on supporting women's entrepreneurial initiatives and on group cooperation spirit. The project has supported women in an effective way through the establishment of eight interest groups, focus groups, training courses, exchange of information and experiences and through the provision of inputs and equipments. Whereas women were confined to the house, they can now work in groups which increased the entrepreneurial and social spirit. Thanks to AGROPUKA interventions, some of the direct benefits for women and their families include:

### Processing

Women groups have learned how to process fruits into a diversified range of products like juices, jam, compote, jelly, dried fruits. In addition, they have started to apply processing of vegetables into dried vegetables. Through processing, it is not only perceived the increase on fruit values, but it is obvious as well that less production is wasted. Their key products of honey, dried fruits and mushrooms, blended tea and fruit juice have a unique market position for their nutrition values, quality, freshness and natural taste.

### Income generation

The family needs are better fulfilled and surpluses are cashed in the market. Thus, through processed products, women have saved money to accomplish family needs, but as well earned incomes. Now women's concern is how to keep fruits present on their tables as long as possible. "Now, I can process our fruits and my family saves a lot of money: my children don't like soft-drinks such as coca cola, they prefer our fruit juice" said Mrs Marie Shkjau, chairwoman of Gjegjan Women Processing Center.



### **Quality and Standards**

Women have been the vanguard on quality issues. The processing technology itself requires certain fruit standards, special boiling and simmering techniques for the production and packaging. They fulfil such requirements in order to become compatible with the technology.

### **Exchange of experiences**

Women took the opportunity to develop their entrepreneurial attitudes and mindsets, but working together has as well strengthened their social spirit. In groups, they also exchange other experiences such as: on health care, dressing and fashion, they share stories, family issues and help each other to find solutions. Women's groups have extended their experiences beyond the district of Puka, replicating their knowledge in Saranda, Kukës, and even in Kosovo. The "Training of Trainers" approach has been very successfully implemented. Trained women at the AGROPUKA processing centre have become main trainers for women's groups established in their villages. They play a significant role as advisors of AGROPUKA project by effectively heading different committees like in case of the Infrastructure Commission.

### **Promoting highlander women as a new organisation**

Focusing on the above achievements and bearing in mind both, the gender inequality and in particular the needs of the women in these remote areas but also their potential, Swiss Cooperation decided to support the creation of the new women Non-Governmental Organization "Progress of Highlander Women". The objective of this NGO is to promote social and economic opportunities for women from Puka region. The establishment of the independent women association "Progress of Highlander Women" marks a significant achievement.

*Eduart Rumani, National Programme Officer, Swiss Cooperation Office Albania*



AlbVET - Promotion of Vocational Education and Training:

## Responding to high demands for economic opportunities.

Women are still more likely to be disadvantaged when it comes to access to employment and incomes. Improved access to education and the acquisition of skills through targeted promotion of vocational skills may pave the way to an income-generating occupation, and may increase their chances of effectively taking part in the job market. Therefore this approach plays a key role in the reduction of poverty and women empowerment within the society. This calls for vocational skills development options that are specifically designed to meet women's needs and are geared to gender equality.

AlbVET project is aiming to contribute to an Albanian vocational education and training system that matches with the labour market requirements, attracts participants, strives towards European standards, and thus contributes to economic development and poverty alleviation. To achieve that, a multifaceted approach has been design in order to tackle the system and also to enhance the capacities of central, regional and local public and private stakeholders to develop and deliver market relevant vocational education and training with adequate quality. On the side of the demand, AlbVET, also built upon the good and long experiences of Swiss funded VET projects in the country for over 13 years.

Women's access to VET remains a strong challenge, particularly due to the fact that VET is still perceived as man oriented and for traditional technical professions.

Taking into consideration the cultural background, tradition and still providing opportunities for women, AlbVET responded to the high demand for courses like hairdressing, tailoring and cooking, which in turn provided also better chances for employment to women. Particular courses on these occupations were designed; they were regularly up-graded and developed into medium-term courses with an approximate duration of 18-24 months. AlbVET has co-financed vouchers for participants who attended those courses covering 15 different occupations. As a consequence, the rate of unemployed participants is reduced substantially, whereas the rate of full-time employed participants is doubled from 12% to 23% after completion of the training. 51% of the participants were females.

*Elda Bagaviki, National Programme Officer, Swiss Cooperation Office Albania*



Good practices – Interview with Christine Arab, UNIFEM:

**“Gender mainstreaming requires a long-term commitment!”**



Since 2007, UNIFEM has been a key partner for Swiss Cooperation in promoting gender equality in development in Albania. Reviewing good practice and drawing on shared experience, Rahel Boesch, Deputy Country Director of Swiss Cooperation in Albania interviewed Christine Arab, the UNIFEM Country Programme Manager and expert on gender mainstreaming.

**Against your long standing professional background – where do you see the particular challenges and opportunities of Albania?**

In Albania, we are very fortunate to work in a country where the Government has clearly expressed concern about the lack of advancement around gender equality. The legal frameworks are quite strong when assessed from a gender perspective: Men and women are equal before the law; gender-based discrimination is prohibited, and with the adoption in 2008 of the law “On Gender Equality in Society”, special measures and stronger protection to combat gender discrimination were put in place. The adoption of the country’s first law on Domestic Violence remains a significant advancement for combating DV, an action which has been consistently recognised by international bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights, as a form of gender-based discrimination. The challenge rests in not only the implementation of these laws, but ensuring their principles are integrated – or mainstreamed – into broader laws, policies and programmes. This mainstreaming process helps to ensure that broader laws – like the Labour Code, Family Code, laws on Social protection and social services, are implemented in such a way that women and men have equitable access to the services under these laws. What does this mean? It means men and women access laws and services differently, and often, when laws are “gender neutral” this means that women do not have as extensive, fair or easy access to a law or service as a man may. This, integration or mainstreaming process is, in part, where the UN channels its support to the government.



### **What does gender equality mainstreaming mean in practice?**

Mainstreaming or integrating gender into broader policies and laws is a typical good governance process in that – if done properly – requires the support of gender-responsive effective planning and budgeting, integrated monitoring, using sex-disaggregated data, and cross-departmental/inter-ministerial cooperation. For example, integrating gender into the Social Assistance law requires: gender-responsive analysis of the law's implementation, including a beneficiary analysis, sex-disaggregated statistics, reviewing the procedures under the Law from a gender perspective. The results of this work would then be used to convince decision-makers about the potentially inequitable application of the law.

### **For policy changes, governmental bodies are key partners – still, what is the role of the civil society in promoting GEM?**

NGOs working in particular on promoting and protecting women's rights have a key part to play and are therefore important partners also for the donor community. Many women's NGOs require strong capacity development so that they can advocate for gender mainstreaming. In this regards, trainings should be focused on ensuring women's rights activists understand the processes involved in developing, monitoring, resourcing and implementing a government policy, if you want to work more strongly on "Gender and Development" (GAD). You have also to work with those NGOs with expertise in national and local good governance process, such as decentralisation; urban planning; budgeting and monitoring. A major potential I would see is to support women's NGOs and good-governance NGOs in Albania in coming together, bringing together their respective expertise – the knowledge on women's needs and rights and the know how on policy influence together. Both are needed!

### **How should the donors best support GEM in Albania?**

The Development Community in Albania is well placed for promoting gender equality actively, in part due to the fact that they have to be very strategic in their use of increasingly limited resources; and in part because many bilaterals actively prioritise supporting gender equality and women's human rights issues in the country. However, a challenge of gender mainstreaming is over-ambition on the part of any organisation. My advice would be to development practioners – don't try to do it all. Be focused and strategic in implementing a gender mainstreaming process. If donors consistently use the rights-based approach to development, gender will quite naturally be integrated throughout the majority of their development interventions. One real challenge of mainstreaming gender is that often practitioners like Swiss Cooperation and UNIFEM need to first support the establishment of sex disaggregated data, inter-ministerial partnerships, gender-sensitive monitoring and analysis of budgets a precondition for mainstreaming of gender into a policy. Gender mainstreaming requires a long-term commitment!

#### What is «gender»?

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life.

#### What is «gender equality»?

Gender equality is the aim of Gender and Development. It does not simply or necessarily mean equal numbers of women and men (girls and boys) in development activities, nor does it necessarily mean treating women and men (girls and boys) exactly the same. The aim is not that women and men become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances become and remain equal. Gender equality includes the right for women and men to be different. It signifies an aspiration to work towards a society in which women and men (girls and boys) are able to live equally fulfilling lives and to equally contribute to designing the society they want.

#### What is «mainstreaming gender»?

Mainstreaming gender is a strategy to achieve gender equality. It means recognising that women and men often have different needs and priorities, face different constraints, have different aspirations and contribute to development in different ways. A key hypothesis is that organisations and societies must be transformed to accommodate women's and men's needs and treat them as equals.

#### What is gender as a transversal theme?

Working with gender as a transversal theme is one of the strategies for mainstreaming gender. It is a planning methodology. At a programme/project and sector level, it implies that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively. It requires the participation of women as well as men throughout the planning cycle and the systematic integration of their respective priorities and needs.

Source: SDC Toolkit on Gender Equality, Definitions, Sheet 1

[http://www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Gender/General\\_and\\_thematic\\_tools/General\\_tools](http://www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Gender/General_and_thematic_tools/General_tools)



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