



Policy Brief

Empowering Albanian Rural Women *Economic and Social Perspectives*

With the Support of:



THE WORLD BANK

Working for a World
Free of Poverty

Tirana, October 2010



This policy brief is product of the Department of Local Governance and Integrated Development of IDM and Gender Alliance for Development Center. The document was made possible through financial assistance provided by World Bank. The opinions expressed herein are those of the experts and do not necessarily reflect the views of the donor.

Prepared by:

Erisa Çela -Head of LGID, Institute for Democracy and Mediation

Mirela Arqimandriti- Executive Director of Gender Alliance for Development Centre



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. IDM AND GADC: WHY THIS JOINT INITIATIVE ?.....	3
2. GENERAL OVERVIEW.....	3
3. ECONOMIC STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN.....	5
4. SOCIAL STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN.....	6
5. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANT DRAWBACKS	8
6. ALBANIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES	9
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	10
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	13

1. IDM and GADC: Why this Joint Initiative?

IDM and GADC through this policy brief intend to advocate for a more powerful role entitled to the Albanian rural women. Through this policy brief, we are providing the public, the decision-making bodies and other interested parties, with recommendations and alternatives after a thorough analysis of the concrete economic and social situation of Albanian women in rural areas.

GADC and IDM believe that the current situation of women in rural areas presented through this policy brief need urgent solutions by new adopted alternatives and clearly outline actions. Both organizations recognize the need of ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities for development. As a consequence, a better balance has to be achieved between women and men in making decisions that affect the life and economy of rural society. Both organizations are working on the micro and macro level. On micro level we are working with people by training them and helping raising their awareness on development issues, teaching them to lobby and advocate. And on the macro level we are working with the government, development partners and the private sector. We will use both levels addressing the problems and recommendations coming from this policy brief which as its final ambition has the contribution to the empowerment of Albanian rural women.

2. General Overview

Albania is a relatively small country, with a notable mountainous landscape and with a population of about 3.1 million inhabitants. Only 24% of the land is classified as agricultural one, 36% is compounded of forests and 15% is pasture. Agriculture continues to play an important part in the national economy since most of the population is involved in this sector. Despite significant economic progress, since its transition to a market-based economy, Albania can still be considered a country with a high level of poverty, which can be extremely soaring in rural areas.¹

Nowadays, rural population in Albania makes up 54% of the total population and 71 % of the working force is employed in agriculture or agriculture related activities. It can be easily observed that rural Albania is more dependent on agriculture than in most European states and has poorly developed manufacturing and respective services. The country's main work force is engaged in agriculture where all economic and human development index data are the lowest nationwide compared to other sectors of the economy. Roughly, half of the Albanian GDP is produced in the service sector. Agriculture continues to downsize but still represents 16.3% share of GDP and remains the largest employer with 58% of the working population.²

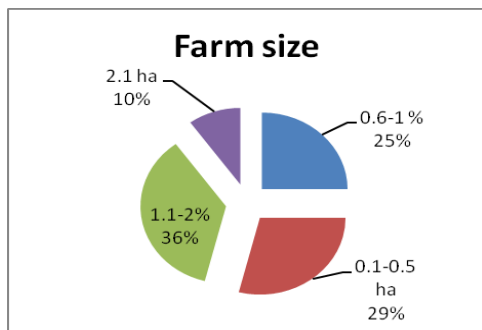
Population living in rural areas is not included in the unemployment figures of the country as the labor force in these areas is considered as self – employed in the agricultural family economies. As

¹ Albania Gender profile, IFAD <http://www.ifad.org/english/gender/cen/profiles/alb.htm>

² EC progress report for Albania 2009: "Sectoral and enterprise structure" pg. 24.

a result, the view of the exercise of rights by women in rural areas is incomplete and the statistical data is almost entirely missing.³

Agriculture is dominated by farms which are small in size (1.13 ha on average)



Source: MAFCP Annual yearbook, 2006

Some 1.670.000, or about of 1/2 of the general population are small farmers. These small farmers, many of them women, are poor and food-insecure. The major contributor in their failure to obtain an adequate livelihood in the places they were born is the migration from rural to urban areas and the high number of the young persons who tend to live abroad. Agriculture sector absorbs almost half the Albanian

labor force. Approximately 49 percent of men and 54 percent of women are engaged in agriculture. Further, 80 percent of rural men and 89 percent of rural women are involved in the agriculture sector.⁴

Moreover, in its overall, rural infrastructure is underdeveloped. Road and rail networks are in poor conditions, water and electricity supplies are frequently interrupted, communication technology does not reach all rural areas and there is an obvious lack of internet connection in the remote northern areas of Albania. This shortage in communication implies serious consequences for rural communities at large. Rural people turn into excluded groups with low possibilities to enter the labor market or income generating activities. They have low access to the most basic welfare needs and services. Additionally, lack of social cohesion and trust between citizens and politicians are strong obstacles to improve quality of life.

This general disadvantageous situation in rural Albania has its off-putting impact on those groups that are often under-represented even in a balanced Albanian urban context, such as women are. Certainly, no one can rebuff that rural poverty is a problem that concerns rural communities as a whole and that has clear impact and costs on all groups living in rural areas; farmers, private entrepreneurs, teacher, elders, youth, children etc. Nevertheless, without undermining the state of other rural groups, in the case of rural women the circumstances show to be much more discouraging, as usually women by and large in Albania undergo discrimination but when faced with the hard socio-economic conditions a rural context imposes on them, their status and positioning in the social order becomes roughly invisible. Gender inequality is still strong between men and women in the main all through Albania but particularly so in rural areas.

³ MoLSAEO – Responses to the UNECE questionnaire, 2009, pg.21

⁴ Nichols Barrett, “An Economic Snapshot”

3. Economic Status of Rural Women

Women in rural areas find themselves in a worse situation of discrimination than those in urban areas. Population living in rural areas is not included in the unemployment figures of the country since the labor force in these areas is considered as self – employed in the agricultural family economies. Rural women are generally not employed and the ones who work in private businesses have no social security payments.⁵ They are identified as “self-employed” and for that reason they cannot profit from the social and health insurance schemes. In addition, more women than men lost their jobs during structural adjustments, and formerly state-owned assets were generally granted to men.⁶ As a consequence, women are increasingly dependent on men financially.

Rural economy in Albania is characterized by distinct gender roles. Given that women’s work limits to gardening products, raising the chickens and the cattle, their contribution is very important for the welfare of their family in general and for the community at large. Taking into consideration their hard work within the family, as they are mostly responsible for the upbringing of children and taking care of the elderly, we reach to the conclusion that women in the rural areas work more hours per day compared to any other group and all these are unpaid hours. At the same time, due to household responsibilities, they cannot be hired into other businesses. Women farmers are producers of food, traders and family caretakers. They play an important role in their communities and contribute to the national economies. However, their work is not compensated financially.

There are some reasons for that: Despite the fact that they offer so much to the rural economy, rural women in Albania, as in many other countries of the world, have a minor share on the family rural properties and prosperities. They often do not have access or control over natural assets such as land and water. Eventhough there is a great lack in data, especially in the disaggregated data according to sex, we can still reach to the conclusion that women in general and especially in rural areas have little access to loans and other financial services such as savings and deposits.

In order for them to obtain a loan from financial institutions, Albanian women need to meet collateral requirements such as land title, however land titles are usually in the name of husbands or even worse of the father in laws. Women can not receive a loan due to the lack of knowledge on existing financial institutions and due to their low educational level. Also very few women have had access to trainings in accounting, finance and marketing in agriculture. Women in rural areas in Albania use traditional technology, they have very little access to modern technology which could help them in their productive activities and farm work is typically hampered by low mechanization and small parcels of land, two factors that contribute to the deficiency in rural resources exploitation.

⁵ Albania NGO Shadow Report to the UN CEDAW Committee “Shadow Report On The Implementation Of The CEDAW Convention In Albania” Submitted by the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) The Albanian Women Empowering Network (AWEN) The Network Against Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking, June 2010

⁶ IFAD, *Albania Gender Profile*, December 2009

4. Social Status of Rural Women

Rural women do not have access in social assets such as networks, associations and cooperatives. This weakens a lot their possibility to exert an influence in the decision-making processes and collective representation. Highland women have serious disparities in the access to human assets such as education and health services. All these factors taken together, the low level of education and the low technical abilities, drastically influence in decreasing the chances that women have to take part in the labor market. Rural women in Albania experience *domestic violence* in significant numbers.⁷ There are specific grounds why domestic violence is more spread in the village or why rural women are violated and cannot break away from from it, even when the conditions exist. Some of these aspects are the very patriarchal values of a rural family, religious belief and distance from the urban areas. Many of the women stay in abusive situations for years because they come to accept the abuse as normal. They get convinced that the abuse was due to their own fault.

Lack of knowledge, embarrassment, fear of reprisal and fear of not being believed has caused many rural women to remain silent about the abuse they undergo. At present, there is a critical need for knowledge sharing about domestic violence, with both survivors of abuse and the public. Information and education is indispensable to break the cycle of abuse, to teach children and adults what abuse is and how to deal with conflict in constructive ways. Rural women in abusive situations need information to deal with the complex issues the domestic violence causes on them and their children. They also need further information on their legal rights and other financial matters.

Albanian women in rural areas are often inhibited by cultural stereotypes and social attitudes that forbid them from taking on new tasks or responsibilities, which are usually considered as the male domain. A typical phenomenon that has been particularly noticed in rural areas throughout the years of transition is the low level of *education* among rural girls and women, mainly due to the school drop out of girls and their involvement in agriculture. Moreover, the phenomenon seems to persist. According to the most recent alternative report submitted to UN on CEDAW⁸, there is a considerable number of girls who do not attend secondary school regularly or drop out upon reaching a certain age. According to a survey undertaken by the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science and UNDP in 2005: 68.15% of rural women have finished their elementary education, 10.60 % have accomplished high school and only 0.77 % attended university. The main reasons for this decrease are the closure of schools in remote areas, economic difficulties, insecurity, diminishment of

⁷ Domestic Violence ,INSTAT 2009

⁸ Albania NGO Shadow Report to the UN CEDAW Committee “Shadow Report On The Implementation Of The CEDAW Convention In Albania” Submitted by the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) The Albanian Women Empowering Network (AWEN) The Network Against Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking, June 2010

school appreciation, and mentality. This decrease in level of education bears negative consequences for the advancement of rural women and their envisagement of what their role in society should be.

In relation to auxiliary services, there is a lack of kindergartens, a drastic change from the not too distant past when they used to be free of charge. This compels women or other female members of the family to stay at home and take care of the children themselves. There is no clear information of demand and supply in kindergarten and nursery facilities. In addition, there is no data on the total number of children of the appropriate age group to attend kindergartens or nurseries, and how many of the latter exist.

There are higher rates of poverty in rural areas compared to urban ones, particularly among women. Access to transport is limited; this comes mainly due to geographical isolation, lack of public transportation, and lack of funds for individuals to pay for their own mode of transportation. This can disproportionately affect single women with children responsible for transporting their families; Lack of providers, particularly obstetric providers due to the recruitment and retention problems in rural areas makes obstetric care particularly expensive and risky for providers. Rural women receive less adequate care when are pregnant and in some areas no prenatal care at all.⁹

Rural elderly women are more likely to suffer from higher rates of poverty, higher rates of chronic illnesses, less education, and lack of access to health care and transportation. In addition, many elderly women live alone as widows or care for a disabled spouse or family member at home.

After the collapse of communism, many Albanian women from rural areas have fallen victims of *human trafficking*. The trafficking has been for many years a widespread phenomenon in Albania and most victims come from rural areas, where economic hardships and ignorance turn young girls into easy prey for traffickers.

Life of rural women in Albania was deteriorated even more with the failure to offer *adequate public services in rural areas*. The lack of proper services has a direct impact on women who are usually the persons in charge of both house economy and children upbringing. As also noted in the latest Shadow Report “On the implementation of the CEDAW Convention in Albania” provision and access to health services is problematic, especially in remote areas. “In these areas, there are generally only general practitioners with insufficient supporting medical staff. Women do not have adequate access to health checks and specific tests, so they are obliged to go to large urban centers or to Tirana. The infrastructure of health centers is poor and left to neglect. Low awareness among women about the need for regular health checks leads to late diagnosis and low levels of prevention.”¹⁰

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ Albania NGO Shadow Report to the UN CEDAW Committee “Shadow Report On The Implementation Of The CEDAW Convention In Albania” Submitted by the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) The Albanian Women Empowering Network (AWEN) The Network Against Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking, June 2010

5. Legislative Framework and Relevant Drawbacks

The Albanian legislation does not differentiate between women in rural and non-rural (urban) areas. Rural women have the same rights as all Albanian women in the following adopted new laws and improved existed ones, such as:

- Adoption of the Law “On Gender Equality in Society” [No. 9970/24.07.2008] which, among other things, addresses the areas of labor and employment, and the adoption of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence (NSGEDV), and its accompanying Action Plan, 2007-2010 (CMD Nr.913/19.12.2007).
- Adoption of the Law “On Measures against Violence in Family Relations” [No. 9669/23.12.2006].
- The recent adoption of Law “On Health and Safety at Work” [No.10237/18.2.2010] which brings issues such as the protection of pregnant and lactating women from hazardous substances, hard working conditions, that are more in line with CEDAW and EU standards.
- Adoption of the Law “On Protection from Discrimination” [No. 10221/4.2.2010], which marks a concrete step forward and reinforces the law on Gender Equality. It includes the establishment of new independent mechanisms, such as the newly established Office of the Commissioner for the Protection.

Access to land and control over its use are the basis for food and income production in rural areas, and more broadly, for household wellbeing. Differences in property rights for women and men, and lack of direct access to and control of land, place constraints on women’s productive roles and diminish their power and influence in the household and community. At the beginning of the communism regime in Albania, agrarian reform took place, and after 1990 during the privatization process, land was distributed to families and not individuals.

While the provisions of the Civil Code (Article 222-230) stipulated of equal status of the members of the farming family, without making any distinction between head of household and other members on grounds of gender, there have been some legal interpretations in practice that have led to dilemmas – this because of a legal vacuum in the law which leads to uncertainty as to women’s position. Pursuant to Article 224, the farming family is represented by the head of the family, who, according to the law may be a man or a woman, but *de facto* is generally a man who represents the woman in trade or ownership relations with others. According to the law, a member of a farming family cannot be simultaneously a member of one or more additional farming families. The question arises in the case of marriage of a member of the farming family (daughter/son) when they move out of the original family homestead [this mainly happens to females because they move out of the

parental home]. In this case, the son or daughter has the right to claim their own share of the property, which derives from the joint ownership of the farming family, in cash. If the daughter does not demand her share of property from the family of origin before she goes to live with her husband's family, she loses her share to the family of origin. In the new family she joins, she gains new ownership rights, pursuant to Article 223. However, in cases of dissolution of the marriage and return to the family of origin, there are ambiguities in the law on whether the woman loses her share in the husband's family's property and whether she regains her original rights in the family of origin. The legal vacuum and lack of clarity have to be clarified in order not to further aggravate the situation of women in rural areas.

6. Albanian Rural Development Policies

The Rural Development Strategy for Albania adopted on 14th November 2007, Nr 774, constitutes a national strategy plan for rural development up to 2013. It lays down the priorities of the rural development policy. The priorities have been set up in accordance with the European Union priorities on rural development policy. The strategic priority of the Albanian Rural Development strategy is to contribute to a fair development of all rural regions in Albania, to improve the quality of life in rural areas in a sustainable way and reduce poverty among rural population

The strategy is based on four priority axes:

- Improvement of agriculture competition, agro-processing and forestry;
- Cultural landscape preservation and environment protection;
- Improvement of quality of life in rural areas and stimulation of economic diversification in rural areas;
- Rural development in network;

IDM and GADC have the conviction that especially the last two axes are the ones that in the short run will have and impact on the well being of women in rural areas. Women should be prepared that, with the modernization of farms and with the shift from solely agriculture to agro-related activities through diversified economy, many of them will have to reposition themselves in the Albanian rural socio-economic scheme. Especially the last axis is important to their context as it is the one that previews the organization and establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs). LAGs will be the public-private partnerships in rural areas that will develop and implement local development strategies and will take decisions on priorities for the allocation and management of funds. The sooner rural women become aware on the issue the better is, as their participation in LAGs will give them a recognized voice in their own socio-economic development.

At the same time, the Albanian Agriculture and Food Sectoral Strategy 2007-2013 (AFFS) is

fully consistent with the Millennium Development Goals. The link is realized specifically through two of these goals and the corresponding policies. These goals are: Goal 1: Eliminate extreme poverty, hunger and other dimensions of poverty; Goal 7: Ensure sustainable environmental development. AFSS contributes to the achievement of Goal 1 through the increase in production, employment and farmer income, thus contributing to sustainable welfare for farmers and their households. AFSS contributes to the achievement of Goal 7 through support to integrated production systems (integrated pest management, integrated management of plant nutrients or animals, integrated land management, integrated farm management etc).¹¹

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The economic and social changes implemented in the Republic of Albania since 1990 have had positive and negative impacts on women living in rural areas. Increased unemployment, coupled with growth in unpaid home labour, decreasing incomes and increasing costs of living, have all resulted in a surge in poverty and a general decline in living conditions of the rural population, particularly of rural women. These developments have triggered increased migration from rural to urban areas. The breakdown of the social services network in rural areas, particularly education, health care, and (regular) payments of social benefits call for actions at all levels.

This policy brief is mainly stimulated by the conviction that there is so much work to be done in Albania in this field, that efforts from both approaches are required (top-down and bottom-up). We should also keep in mind that the given situation of rural women in one particular rural area might be, among others, dependant on the general situation of rural development in that particular territory and by rural development it is not implied economic growth only. In itself, the concept implies also the social and cultural dimension which are all and the same important to the full development of an individual living in rural areas. With this in mind, IDM and GADC have joined their expertise in both rural development and gender issues to offer recommendations that mainstream gender concerns in the rural development policies of Albania.

Actions proposed to governmental institutions:

¹¹ Albanian Agriculture and Food Sectoral Strategy 2007 – 2013

- ✓ There is a need to improve Albanian legislation on land ownership; especially amendments should address the existing vacuum in law in cases of marriage or marriage dissolution. Giving woman a clear legal status would guarantee her position in the family property and would split the chain that makes her financially dependent on man.
- ✓ There is a need to increase rural women's access to the judiciary system. Many rural women do not have information about their legal rights and very few of them know their legal rights upon marriage. Therefore, it is necessary to provide rural women with knowledge and information on their legal rights as well as institutions they should address when they counter legal problems.
- ✓ Specific policies at the local level should be elaborated and promoted for the increased involvement of rural women in local government units. Their involvement should be encouraged not only through quotas but especially qualitatively through direct participation in the decision making process . Also specific items within the budget of communes should be appointed for the further qualification of women in rural areas.
- ✓ Before elaboration of any strategy at the local level, it is important to monitor and conduct research on the needs of rural women in specific territories; Poverty in Albania has various characteristics in various geographical territories of the country therefore the intervention cannot be a unified one.
- ✓ Gender analysis and preliminary planning should be developed in order to identify specific aspects of culture division of labor, access to and control of resources, for the purpose of understanding their implications;
- ✓ Women's access to soft loans should be encouraged and facilitated. Taking into consideration that very few rural women have access to loans, specific policies should be elaborated that favor rural women in obtaining loans.
- ✓ Promotion of diversified economy activities through pilot projects and support through vocational trainings which are directly connected to the employment market in the area are necessary in order to prepare rural women for the downsize in agriculture activities and promotion of other rural income generating activities; (development of cultural industry, products certification and branding; agro-tourism, agro-processing etc).
- ✓ Increase government support to physical and social infrastructure in rural areas such as road constructions, schools, medical facilities and kindergartens; improvement of such infrastructure is of benefit not only to women but to the rural economy too, as improvement of such public services would bring about positive change in the quality of life in rural areas and as a consequence would diminish the migration of rural communities to urban ones.
- ✓ Enable concrete financial support to new businesses in rural areas.

- ✓ Create possibilities for experience exchange among rural areas regarding successful projects.

Action proposed to civic stakeholders (local non-governmental organizations and donors):

- ✓ Facilitate the creation of NGOs in rural areas by providing consulting services, legal advice as well as necessary documentations;
- ✓ Promotion of women rural local organizations and their further involvement within the future local action groups (LAGs);
- ✓ Endorsement and capacity building of women's groups within farmers organizations;
- ✓ Improve access to information in rural areas and create awareness among the rural population regarding their needs;
- ✓ Awareness raising, leadership capacity building and skills development through gender sensitivity sessions, involving discussions regarding gender issues; Leadership training to equip women farmers with basic knowledge, skills and orientation on leadership; Specialized trainings with the aim to develop skills of women farmers in various areas of work e.g. financial management, agro-food processing, cooperative management.
- ✓ An effective strategy for providing education and information about domestic violence must be developed and delivered to high schools and the public using a variety of innovative methods and media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Commission of the European Communities, “Albania 2009 Progress Report”, pg. 35, Brussels, 14.10.2009
- Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), The Albanian Women Empowering Network (AWEN), The Network Against Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking, “Shadow Report On The Implementation of The CEDAW Convention In Albania ”, Tirana, June 2010
- IFAD “Albania Gender Profile” <http://www.ifad.org/english/gender/cen/profiles/alb.htm> December 2009
- INSTAT, “Domestic Violence” , 2009
- MoAFCP , “The Inter-Sectoral Rural Development Strategy of Albania , 2007-2012”
- MoAFCP, “Albanian Agriculture and Food Sector Strategy 2007 – 2010”
- MoLSA EO, “Responses to the UN CEDAW questionnaire” pg. 21, Tirana, 2009
- Nichols Barrett, “An Economic Snapshot”