**Multifunctional role of women as a key driver for rural development**

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**White Paper**

***PR.T4. Final guidelines and recommendations based on the MORE paradigm***

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# **An introduction to the document**

This document is the result of the MORE Project Task 2.4 “Final guidelines and recommendations based on the MORE paradigm”. It defines guidelines on how to replicate the MORE educational approach and includes final recommendations for policy-makers, academia, trainers and the economic sector on how to better empower rural women and increase their training and skills for their multifunctional role.

The White Paper on multifunctional women as a driver for smart, inclusive and sustainable development of EU rural areas represents a strategic tool for the sustainability of the project results, facilitating the achievement of their longer-term impact.

**THE MORE PROJECT APPROACH**

Partners have co-created and validated all project results with the target group, through a participatory and transdisciplinary approach, paying special attention to the whole community engagement.

The project has stimulated inclusive participation of rural women and other rural stakeholders by:

1. Involving the target group in the results’ definition through the establishment of “Rural Women Hubs”;
2. Performing in-depth research on multifunctionality;
3. Creating the first digital EU community dedicated to multifunctional rural women.

Co-design and co-creation are a form of collaborative creativity initiated by firms first. Just in the last decade co-creation has started being applied for the design and delivery of public processes and products. The MORE project research (PR2) has analysed how co-creation can be applied in rural areas, to engage women in the educational processes for rural development and regeneration, and to ensure their direct involvement and motivation.

The White Paper shows how to achieve these objectives, presenting tips and strategies to all the different actors involved in this development and empowerment process.

**THE WHITE PAPER STRUCTURE**

**First part: A set of boxes collecting partners’ recommendations**

Each box addresses the needs of a particular target and a particular domain (VET / digital skills / policy makers and participative actions / EU policies / female entrepreneurship / research sector). Partners provided inputs depending on their particular field of expertise and research; indeed, the content of this section stems directly from the results of the “MORE study on multifunctionality of rural women as a new paradigm for rural development”, carried out by partners in PR2, and the co-creation events carried out in PR3.

**Second part: Lessons learnt**

The second part gathers recommendations and lessons learnt resulting from the Test and Validation phase (Task 3.3). The delivery of the training courses to the target group allowed partners to identify strategies and methods to better address rural women’s training needs.

# **Box 1 – Recommendations for VET providers (RADIO ECCA)**

| How to improve the quality of training addressed to women based in rural areas? |
| --- |
| * Practical training adapted to reality;
* Learning communities (horizontal). For example, in entrepreneurship issues, learn from those who have already gone through the process. Learn from the rest of the students and not just from the teachers;
* Support mentoring (reinforcement of learning). Tutoring and accompaniment;
* Design and maintain a system for listening to the user in a systematic way (vs something punctual);
* Be careful who designs the training. Let the design be the rural environment itself;
* Avoid technicalities in the language;
* Offer constructive feedback;
* Supportive spaces;
* Multidisciplinary teams with a common purpose;
* Comprehensive accompaniment programmes, which make all the resources available;
* Go hand in hand with a local agent.
 |
| How to adapt educational methodologies to the rural context? |
| * Reduce the number of students, work in smaller groups (e.g., regions);
* Incorporate evaluation and monitoring systems to see if the content is being understood and later, to see if it is being applied;
* Participatory approach;
* Collaborative approach;
* Case study, practical approach based on the rural environment.
 |
| Multifunctionality is a skill that guarantees self-empowerment, community’s empowerment and local development… |
| 1. *How can VET providers tackle multifunctionality as a skill?*
* Continuous knowledge updating;
* Include among the skills worked on through specific training the “transformative competencies” (OECD, 2018):
	+ **Creating new value** (refers to creative and design thinking);
	+ **Reconciling tensions and dilemmas** (thinking and acting in a more integrated way);
	+ **Taking responsibility** (self-regulation, self-efficacy, responsibility, problem solving and adaptability).
1. *Which are the other skills that should be improved in order to become multifunctional?*

**Soft skills**: conflict management, stress resistance, self-knowledge, team management, communication...* Community development
* Self-care and mental health training
* New business models and innovation in traditional models to make them more viable
* Technological innovation and social innovation, resolution of challenges - open innovation
* Triple bottom line and transition to sustainability
* Entrepreneurship - Business plan - Financial education
* Design thinking
* Objective and Key Results (OKR) - Methodologies and management tools
 |

# **Box 2 – How to enhance digital skills (ITSFA)**

| Which digital skills are essential for rural women to become the key driver of local development? |
| --- |
| * **Information and Communication Technology tools.** ICT Tools for bridging the digital divide. How to transfer its benefits to entrepreneurial activity:
* Manage Internet presence
* How to search effectively of the Internet
* Navigate safely
* Cybersecurity
* Basic technical problem solving
* **Corporate image & tools.** How do you show yourself to your customers?
* **Project management tools.** How to organise my workload?
* **Communication tools.** The coordination with others.
* **E-commerce.** Basic tools for selling online.
 |
| How to support digital learning in rural areas? |
| * Promoting digital literacy;
* Promoting digital entrepreneurship empowerment;
* Promoting active and autonomous learning - digital learning. Finding your own resources in a long-life learning;
* Providing quality training material and resources specifically designed for the target group and adapted to their needs;
* With specific policies and action plans to facilitate access to digital media, equipment, and resources for rural women to boost their digital entrepreneurial potential.
 |
| Digital hubs can offer meeting spaces to engage with other businesses or experts, can promote training and improvement of digital skills, foster business and community development and provide internet access… |
| 1. *How to promote the creation of digital hubs addressed to rural women?*
* By raising awareness about the importance of this type of initiatives and workspaces. As a shared business / entrepreneurial space, it represents an employment network that fosters a business ecosystem that generates new opportunities of great value;
* With the development of initiatives such as MORE Project, which encourage the creation of rural women networking.
1. *How to guarantee their sustainability?*
* Adopting a range of measures and initiatives to encourage their creation and long-term viability;
* Guarantee the necessary resources to make the initiative possible, maintain its existence and durability over time;
* Ensuring the usability and effectiveness of this space by the target group;
* Ensuring the effectiveness and applicability of the initiative.
 |

# **Box 3 – Recommendations for policy makers and participative actions (CIRCLE & DEMOSTENE)**

| How could policy makers foster rural women social/economic inclusion, operationalizing the multifunctionality concept? |
| --- |
| * Regional authorities should dedicate ESFs - **European Social Fund** - to activate through the local VET providers permanent dedicated training programmes for rural women strictly tailored for their needs. The training programmes should work on strengthening competences, skills and attitudes that are relevant and useful for their professional growth and their socio-economic development. The programmes should really have a practical approach: rural women should be stimulated to take the course through **smart rewarding systems** (like receiving virtual merit points, which entitles them to vouchers or free services). The courses should be properly advertised by municipalities through both online and offline activities.
* **Rural Development Programmes** (RDPs) must include specific **measures on women**, their role in rural areas and multifunctionality. Rural development is the 'second pillar' of the common agricultural policy (CAP), reinforcing the 'first pillar' of income supports and market measures by strengthening the social, environmental and economic sustainability of rural areas.
* The **LEADER approach** ("Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale") should involve women much more with specific actions aimed specifically at them. LEADER is a 'bottom up' approach, in which farmers, rural businesses, local organisations, public authorities and individuals from different sectors come together to form **Local Action groups** (LAGs). LAGs prepare their own local development strategies and manage their own respective budgets. LEADER is a local development method, which has been used for over 30 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas. <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en>
 |
| Are there any replicable examples of participative initiatives generating more listening spaces for rural women? |
| ***Puglia Partecipa*** is an innovative tool at the service of citizens introduced by Regional Law 28/2017 "Law on Participation" to strengthen transparency, dialogue with citizens and stakeholders. It allows people to exchange information, submit proposals and participate in public consultations.The **participatory process** is a structured comparison process related to policies, projects or initiatives of particular relevance for the territory. The actors promoting the activities are Region / Local Authorities and Institutions / Third Sector Entities / Schools / Universities / Subjects from the economic-social world. The outcome of a participatory process is a participatory proposal document that the competent authorities are obliged to take into account in their measures.In this context, we can point out the initiative of *Puglia Partecipa* called***Abitare al femminile***is promoted by Gallipoli municipality*. Abitare al Femminile* is a project for the adoption of a national best practice - aimed at fostering the active involvement of women in city and rural area planning processes in order to promote the needs of women in communities. <https://partecipazione.regione.puglia.it/?locale=it>  |
| Women running a business at the local level often promote the territory and contribute to its development; however, they report a lack of dialogue and support from the local institutions… |
| 1. *How to ease and improve the dialogue path with political leaders?*
* Each municipality or groups of neighbouring municipalities should activate an advisory desk dedicated to women who run businesses or wish to run a business, to receive information about all the national/regional policy measures that support them (employment centre, advisory point etc.);
* Strengthen participatory design events promoted by local authorities (municipalities, provinces, regions);
* Promoting consultation events between citizens and Policy makers;
* Support associations and organisations that have an intermediary role between entrepreneurs and local authorities.
 |

# **Box 4 – Recommendations for future EU policies and actions (IHF)**

| Why should EU institutions introduce multifunctionality into policies for women empowerment and local development? |
| --- |
| * The multiplicity of roles contributes to the improvement of families' quality of life, as well as rural socio-economic development, civic engagement, and ways of rethinking the territorial contexts;
* To achieve multifunctionality, it is necessary to promote several training opportunities for the development and improvement of different skills; the introduction of this paradigm can reduce gaps and inequalities between women and men in terms of competence and skills;
* Multifunctionality can work towards equal opportunities between women and men, since it allows becoming direct actors of the social, policy and economic processes at local level.
 |
| How could EU policies support and improve the multifunctionality of rural women? |
| * Promoting a **systematic collection of gender-based data** in rural areas in order to design better strategies and policies for women empowerment.
* Ensuring an **equal representation of women** within the **Local Action Groups** (LAGs). According to the Commission’s guidance, decision-making bodies within the LAGs should be gender-balanced; however, women are still underrepresented. (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

SUGGESTED ACTION:Integrating the [EU Regulation 2021/2115](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02021R2115-20220422) - establishing rules for the design of Common Agricultural Policy Plans for Member States - with some impact indicators to assess the performance of the policy under a gender lens. In particular, there are two indicators measuring the EU objective “Promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas” that may be integrated as follows:**Indicator R.38:** Share of rural population covered by local development strategies (**LEADER coverage**)Possible additional indicator: **Share of rural women population** covered by local development strategies.**Indicator R.39**: Number of rural businesses, including bio-economy businesses, developed with CAP supportPossible additional indicator: **Number or rural female businesses** |
| *Women, unlike men, are more prone to innovation and multifunctionality, are more adaptable and have a stronger connection with the territory, culture, tradition and local knowledge -* [*WWF, (2020)*](https://www.wwf.it/pandanews/ambiente/le-donne-protagoniste-della-transizione-ecologica-in-agricoltura/) |
| *1. Which funding instruments should be unlocked at EU level to exploit and boost this potential?** Loans and grants for business development (a particular focus should be given to the promotion of the hospitality and tourism sector where women can play an important role if a proper access to finance is guaranteed);
* More funds for training initiatives and information actions related to farm/any other business development and management or IT expertise (Erasmus MORE-like projects);
* Funds for the promotion of Startups addressed at rural women designing projects for the local development;
* Investments in physical assets (e.g., IT infrastructures) and funding for basic services and village renewal in rural areas (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Regional development Fund, Cohesion Fund);
* Funds for the creation of advisory services, farm relief services and other support services for women (European Social Fund+);
 |

# **Box 5 – How to enhance women economic inclusion and female entrepreneurship (IDP & KLEINON)**

| Which are the barriers for rural women to access entrepreneurship that should be addressed at local level? |
| --- |
| Resulting from the literature review and co-creation events conducted, the main barriers women in rural areas face, preventing them from reaching their full potential and getting involved in entrepreneurial activities, are related to:* **Disproportionate responsibility for household work** and family care, leaving them little time to invest in new endeavours or their education/development. Lack of childcare and elderly care facilities;
* **Limited support** from family, community members and stakeholders, due to stereotypes regarding the women’s role in society and differences in educational levels. In some areas these stereotypes still lead to dramatic outcomes such as ‘normalisation’ of violence and other forms of abuse, which remain unreported, and no legal measures are taken, putting women in vulnerable situations and therefore less prone to accessing entrepreneurial activities;
* **Few entrepreneurship and professional training opportunities** in rural areas, combined with **poor infrastructure** and public transportation to reach urban areas where they could access such activities;
* **Gender issues under-addressed** by the regional and local rural policies, in some cases only formally mentioned but no concrete action taken;
* **Under-representation** and low involvement in local decision-making;
* **Less control and ownership of land** and productive assets than men;
* **Official information on EU funding can be confusing,** very dense and difficult to navigate. Co-financing is most often an issue;
* Legal, accounting, financial and professional **services not as readily available in rural areas**;
* Qualified/skilled workforce difficult to find, **limited to no recruitment services**;
* **Limited availability** of work/production/commercial **spaces**.
 |
| Which aspects should be included in a local strategy for women economic empowerment and female entrepreneurship?  |
| * **Consulting/involving wome**n from the local community in all stages of strategic development;
* Creating and valorising existing education and **training opportunities**: providing a framework to foster organisation of training within the community, in partnership with private stakeholders. At the same time, the strategy can encourage women’s participation by offering a form of recognition and/or incentives (not necessarily financial).
* Setting up free or accessible **counselling/support services** to assist women identify, access, and manage available **EU funding**. Periodically inform women on existing (relevant) opportunities.
* Encourage women’s ownership of land and productive assets through **tax incentives/exemptions**.
 |
| Which are the economic sectors offering most opportunities for women entrepreneurs in rural areas? |
| * Tourism and hospitality
* Traditional handicraft products
* Organic food production
* Plant-based organic cosmetics production
 |

# **Box 6 – Recommendations for the academic sector and the enhancement of research (SEERC)**

| The multifunctionality of rural women may be considered not only as a new paradigm for rural development but also as an innovative paradigm within the area of gender studies as a whole… |
| --- |
| 1. *How can the academic sector help to clarify the multifunctionality concept and facilitate its operationalization for local operators and policy makers?*
* Undertaking **primary research with women in rural communities** to fully understand contemporary issues related to the various facets of multifunctionality;
* Coordinating efforts to clarify the concept of multifunctionality in contemporary society across the European Union to **avoid the current national level polarity**;
* Developing a **framework** to understand the conceptualisation of multifunctionality and how each of the components interacts with outcomes in rural communities – without a framework, understanding will remain fragmented and haphazard;
* **Identifying the financial and non-financial contribution of women** in rural communities towards overall national economic development and prosperity.
 |
| Starting from the results of the MORE PR2, which aspects should be addressed or deepened by future research? |
| * Ensuring that policies supporting rural women’s entrepreneurship be re-evaluated so as to represent an **integrated development strategy** linked to overall economic and social structures in rural communities;
* Developing a comprehensive **strategic approach towards reducing inequalities** and the alleviation of problems that rural women face;
* Undertaking, considering, and disseminating **research on best practices** related to the multifunctionality of women in rural communities within countries and across the European Union in order to chart future policy development.
 |
| *Multifunctionality may be perceived as a trap in which women should serve for everything or continue to be assigned care tasks. There is debate about whether women have the ability to choose the multifunction or is it something imposed by the patriarchal society* [Source: RADIO ECCA MORE Co-creation event] |
| 1. *How could the academic sector contribute to this debate, highlighting the positive aspects of multifunctionality?*
* Conducting research with men, women and children in rural cities to **identify the impact of multifunctionality** on family, business, and community levels;
* **Quantifying the impact** of women’s multifunctionality in rural communities;
* Researching men in rural communities who undertake more of the multifunctional roles (**non-stereotypical patriarchal family relationship**);
* Comparing **women’s multifunctional roles in rural versus non-rural environments** to ‘elevate’ to provide evidence of the elevated role women play in rural communities.
 |

# **Lessons learnt from Test & Validation**

During the last phase of the project, partners carried out Test & Validation sessions with the target groups (women and education providers) in order to test the relevance and usability of the MORE training results. The positive feedback of participants underlines the effectiveness of the project in delivering valuable educational content and resources that are relevant to rural women’s training needs. At the same time, the Test & Validation sessions allowed partners to outline lessons learnt and spot areas for further improvement that can support practitioners and decision makers to better serve the target:

* From the perspective of the learning experience, participants confirmed that the video aspects and the self-assessments tools are highly appreciated, asking for a more systematic integration of those contents within the learning experience.
* Constant updating of the training material is also required in order to ensure that it remains up-to-date with evolving knowledge and technologies.
* The MORE resources were particularly appreciated for their micro-learning approach delivering content in small, focused, and easily digestible learning units. It is important not to overwhelm participants with unnecessary details.
* Micro-learning facilitates the ease of use without assistance; indeed, rural women ask for resources that, like the ones developed by the MORE project, are easy to follow and complete without the need for additional assistance. This design acknowledges the limited time rural women might have due to various responsibilities and maximises the efficiency of the learning experience, making it highly effective and engaging.
* However, support services that can assist participants in implementing what they have learned, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship, are highly required. This demand proves the relevance of services like mentorship programmes, skills-specific workshops or post-training consultations that may be integrated to MORE-like training resources.
* To determine the most suitable format for training sessions, it is necessary to consult the target group offering options like face-to-face guided sessions with trainers, scheduled interactive activities, group projects, and local events.
* It is important that courses addressed to rural women are not generic but offer in-depth content tailored to the very specific rural context, including its unique characteristics, challenges, and opportunities. In this regard, the engagement of local stakeholders can play a significant role: close collaborations with local authorities and communities can contribute to customising the course according to region-specific issues, leveraging available resources effectively, facilitating connections between course participants and local entrepreneurs, businesses, or market.



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