

# **RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT - ACTUAL TASK OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

The essential risk factors for rural inhabitants, especially for rural women, are low level of agricultural productivity, lack of economical activities besides agriculture and unemployment. Mostly women are unpaid family members in farms, less than men they are in business and more than men – unemployed. In this situation the main task is to promote empowerment of rural women to control over the resources and decisions that affect their life. Empowerment normally gets through access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity. Association of Latvia Rural Women organizations (ALRW) is real tool for rural women empowerment. Strategy of Association provide its influence on processes in rural areas: training, economical activities, communication, impact on local authorities and governmental institutions.

## **Key words:**

rural women, empowerment, organizational capacity, case study.

## **Introduction**

The 90ies are times of changes in Latvia. The process involves the countryside, too. Land is private property now. Most part of agricultural production is produced in individual farms. Prices and market are essentially liberalized. Legislation is readjusted according to market economics. GDP has been growing increasingly during last three years. Although it is important to know that GDP in Latvia respectively to EU average is only 29 % per capita. Only Turkey, Romania and Lithuania have such a low indicator among accesing countries. Besides, the poor benefits of the development are divided unevenly among the inhabitants of Latvia and, unfortunately, the division is not good for rural areas. It means that educational, self fulfillment possibility is less for the rural inhabitants. So, there is high level of social stress in the rural areas.

Actually- the aims and tasks of macroeconomics are solved and approximated, but social aims and tasks are still the risk factors. The essential risk factors for rural inhabitants are:

- low level of agricultural productivity;
- lack of economical activities besides agriculture and
- unemployment.

## **Situation in Agriculture**

The published results of the agricultural census of 2001 are reflecting quiet a difficult situation in the rural regions of Latvia. In 1995, agriculture provided about 11 % of GDP and supplied with job 18 % of the inhabitants but, in 2000, respectively- only 4% and 14%. It shows that job productivity in the agricultural sector is still low. The average area of the farms is only 13 ha and average area of agricultural sowings- 4. 8 ha. 68% of the explored farms do not produce their production for selling. Just some 10% of the farms are realizing more than 50% of their production in the market.

It means:

- we have lot of small, non effective farms that are performing the model of the natural economy in fact;

**Table 1. Division of Farms by Size, ha**

Farm size	ha	%
Small farm size	< 5	25.9
Medium size (a)	5-20	46.5
Medium size (b)	21-50	26.3
Large size	51 and more	7.2

Source: Results of ...,2003:54.

- we have more than it is necessary for production people in farms;

**Table 2. Employment in Agriculture, thsds**

	thsds	%
Employed at all	265.5	100
Of which:		
full time employed	66.2	22.8
part time employed	199.3	77.2
Of which:		
up to 2 ours	83.1	31.3
up to 4 ours	54.0	20.3
up to 6 ours	35.5	13.4
up to 8 ours	26.7	10.0

Source: Results of ...,2003:352.

- we have by all means unfavorable age structure and educational level of farmers.

47.9 % of farmers are 50 and more years, moreover every fifth employed in agriculture has 65 and more years. Educational level of the agriculturally employed does not refer to scientifically based economics. More than 80% of agriculturally employed have just basic skills or training experience in agriculture

### **Economical activities**

Entrepreneurship is poorly developed in the country. Big part of rural inhabitants is traditionally orientated on agriculture but the number of the agriculturally employed is constantly decreasing. In 1990, 15. 5% of all the state employed people were employed in agriculture, forestry and hunting, in 2000- 13. 3%. Decrease of the number of the agriculturally employed is expected. Therefore it is important for the rural inhabitants to search new occupations in part time farming or in activities of different character outside their farms. Unfortunately, many of them lack necessary skills, information, and motivation to look for alternative occupations. It is usually influenced both by age and education.

**Table 3. Gender Aspect of Rural Labor Market.**

By status	Men		Women	
	thsds	%	thsds	%
Employees	107.6	66.7	91.8	67.4
Employers	9.1	5.6	1.9	1.4
Self-employed	24.6	15.3	20.3	14.9
Unpaid family workers	19.7	12.2	22.1	16.2
Other status	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1

Source: Labor Force Surveys: main indicators (November, 2001), Riga, 2002: 26

**Table 4. Rural Women Situation in Labor Market, thsds**

	November, 2001	November, 2000	November, 1999	November, 1998	November, 1997
Working age	194.1	198.6	195.9	196.7	197.8
Employed	136.2	131.1	138.6	148.0	152.8
Of which					
Employees	91.8	86.6	85.7	86.8	80.1
Employers	1.9	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.5
Self-employed	20.3	23.9	26.2	30.9	37.1
Unpaid family workers	22.1	17.1	23.4	27.1	32.1

Source: Labor Force in Latvia., 1997, 1998, 1999; Labor Force Surveys: main indicators, 2002.

### Unemployment

Unemployment as a risk factor is connected with the two previous factors. The average number of the unemployed in the state is 13.1% (registered – 7.8%), but in many regions this number still exceeds 20% (Rzeknes district – 26.5%, Preilu district - 27.4%, Kraslavas district – 29.7%). In recent years, remarkable differences in indicators of unemployment levels among regions have not decreased. Relatively high is long-term unemployment level (45.6% from all unemployed people). Ratio of females to the total number of long-term unemployed persons is 59.7%.

Position of rural women is especially hard in this situation. By publications of Central Statistical Bureau:

#### **at first**

- 14. 5 thousand women are looking for job, and 11. 6 thousand of them- no matter what job,
- 8. 7 thousand women do not look for job any more because of lost hopes,
- 4. 0 thousand women also do not look for job anymore because they do not know where and how to do it;

#### **at second,**

- 15. 9 thousand part time workers would like to work full time,
- 4. 6 thousand women have temporary, occasional or seasonal work;

#### **at third,**

- 22. 1 thousand of the working women are so called not paid family members.

Commonly it is nearly 70 thousand of 194.1 thousand women in working age. (Labor Force Survey, 2002)

If we add salary lists that are certifying that country women are the lowest paid workforce, then we see that seriousness of the situation is obvious and social stress is high. About half of poor people of Latvia are living in country. It is connected with the fact that economical activities in the state are concentrated in capital Riga and Riga region. 50% of the state GDP and 40% of the state tax income are invested there.

**In this situation the main task was to promote empowerment of rural women to control over the resources and decisions that affect their life.**

## **Rural women empowerment**

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Empowerment include: self-strength, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, own decision making. Empowerment is relevant at the individual and collective level. It normally gets through access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organization capacity. Further development of the world is closely connected with increase of rural women empowerment (World development report, 2000/2001).

Informed citizens are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities, Access services, negotiate effectively and hold state and non-state actors accountable. Participation can take different forms from political, through elected representatives, till economical, through entrepreneurship. Accountability refers to the ability to call officials, private employers or service providers to account requiring that they be answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds. And finally the capacity of local organizations may be presumed as tool for empowerment.

Local organizational capacity refers:

- to the ability of people to work together, organize themselves, and mobilize resources to solve problems of common interest;
- to the formation of networks or associations – eventually becoming large federations with a regional presence – that they begin to influence government decision making.

The individuals, working together, protect their common needs through their individual interests. Societies in which people are accustomed to cooperating and working together are much more likely to develop strong and efficient state institutions” ( Fukuyama 2002)

## **Association of Rural Women organizations in Latvia**

The 1990-ties was the time of appearing rural women organizations in different local territories but till the 2000 they are working without close collaboration. Participation in competition “Creative woman in rural area” (start in 1998) made rural women more active and promoted to realize necessity to change themselves – their life and surrounding. The result was that 500 creative rural women came together in summer 2000 and inferred that individual person or small groups are powerless. That is why they decided to make common organization. 240 delegates from rural regions established Association of Latvia Rural Women (ALRW) in the November of the same year. On the second conference of association in November, 2001 association consisted of 123 local organizations with 280 delegates. They discussed about necessity of education for adults and possibilities of getting education in rural regions. On the third conference of association in November, 2002 association consisted of 150 organizations and 480 delegates. They discussed about women role in family and society.

Using the case study method it was possible to estimate the significance of association in rural women empowerment.

In 2002 Association Board worked out development strategy to ensure more purposeful work. This strategy included seven main work directions:

- organizing and informative action,
- training/perfecting knowledge,
- participation in decision making,
- making collaboration with other organizations,
- participating in international organizations,
- representing and
- participating in investigating women problems.

The Association has largely expanded its activities in the mentioned directions proceeding from its development strategy.

The main aim of **organizing action** was to make regional associations which could provide collaboration between organizations in field and intermediate levels (in 14 of 26 districts are working) On the second, to involve women who were not in this program (every number of organization involve one women from outside in time of one year).

There was strong and wide **information action** both ways (from Board to region associations and local organizations and contrary):

- information about various activities to local organizations, the main of these activities are training courses especially free of charge ;
- about funds for projects, especially to get financial support ;
- e-mail using chances;
- information to Board about activities of local organizations and regional associations, mainly about events, collaboration with local authorities etc.;

Board was working on Association Home Page what is becoming.

There are two directions in **teaching/learning action**:

- work was starting with studies which improve women self-confidence, dare to work and improve themselves, develop self-examination (ability and mind) :

at the same time

- in elaboration of business plans, adoption of accounting basis, market analyze, understanding of economical collaboration forms etc.

Trainings are in all levels: in organization, in regions when women came together and in association summer school (2001, 2002 and will be in 2003). Training abroad is furthered maximally (Israel, Ireland etc.) The basic themes of the study is project elaborating, essence of small business and non- traditional agriculture, co- operation possibilities etc.

Important activities are made in **participation in decision making**. In the Ministry of Agriculture works Agricultural organization's collaboration council (it contains milk, meat, potatoes, vegetables etc. producing industry associations, totally 17 organizations). Since last year as full-fledged member there is included ALRW to depend interests in any questions. So the Association has suggested its proposals for development of Subsidy Regulation.

Possibilities for **cooperation/collaboration with other organizations including local and regional authority structures** are being searched and realized. ALRW expand collaboration with Women of Farmers' Federation, "Marta" organization in Latvia and other organizations which work also with rural people.

Successful collaboration of organizations of the Association and Local Governments is forming in many local territories and districts. They are solving social problems, supplement of premises for activities and financial support. Cross- border collaboration with rural women organizations of Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Russia started up. ALRW is preparing documents to become a member of ACWW (Associated Country Women of the World).

As social opinion can influence only **well known organization**, ALRW spread out:

- material generalize about their work (every region makes informative material about organizations which are working there);
- booklets;
- home page;
- information in issue for farmers "Agropols";
- information in local mass media.

Ministry of Agriculture understood the role and sense of organization which contain all state. That is why the Ministry of Agriculture:

- for the second year of organization give a little financing support for operational activities (telephone, correspondence, transport expenses for the members of Board);
- for the second year finances courses in entrepreneurship for women in every district (2002 - were 780 participants, for 2003 is planned the same);
- is distributed cash (an investment part) to first Baltic states Women Conference, organized by the Association, what will be held in October, 2003.

Unfortunately, for the present, association failed to succeed sufficient corporation with Education, Environment and Self-government Ministries, which are working also on important rural development problems.

In spite of everything rural women activities are extending not only in local, but also in regional and state level.

## Conclusions

1. In any case, activities of rural women within any NGO can become an important mean for women empowerment. It does not depend on character and functions of the organization because it promotes activity and collaboration.
2. As more influential mean can be activities in authoritative organization with wide range of contacts and influence on social processes. The ALRW is on its way to such condition. It means that there is need in the society to gather individual energy in common strength. So there is increasing possibility for rural women to influence some social processes
3. Empowerment and the social capital are closely connected phenomena..

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