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A wide-angle photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground and middle ground, a field is covered with numerous large, cylindrical hay bales. The field is a mix of dry, golden-brown grass and some green weeds. In the background, a range of green, rolling mountains stretches across the horizon under a clear blue sky. A few scattered trees and small buildings are visible in the distance.

PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

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Policy brief no. 20 *'Perspectives of women in rural areas'*, provides a summary of key findings and recommendations from an extensive research study carried out by the Center for Research and Policy Making.

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PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

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FOREWORD

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ has made significant progress in advancing the implementation of national commitments to gender equality. Respect for women's human rights and a commitment to the advancement of gender equality are key principles and objectives for the Macedonian Government and are enshrined within the constitution and in numerous specific laws. Gender equality mechanisms have been established at national and local level, specific policies have been adopted and the legislative framework has been improved with the recent revision of the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men. Recognizing that equality needs to go hand in hand with equity, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2007–2012 stipulates that working towards “gender equality and coping with existing inequalities very often means working differently with men and women, admitting that women often have different needs and priorities, face different obstacles, have different aspirations, and contribute to development differently.” Despite the progress made in the institutional, policy and legal framework, however, gender gaps and inequalities continue to persist, especially among the most vulnerable.

In an effort to provide meaningful technical assistance to the implementation of national priorities, UN Women supported the research initiative leading to this study as a contribution to one of the key strategic objectives of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality—the effective realization of the rights of women, including women in rural areas.

The present study is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of the status of women in rural areas in the country as compared with the status of their male counterparts in rural areas and with the population of both men and women in urban areas, thus providing a baseline with which to design concrete measures leading to the empowerment of women in rural areas.

The study provides an analysis of existing legislative and policy frameworks and explores the extent of the social exclusion of women in rural areas, including their exclusion

from the labour market, from local public and social life, and from participation in local decision-making processes. In addition to voicing the needs and challenges of women in rural areas and highlighting the gaps that need to be addressed to improve their status, the study identifies the available opportunities to challenge the barriers these women face.

This study thus encourages policy-makers to take stock of the disadvantages and challenges experienced by women in rural areas but also to look beyond these impediments and explore the potential these women have for their own advancement and for the development of their communities. The study offers insights into the needs and concerns of rural women and encourages local as well as national policy-makers and decision-makers to review community development from the perspectives of women in rural areas. It calls for local and national policies to be adapted to the realities faced by these women in order to remove the barriers they face on a daily basis. Last but not least, the study underlines the urgent need to ensure that rural women are included in key decision-making processes.

Investing energy and resources into creating an environment supportive for women in rural areas will not only ensure progress for such women but will also contribute to the overall development of the communities in which they live. As emphasized by Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, the imperative to empower women in rural areas is clear: *‘We can no longer afford to leave women out ... the voices of women must be heard in decision-making at all levels if we want to achieve lasting peace, democracy and sustainable development.’*

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1 “Pursuant to Resolution 817 of the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations provisionally refers to the country for all its purposes as ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.’”



STUDY BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

Extensive efforts have been made in recent years to promote gender equality in Macedonia. Gender equality mechanisms have been established at national and local level and supportive legislative frameworks have been adopted including the recently revised Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men. Nevertheless, as in many countries in the region, the key struggle remains that of ensuring normative frameworks are translated into positive actions and tangible results which improve the lives of women, particularly the most vulnerable and excluded groups of women.

The 2006 recommendations of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women emphasized the vulnerability of women living in rural areas and women from ethnic minority communities, highlighting the limited efforts made so far to address the social exclusion of such women. Similar concerns have been reiterated in European Union reports on the progress made by the country towards EU integration.

In addressing any challenge, especially a complex challenge, the necessary first step is to identify and understand the issues at stake. The aim of the research project behind this publication was thus to provide a comprehensive analysis of the status of women in rural areas, assessing their status on the basis of all available data, mapping the needs and challenges they face and exploring the roots of their exclusion. This step was all the more necessary given the lack of official data and comprehensive analysis of the status of rural women in the country.

Representative field research was thus conducted in rural areas to ensure the inclusion of women's subjective experiences as a legitimate tool of research into rural ways of life and how these conditions impact on the status of women within society-and, in particular, how they impact differently on men and women. In addition to addressing the gaps left by previous studies and the lack of sufficient official data on women in rural areas, this research aimed to gather quantitative and qualitative data with which to formulate sound and effective policies that recognize and meet the specific needs of women in rural areas.

On the basis of the findings of this field research and from the analysis of gaps and opportunities in existing legal and policy frameworks, this study offers recommendations for policies to support the inclusion and empowerment of women in rural areas.



KEY FINDINGS

The baseline study on rural women conducted as part of this project confirmed the findings of the scarce literature currently available in Macedonia concerning the status of women in rural areas. In particular, the study found evidence, both from the data already available and from the field research undertaken, of the great extent to which women in rural areas are socially excluded-from the labour market, from local public and social life, and from participation in local decision-making processes that could positively affect the development of the communities in which they live and which could bring desirable changes to their lives.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES IS HINDERED BY A LACK OF ADEQUATE SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS

The majority of the rural population of Macedonia live in the north-western region of the Polog Valley and in the south-eastern and south-western regions.

The rural population suffers from an underdeveloped infrastructure and a limited range of public services. These factors, combined with the prevalence of traditional values in rural societies, place women living in rural areas in a particularly difficult and disadvantaged position.

In terms of mobility, women in rural areas suffer both from distant amenities and traditional gender stereotypes that hinder their individual movement-preventing many of them, for example, from acquiring driving licenses. Women in rural areas usually cannot travel alone to visit a doctor. There are often no kindergartens within walking distance in rural areas. And employment agencies are usually too far away to provide help, information and development opportunities to rural women in finding jobs and acquiring skills.

This study therefore recommends that policy-makers adopt a gendered approach when designing infrastructural measures. This is because men and women in rural areas are traditionally tasked with different responsibilities to provide for life and therefore have different priorities when it comes to improving the accessibility of basic infrastructure.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

The limited range of public services available in rural areas prevents women from accessing many opportunities, including opportunities for economic empowerment.

FACT:

In 90 per cent of highland villages and 70 per cent of lowland villages, childcare services are not locally available and women typically have to walk an hour and a half or more to reach the nearest childcare centre. In fact, children in many rural areas are rarely enrolled in childcare services. For example, the lowest proportion of children aged 0-7 years attending kindergarten are in the Polog region (2.5%) and the south-west region (6.5%). The average proportion of children attending childcare services throughout the country is 12 per cent.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

"I have no one to look after my children and there is no kindergarten nearby. So I cannot look for work."



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION IS HINDERED BY BARRIERS TO LABOUR MARKET ABSORPTION

The disadvantages faced by women from rural areas are exacerbated by many factors. In addition to infrastructural deficiencies and a lack of access to services, women in rural areas are challenged by typically having lower levels of education compared both to men in the same areas and to women living in urban areas. The study shows that women from rural areas typically have only primary level education, while women from urban areas typically have at least secondary level education. The typical educational profile of men from rural areas, meanwhile, is between these two levels.

The study did reveal an improving trend, however, in the transition from primary to secondary education amongst girls in rural areas. Gender differences in educational achievement remain determined, as the results of the study show, by ethnic and cultural background. Amongst ethnic Macedonians, for example, gender balance in education is expected to be achieved quite soon, while additional support and awareness-raising efforts will be needed to ensure such a gender balance in ethnic Albanian and Turkish communities.

Problems related to the transport of children to schools must be resolved as a matter of priority if these difficulties are not to become the single greatest exclusionary factor preventing the schooling of girls from rural areas.

The findings of the study show a very strong inverse correlation between low educational levels and rates of economic inactivity. Women in rural areas with lower levels of education are much more likely to opt out of the labour market on realizing how few jobs are available to them as compared to women who pursue more ambitious educational goals. Statistics indicate, however, that many women in rural areas who have acquired higher levels of education and are actively seeking work still struggle to break into the labour market-as shown in their high rates of both economic activity and unemployment.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Women need more than education to break into the labour market.

FACTS:

Twenty-three per cent of women in rural areas have no education or only incomplete primary education. Economic inactivity rates amongst these women are extremely high, at 78 per cent. Only five per cent of women in rural areas have completed higher or university education. And while inactivity rates are typically lowest amongst university-educated women at 12 per cent, as many as 40 per cent of women with degrees remain unemployed in rural areas, meaning that educated women in rural areas have few opportunities and have little incentive to stay there.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

“There’s no future for us [women with university education] in the village. We are all looking for jobs in town ... but it is very difficult to find one.”

GREATER EFFORTS ARE NEEDED TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE PROVISION IN RURAL AREAS, TO RAISE HEALTH AWARENESS AND TO INCREASE WOMEN'S INDEPENDENCE IN THE USE OF HEALTH SERVICES

A major difficulty facing the rural population is that of limited access to basic health services. While the country's health policy is sensitive to the needs of people in rural areas, the distribution of General Practitioners in rural areas remains uneven and primary healthcare is especially scarce in highlands and remoter villages.

More effective monitoring and evaluation of primary healthcare provision in rural areas is needed to ensure better coverage.

The outreach of health services to women in rural areas would also be improved by reforming the law on health insurance to allow for individual insurance rather than shared insurance with a spouse. This is because shared insurance has been shown in the study to support the dependence of rural women on their husbands who hold the rights to health insurance.

Women in rural areas thus face numerous barriers in accessing healthcare services, and this particularly applies to specialized services such as reproductive healthcare. These services are typically located in urban centres and involve high costs in terms of transport and services.

These disadvantages are further exacerbated by the limited individual mobility of women in rural areas, who often do not have the means or necessary qualifications to drive a car in areas where public transport is deficient. The traditional cultural norms that prevail in some rural communities also serve to discourage women from making use of specialized healthcare services—as for example the traditional sense of 'shame' associated with visiting a gynaecologist and the pressure on women to be accompanied by males when visiting the doctor. Women from some ethnic minority communities may face additional disadvantages in the form of language barriers when accessing services.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Women in rural areas must endure cultural taboos when accessing certain healthcare services.

FACTS:

In seventy per cent of rural villages, a visit to the nearest provider of specialist healthcare services involves a journey of at least ninety minutes by foot. Many women in rural areas visit a gynaecologist as infrequently as once every five years or less: this applies to over 52 per cent of Macedonian women, 43 per cent of Albanian women, and 64 per cent of Turkish women in rural areas. Some have never visited a gynaecologist and many only do so when strictly necessary. In addition to the significant obstacles of distance and transport costs, cultural norms and traditions also impose barriers, while low awareness and insufficient healthcare provision in minority languages may exacerbate the problem even further.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

"There is a shame about it here, although there shouldn't be. So women only go to the gynaecologist if they have a problem and don't go for regular check-ups. Lots of women don't go because they are not well informed. They are ashamed... Even if there was a gynaecologist in the village, they might not go more often because they would be ashamed to be seen there. If anybody saw her she'd be embarrassed to say hello to them on the street the next day."

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS CONTINUE TO PREVAIL

Statistics on in/activity rates in the labour market indicate striking gender differences, with very high inactivity rates among women in rural areas. The study shows that economic activity rates are two times higher for men in both urban and rural areas than for women in rural areas. This applies, moreover, to nearly all age groups.

Another notable finding of the study is that women aged between 25 and 60 in urban areas are more actively involved in the workforce than women in rural areas, while no such difference exists between men in urban and rural areas.

Given this lack of economic and employment opportunities, combined with difficult living conditions, economic hardship, and a limited range of accessible public services, young women in rural areas are certain to leave their villages in the future unless their local circumstances and opportunities improve.

Young women living in rural areas face great obstacles breaking into the labour market. The study shows that unemployment is much higher among young women from the age of twenty upwards in rural areas than among women of the same age in urban areas. From the survey responses it appears that the main reason for this difference is the responsibilities that rural women are traditionally expected to fulfil for their families (as wives and mothers), as well as the amount of unpaid housework they typically perform.

Important ethnic differences also exist in rates of economic inactivity amongst women in rural areas. Thus, while approximately 50 per cent of Macedonian women surveyed in rural areas are earning an income and are self-sufficient, the study shows that only 25 per cent of Albanian women and none of the Turkish women surveyed were earning an income. This disparity tends to confirm that the primary role of women in rural areas remains that of looking after children and role of their husbands as the main breadwinners in the family, with this division of labour being most evident in Muslim families and communities.

Current active labour market measures do not target women in rural areas specifically. As such, current measures have no capacity to reach out to the majority of rural women who are economically inactive. There is a room for

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Young women in rural areas experience great difficulties entering the labour market. The traditional responsibilities assigned to women for family care constitute an additional reason why the majority of women of reproductive age in rural areas are not economically active.

FACTS:

Three out of four women in rural areas are unemployed. Young women in rural areas suffer the highest rates of unemployment, with 59 per cent unemployment amongst rural women in the 20 to 24 age group and 43 per cent unemployment in the 25-29 age group.

Overall, 64 per cent of women in rural areas are officially economically inactive. According to the survey, the most frequent reason for such high rates of economic inactivity amongst women in rural areas is their occupation with childcare and household responsibilities—a reason cited by 43 per cent of economically inactive women in rural areas.

It must be noted, however, that 47 per cent of women in rural areas who are not employed do in fact perform a number of activities such as working on family farms, producing handicrafts or doing occasional jobs for others.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

“We are housewives and we are not seeking work. At the moment there is no work for the men. And anyway we have so many tasks at home: washing, cooking for the family, and other chores.

I just stay at home with my domestic chores and work nowhere. We women also need to work but there is nothing to do. And if there were jobs for us I do not think our husbands would let us work.”

improvement in increasing the access of women in rural areas to employment support services.



POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE IS TO BE MORE THAN JUST A COPING STRATEGY

In rural areas, agricultural work is seen as a way to earn additional income, though such work is not well paid. Official statistics show that many more men than women are making a living from agriculture as they are formally employed as farmers or in agricultural companies. The results of the study, however, reveal that the majority of unpaid workers and undeclared employees in the agricultural sector are women, typically engaged as unpaid family workers or seasonal agricultural workers.

The prevalence of unpaid or poorly paid work in agriculture together with high unemployment and a severe lack of job opportunities, combine to put women in rural areas in an especially vulnerable position.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the results of this study show that young women from rural areas are not interested in spending their futures in farming and that many of them say they would only like to continue living in these rural areas if they can find jobs that do not involve agricultural work.

Women are more likely to move away from rural areas to marry and settle down in cities. One reason why women migrate from rural areas more readily than men is that women in rural areas own no property and so have much less to lose than men by leaving their villages.

One way of increasing the motivation of women in rural areas to engage and commit to agricultural business activities rather than seeking opportunities outside of agriculture or migrating would thus be to introduce measures to improve women's access to material assets, including farmland and other property. Such a reform would also contribute to the success of the current policy for rural development aimed at diversifying the agriculture sector by promoting rural tourism and other economic activities. Limited scope of available data on affirmative measures aimed at supporting applications from women and young people for the rural development schemes appear to reveal an increasing proportion of successful female applicants, though still lower than the number of successful male applicants. More detailed analysis of the impact of these schemes in terms of gender is needed, however, before a firm assessment can be made.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Farming is perceived as a male job and family assets are traditionally kept under the control of men. Women have little space to question this practice, let alone to take advantage of opportunities.

FACTS:

Women make up 38 per cent of all those officially employed in agriculture, hunting and forestry (including seasonal workers). Women working in this sector earn 33 per cent less than their male counterparts. Some twenty per cent of economically inactive women in rural areas are working on family farms without being paid and very few are formally registered as farmers. Fifty-eight per cent of women in rural areas have no personal income. And in less than six per cent of families women own farmland or a house. Contrary, majority of men both have personal income and control the family assets. Thus in almost 80 per cent of rural families in the survey it is the husband or the husband's father who owns the family house, and in 62 per cent of families it is the men own the farmland too.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

"Everything my father-in-law owns belongs to my husband. We live together and that is ours. There is no need to transfer the property to women.

If a woman were to go to the purchasing point (otkupenpunkt) she would be laughed at ... Even if a woman knows better than men, you can only say that at home, not in public."



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The study analysed a number of current institutional and policy frameworks in Macedonia in terms of their potential to establish an environment supportive to the enhancement of women's livelihoods in rural areas.

These frameworks include reforms in the following areas: reforms intended to increase gender equality, such as the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality; reforms intended to increase employment opportunities, such as the National Employment Strategy and set of active labour market measures; reforms aimed at eradicating poverty, such as the Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010-2020; and reforms intended to promote rural development, such as the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, and the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development (IPARD).

The study's analysis shows, however, that only two of these policy frameworks include measures with specifically defined objectives aimed at improving opportunities and conditions for women in rural areas—these being the National Action Plan for gender Equality and affirmative measures supporting Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The other policy frameworks recognize the problems of women in rural areas but do not provide specific measures that would offer any solutions to those problems.

What is encouraging within the agriculture and rural development policy framework is that it includes affirmative measures aimed at encouraging women in rural areas to apply for institutional support, with the aim being to stimulate women's economic engagement in agriculture and rural tourism.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Agricultural schemes are open to female applicants, though it remains the case that a higher proportion of males make use of institutional support for farming than women. Some women, however, are interested in advancing in farming.

FACTS:

Of the 46 men and 40 women in rural areas who identified themselves in the survey as farmers (including non-registered, informally employed farmers), 65 per cent of the female farmers had never applied for institutional support for farming, while 67 per cent of the male farmers had applied for such support. The main reason for this gender discrepancy is that many women do not fulfill the eligibility conditions for applying.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

"I would like to continue my education or attend some training course in farming -- there must be many things that we don't know yet. I would go together with my husband."



AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS ARE LIMITED AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS PREVENT THEIR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

On the basis of the official data available on the affirmative actions to facilitate the development of rural areas and to increase equal opportunities, the study assessed these measures in terms of their different impact on men and women.

The study's assessment recognizes and praises the supportive measures. However, it also identifies the need for greater coordination amongst the related policy documents and institutions which tackle issues relevant to women in rural areas. The study further criticizes the lack of responsiveness of these measures to the needs and interests of women in rural areas, questioning the extent to which these actions respond appropriately to the factors that negatively affect the livelihoods of women in rural areas. The main reasons for this deficiency in responsiveness is that such women are not usually included in important decision-making processes and that there is no substantial body of data available that comprehensively identifies the specific needs of women in rural areas and would thus serve to inform policy-making processes.

The current lack of sufficient data including urban and rural, age and ethnic background comparisons with sex-disaggregated data constitute a serious impediment to the effectiveness of policy-making as well as preventing any meaningful cross-cutting gender analysis.

The study further identifies two major obstacles to the effective implementation of policies aimed at supporting gender equality: (i) the lack of adequate and sustainable financing, and (ii) the lack of system in place for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of such policies and, in particular, their impact on women in rural areas.

BRIEF FACTS THROUGH GENDER LENSES

Women from rural areas are rarely consulted on public issues. Even if they participate, they lack trust in the processes.

FACTS:

There is no woman serving as mayor. While majority of women do participated in elections as voters, only 3% of women rural areas would be involved in actives political live (party activism) and even less 2% would participate in public hearings, debates or municipality meetings. 72% of those women stating they are not participating, do so because they don't believe they can benefit from the meetings.

HER PERSPECTIVE:

They do not organize anything ...just when there are elections, villagers are gathered and asked and still there is nothing for us, women sat at home and on fields. What ever we say, won't be accepted. You go there, they speak, we listen, when they finish, we leave. They don't ask for your opinion and often you can't speak up.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study addresses the current lack of a gender analysis of the needs of women in rural areas, identifying these needs through comparative data analysis. It further presents an analysis of the policy frameworks affecting women in rural areas and an assessment of existing institutional capacities for the effective implementation of these policies. Finally, the study provides recommendations to help policy-makers increase the effectiveness of measures which might positively affect the conditions and opportunities of women in rural areas. These recommendations aim to offer evidence-based inputs to assist the policy agendas of individual ministries within the Government and the policy agendas of the country's units of local self-government. These recommendations are not presented as ready-made solutions, however; rather they should be considered as starting-points for policy discussions that will hopefully result in solutions to improve the livelihoods of women in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Policy-making and implementation needs to be more responsive to the needs of women in rural areas if it is to be effective.

The development of policies responsive to the needs of women and men in rural areas requires adequate data provision. The central government should thus make it a priority to ensure that systems are in place to collect and process data on the delivery of public services and make this data publicly available so as to enable cross comparisons of key categories such as age, gender, sex, ethnicity, and rural and urban populations.

A cross-cutting comparison of sex-disaggregated data against other categories would allow the findings of gender analysis to inform policy design and thus ensure the adoption of appropriate gender-responsive measures to address the identified gender gaps and inequalities and to meet the needs articulated by gender advocates. Consultative processes must also be set in place within these frameworks to enable and encourage women in rural areas to participate and voice their needs in policy-making processes. To strengthen the effectiveness of policies and their impact on improving the livelihoods of women in rural areas, adequate sourcing should be planned and secured for all relevant strategic priorities and policy measures. The effects of implementation should be monitored and their impact evaluated from a gender perspective, including the perspectives of women in rural areas.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN BRIEF:

- *To ensure that systems are in place to collect and process data on the delivery of public services and that this data is made publicly available to enable cross comparisons of key categories such as age, gender, sex, ethnicity, and rural and urban populations.*
- *To ensure that gender analysis of data is reflected in policy design, policy implementation and in the monitoring and evaluation of policy results and impacts.*
- *To ensure that the policy-making process includes a consultative process that enables and encourages the active participation of women in rural areas.*

Increasing the effectiveness and impact of rural development programmes on women in rural areas

In-depth gender analysis is also crucial to support ongoing processes aimed at devising institutional responses to the needs of the rural population. Such analysis must include gender budget analysis of the rural development programmes, including embedded affirmative measures to encourage women applicants. Additionally, it is also important to ensure that recommendations are taken into consideration in policy-making in order to sustain positive results and increase the gender-responsiveness of rural and agriculture development policies.

For such policies to be effective in improving the livelihoods of women in rural areas, it is necessary that steps be taken to make agriculture more attractive for women. These steps should include actions to acknowledge women's contribution and to ensure equal pay for women and men in agricultural work. Women's access to agricultural assets and other property rights should be improved and women farmers should be promoted as positive role models. The costs incurred by registered farmers should be reduced, bearing in mind the seasonal character of agricultural work. Ongoing initiatives designed to promote and raise awareness of agricultural benefit schemes for farmers must be strengthened and directed more effectively at women farmers and other women in rural areas. Raising the awareness of women in rural areas about property rights in regard to agricultural land and providing them with support to exercise these rights would substantially improve their economic independence and increase their eligibility for agricultural subsidies.

Increased investment is needed in measures aimed at increasing the participation of women in rural areas in current agricultural schemes. This includes investment in the following measures: (i) awareness-raising initiatives and the use of quotas to encourage women in rural areas to participate in training courses on new production trends like organic farming; (ii) measures that provide incentives to support the self-employment of women in rural areas, by reducing costs and introducing low-interest credits to support women in starting up their own businesses; and (iii) measures to provide technical

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN BRIEF:

- *To improve the effectiveness and sustainability of policies and increase their responsiveness to the needs of women in rural areas, it is necessary to incorporate in-depth gender analysis in policy design, including gender budget analysis of the rural development programmes and affirmative measures aimed at increasing the participation of women in such programmes.*
- *To support greater recognition of the role of women in rural areas and the contribution they make to agricultural and rural development and to ensure that such women receive an equal share of property rights and profits from assets, equal pay and equal access to public assets and opportunities.*
- *To support women in rural areas by improving their access to current schemes and to ensure that women benefit from these opportunities as much as men. This support should include measures to improve women's access to information, the use of quotas or minimum thresholds in capacity-building initiatives like agricultural training, measures to provide women with increased access to credits and advisory support.*

support and pro-actively raise awareness in the preparation of applications for support from programmes for the development of rural tourism and financial assistance offered by IPARD.

Increasing employment opportunities for women in rural areas

Employment opportunities for women in rural areas must be improved by supporting initiatives that increase awareness, especially amongst women from ethnic minority communities, about the benefits and support available through active labour market measures. Support should thus be provided to capacity-building initiatives aimed at facilitating the access of women in rural areas to all available public and private economic empowerment opportunities. Employment schemes such as the active labour market measures must be revised (e.g. with modified criteria or new measures) in order to ensure the inclusion of low-skilled and economically inactive women in rural areas and to promote and increase their economic activity. These policy revisions need to reflect an adequate assessment of the capacities of women in rural areas and the gaps identified in terms of available labour market opportunities. In particular, it is necessary that such policy revisions ensure access for women in rural areas with low levels of education to enrol in adult-training programmes specifically tailored to help to utilize available opportunities. Such training could include opportunities for some women in rural areas to complete their primary or secondary education, opportunities for women to increase their computer and internet skills, business training courses and courses to increase women's capacity to search for jobs or to become self-employed. Initiatives are also needed to promote innovative networking between women in rural areas, for example by using social media and to build bridges between different generations of women.

Given that a substantial number of women in rural areas express a desire to find formal employment outside of the agricultural sector, it is clear that support should be given to create employment opportunities for women in sectors other than agriculture, such as in local tourism and related services. Initiatives to promote and facilitate networking between women with specific skills—like sewing and other handicrafts that have not been officially recognized—and businesses that are in need of such skills or which are involved in marketing products involving these specific skills. In addition, policies such as tax incentives are needed to support more flexible employment arrangements and part-time work so as to encourage women to become more economically active and to address their burden of childcare and housework responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN BRIEF:

- *To ensure that women in rural areas are adequately informed about the benefits, opportunities and support available from public schemes such as active labour market measures and local economic development opportunities, and to provide women in rural areas with incentives to become more economically active.*
- *To ensure that the needs and perspectives of women in rural areas are consulted and recognized and incorporated when revising employment and economic development policies and in adopting new policies.*
- *To ensure that capacity assessments of gaps and needs against existing market opportunities are used to develop tailored initiatives aimed at women in rural areas. Such initiatives should include, for example, adult training programmes for women in rural areas with low levels of education to complete their primary or secondary education, to increase their computer-literacy skills and to increase their capacity for seeking jobs and for self-employment.*
- *Support economic development investments that provide for opportunities beyond agriculture and that can absorb skills and capacities of women in rural areas (incl. facilitation of networking between business opportunities in needs of skills that rural women have to offer).*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Strengthening participatory policy making

Local stakeholders must ensure that the perspectives of women in rural areas are adequately consulted and integrated within local infrastructural projects and initiatives and in the design and delivery of public services.

Participation needs to be strengthened in every phase of the process of policy development—in the design, planning and implementation of policies as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness. Such strengthened participation can be achieved through the introduction of participatory budgeting and gender-responsive budgeting tools and by increasing the transparency and accountability of local governments and the services they provide to rural populations—and to women in rural areas in particular.

Enhancing the capacities and outreach of public services

Local authorities, in cooperation with the national authorities responsible for setting the central level policy and institutional framework, should enhance the capacities of public service providers at local level to expand the outreach of their services to women and men in rural areas. This can be achieved, for example, by instituting more frequent field visits and by devoting increased resources to ensure the greater outreach of local services.

Enhancing the capacities and outreach of public services will necessarily entail improvements in at least five main areas. Thus, the reliability, coverage and frequency of **transport services** need to be enhanced. A **childcare** service network needs to be provided in rural areas to enable women to seek employment opportunities at local level. This may be achieved by providing incentives to public or private childcare providers or by advocating with local self-government units to explore the possibility of using centrally distributed block grants as part of alternative solutions for the provision of childcare services in rural areas. **Adult education** programmes, including primary and secondary education courses, need to be introduced and promoted and made

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN BRIEF:

- *To institute participatory mechanisms at local level to encourage the participation of women in rural areas and ensure that their needs and perspectives are recognized and that they are consulted in local policy making and local development planning.*
- *To use participatory budgeting and gender-responsive budgeting tools to increase the responsiveness of local government to the needs of women and men in rural areas.*
- *To ensure that public services providers have the capacity to expand the outreach of their services to women in rural areas.*
- *To ensure that supportive services are in place to address the needs of women in rural areas. This includes improving the availability of public transport, improving the provision of childcare services, improving the coverage and availability of healthcare services in rural areas, and implementing adult education programs.*

available free of charge to women and men who have not completed their formal schooling. To meet the **health-care related** needs of women in rural areas, the relevant authorities need to explore the possibility of supporting regular weekly visits by paediatricians and gynaecologists to villages. To strengthen the effective delivery of healthcare services to women in rural areas who belong to **ethnic minority communities**, it is necessary to explore the possibility of making such services available in the mother languages of all women in rural areas, for example by supporting the hiring of healthcare staff with multiple language capacities or by producing guidelines and instructions in all local languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Public authorities and private entities, including civil society organizations, should take steps to strengthen their cooperation in addressing the challenges faced by women in rural areas and in responding to their needs and priorities effectively. This may include partnerships in a variety of initiatives with civil society organisations and private institutions—and especially with women's organisations and gender equality advocates.

Greater cooperation and strengthened partnerships would benefit the following activities, for example: i) the introduction of initiatives to break traditional gender stereotypes and other barriers which prevent women from making independent use of public and private means of transport, including the provision of support for women who are interested in obtaining driving licenses; ii) the promotion of proactively positive male role models by, for example, encouraging men to take parental leave and to share childcare responsibilities more equally; iii) the establishment of mechanisms to ensure the early detection of families assessed as being at higher risk of either not enrolling their children at school or withdrawing their children from school—families in traditional Muslim communities, for example, and families living in remote mountainous areas. Such mechanisms would include the promotion of proactive interventions: awareness raising and counselling early in the schooling process.

A partnership approach should be adopted and multiple partners—including the media, public and private healthcare providers, local leaders and civic organizations—should be involved in awareness-raising initiatives on health issues, especially the need for regular gynaecological check-ups (particularly in ethnic Albanian and ethnic Turkish communities). Cooperation and involvement with healthcare providers and specialist doctors is especially necessary in proactive preventative healthcare initiatives and could include, for example, informative consultations with local communities involving local doctors as expert resources.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN BRIEF:

- *To support the establishment of partnerships between public authorities and the private sector, including civil society and women's organizations. Such partnerships can serve as the driving force for introducing initiatives that are more responsive to the needs of women in rural areas.*
- *To adopt a broader partnerships approach—including partnerships between public authorities, civil societies, the media, religious and other community leaders and professionals—in order to raise awareness of and challenge gender stereotypes that prevent women in rural areas from taking a more active role in public life and benefiting from economic opportunities.*
- *To promote cooperation and joint initiatives by multiple partners at local level that address issues affecting women in rural areas, including preventative healthcare programmes, schooling support, and initiatives aimed at encouraging men to take a equal share of childcare responsibilities.*

It is crucial, moreover, to raise the awareness of men in rural areas as to the importance of preventative healthcare and to encourage the proactive involvement of men in promoting women's access to preventative check-ups for risks related to reproductive health. All relevant stakeholders should jointly explore options for policy measures at local and central level that would support the introduction of compulsory gynaecological check-ups and reduce the costs of healthcare by enabling free-of-charge screening for terminal diseases such as different kinds of cancer.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The research methodology employed in this study included a representative survey of women and men in rural areas in Macedonia conducted in spring 2011, focus-group discussions with women and men in rural areas, and interviews with relevant policy-makers. The data gathered from the survey, discussions and interviews was then cross-analyzed with official statistics and data from secondary sources. A background review was also conducted of relevant legislation, decrees and decisions, annual reports from public bodies, and reports from international organizations and civil society. Finally, the study team conducted a gender analysis of current policy frameworks to assess the extent to which they respond to the specific conditions and needs of women in rural areas. This last assessment was necessary in order to identify and elaborate relevant policy recommendations for measures to transform rural societies and improve the livelihoods of women in rural areas.

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