RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: INSIGHTS FROM CYPRUS

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WE-GREEN proposed to foster social green entrepreneurship among women in rural communities through education in the form of practical local programs. The project aims at bridging the "gap" in the educational system between the need for new green skills and entrepreneurial skills and the lack of adequate educational content for the development of such skills.

The objectives of the project are to build awareness in rural areas about women and green entrepreneurship as vehicles of the empowerment of local communities, build the capacities of formal & non-formal educators in a rural area on green social entrepreneurship for women, design & implement local programmes aiming at empowering women in rural area through green social entrepreneurship, and develop guidelines for stakeholders at local, national and European level about needed measures for building an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship in the rural area.

The research involved the delivery of a capacity building programme for formal and non-formal educators supporting women in rural areas with the upskilling path in green social entrepreneurship, the training of trainers, and the drafting of a toolkit on local policies and best practices for the inclusion of rural women at the local level.

The research contributed to the first project result, aimed at developing a sound and updated knowledge base repository on rural women's green social entrepreneurship. The research focused on defining the needs of women living in rural areas and the respective skills and competencies educators should have to effectively support them in the green transition. A common research protocol was applied by researchers in all participating countries and by the partner responsible for the EU level perspective. All needs, challenges and skills were developed from the point of view of the local contexts and the EU context in terms of organisations and stakeholders involved, local competitive advantages, and social challenges.

WE GREEN
Rural Women's Empowerment through
GREen Social ENtrepreneurship

Methodology:
The research focused on defining the needs of women living in rural areas and the skills and competencies that educators should have to effectively support them in the green transition. A common research protocol was applied by researchers in all participating countries and by the partner responsible for the EU level perspective. Rural areas account for 83% of the total EU area, but only 27.4% of the EU's population lives in rural areas. High unemployment, low employment on non-agricultural activities, low incomes, and a high proportion of people of 65 and older are among the main reasons for the higher poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, leading to lack or even the inaccessibility of goods and services. Rural areas are crucial for the green transition due to their natural resources and ecosystem services, but are often left out of low-carbon planning and strategies. Without appropriately targeted training, education, employment placement, financial tools and supportive social policies, transitioning to a green economy may exacerbate existing inequities and hinder global human development goals. Women in rural areas of the EU make up almost 50% of the total rural population, represent 45% of the economically active population, and about 40% of them work on family farms. Their importance in the rural economy is even greater since their participation in the informal rural economy is not statistically recognized. The European Green Deal sets Europe
on the pathway to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, while the EU's Gender Equality Strategy is designed to make gender equality in the EU a reality. The EU Rural Action Plan aims to improve the situation, notably through the uptake of female entrepreneurship, women's participation in decision-making and the provision of adequate services in rural areas. Green social entrepreneurship emerges as a new, but developing field, showing great potential for the development of women in rural areas, across all targeted countries.

Specific needs of rural women and the challenges they face:
Rural women all over Europe and particularly in the four countries included in the project face several challenges in their day-to-day life and when they want to access the work market. These challenges include mobility difficulties, societal issues, lack of opportunities, lack of market demand and limited digital skills. One of the main barriers for women starting an entrepreneurial activity is their involvement in household activities and the care of children or the elderly. Programs and services should consider rural women-specific needs and strive to promote mutual learning, exchange of experiences and good practices, cooperation, marketing and communication, develop generic business skills and skills used in interpreting regulations and legislation, digital skills, human resources skills and capacity-building programs of design thinking.

Educators' skills and competencies for green transition:
The training programs available for women in rural areas aimed to foster social green entrepreneurship initiatives are modest and focused mostly on general subjects. Most trainings include a module on sustainability, but lack contextualisation and adaptation to the real situation in the rural areas. Green skills are related to sustainability, circular economy and climate change, and can also be related to technology, technological skills and communication processes between women and between women and others. New training programs should have a greater orientation towards the development of local, personal, family initiatives that combine elements of social entrepreneurship, green entrepreneurship (types, forms, rationale etc.), business plan development, risk management, business management case studies, real examples etc. Specific modules should be designed aimed at the attitude of women and their social-psychological-emotional development.