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EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE (ECA)

**TWELFTH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON WOMEN
AND THE FAMILY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Nitra, Slovakia, 18-21 October 2004

**INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR RURAL WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT IN ALBANIA¹**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The rather unique social structure of Albania necessitates an approach to women's empowerment rather different from that in most other parts of Europe, but one that has potential to contribute to understanding of women's empowerment in a broader context.^{a)} It looks at women's empowerment from below, from the point of view of ordinary women in the villages. It does not purport to be a balanced view of rural women in Albania. The data in this paper come from the villages that are relatively favoured. They are located within ten km of a town, a main road or a railway and they are barely affected by population decline, which affects more remote areas. Perhaps half the rural population lives in areas such as these (estimated from Instat, 2000:149). Rural areas are also more prosperous in the south than in the north. They are less traditional and improvements in women's position occur sooner.

2. Just over half the population of Albania lives in villages, *fshat*, consisting of groups of dwellings, hamlets or neighbourhoods (*lagja*) scattered around an area the size of a parish. Several villages make up a commune. In some villages one *lagje* has grown larger than the others and in some cases as the result of a deliberate (though not forced) policy of centralization during the communist era. These are the location of most formal institutions. However, the most important institutions are informal ones, specifically the extended family kin (*fis*). Changes in the last dozen years in the range of institutions and in how they function have had both positive and negative effects for women. Some

¹ This paper was prepared by Ms Beryl Nicholson as a background paper to the Session. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

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changes have enabled women to empower themselves, though often by adding to their work burden. On the whole women's situation has improved.

3. The most fundamental change in rural areas has been the privatisation of agricultural land, which was largely completed by 1994. Land was distributed according to the number of persons in each household, irrespective of their gender or age, and took no account of previous ownership. A full allocation was made to those who had worked in agriculture and a half allocation to those who had not. The average amount of land per family was just under one hectare, and all families got some land. Title to land is in the name of *zoti i shtëpisë*, the senior man in the family and his wife, but everyone in the family knows which parcels were allocated to whom, and regard these as their own. Even when a daughter marries and leaves the parental household her portion of land is still considered hers and she has the right to decide how it will be disposed of, although her brother will use it in the meantime. This is not how the law is supposed to be interpreted (UNDP, 1999:7), but it is what the new owners find to be just. The allocation of land to all rural inhabitants blurs the divide between farm and non-farm families. While many of the latter have little enthusiasm for farm work, they often keep chickens or a pig and grow vegetables. Some have lost non-farm jobs, or have low salaries or pensions, which they supplement with agriculture. There are few families in which no adult works, or has worked, in agriculture. The non-farm rural population is therefore not treated separately in what follows.

II. TYPES OF INSTITUTION AND RECENT CHANGES

INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS: FAMILY AND KIN NETWORKS

4. Albanian civil society is dominated by one powerful institution, the patrilineal family. This was the case before and during the communist years, when it co-existed with the all-powerful state, and it remains the most significant non-state social structure. As in the rest of the Balkans, penetration by formal institutions, such as the Church, the state or the feudal lord, was much weaker than elsewhere in Europe (Mitterauer, 1996). Thus familial social forms are stronger and perform a range of functions, which elsewhere are distributed among other social institutions (Sampson, 1996:125). The family is, however, not a 'traditional' institution, but the *present form* of what was a traditional institution. As conditions around it have changed the family has evolved and adapted in response to outside influences. Under the old regime modifications were introduced by the state. Some, such as limiting the size of dowries, are now ignored, others, that were generally accepted, such as ending the practice of infant betrothal, have persisted. Its resilience is such that it has withstood the upheavals of the past decade, in some ways weakened, but in others strengthened.

5. The trend of change has generally been in the direction of improving women's position and the degree of power and autonomy they have within the household. This was already evident in small ways a century ago (Elezi, 2002:72) but progress is slow. The biggest structural change introduced by the former regime was to replace the practice of living in joint households, which divided after a generation or two, with a series of stem families. That is, as each brother in succession married and brought his new bride into the household, the brother who had married before him would move out and set up his own household. The last son to marry stayed in the house (Nicholson, 2003c). The intention was, apparently, to weaken the solidarity of the joint household (seen as a potential source of opposition), while ensuring that the family continued to provide unpaid care for family

members who needed it. Each daughter-in-law did her share of caring for elderly relatives, then, except for the youngest, obtained her own household where she was no longer bidden to her mother-in-law. This change took account of the value placed on care of the older generation, while at the same time allowing many women what they wanted (though most only say so in private) their own home (Tusha, 2000:20). Allowing women to see their future spouse before marriage and asking them for their consent, which is general now, is sometimes attributed to the loosening of restrictions since 1990, but it began sooner. It follows from attempts under the old regime to popularize the idea of romantic love and to end arranged marriages (which are still normal, especially in rural areas).

6. Undoubtedly the opportunities and the pressures of the past decade, notably the imperative of earning an income under difficult circumstances, have tended to empower women. A village woman who sells milk in a nearby town explained that her husband would have preferred that she did not do it, but she, though shy about selling in the street, persuaded him they needed the income, and that argument was decisive. The emigration of many men to seek work has also given women more responsibility (Nicholson, forthcoming), and allowed them more autonomy, and not for the first time (Elezi, 2002: 91)^b. Emigration in general, and the stream of new ideas that comes to almost every family with the constant back and forth movement of migrants and their eventual return (Nicholson, 2002:440-441) is, itself, as in the past (Elezi; Nicholson, forthcoming), a source of change.

7. The strength of the institution of the family has important implications for the development of civil society. Viewed from the perspective of a conventional social capital approach, which assumes a linear development from traditional and informal to modern and formal institutions, it could be seen as an obstacle to the insertion of new institutions. However, when it is understood that this so-called traditional institution also evolves, and can play an important part in modern society, it can be appreciated that civil society too can develop alongside well established informal institutions, but it must do so by taking account of the context (Sampson, 1996:125). Its course of development depends on what exists to start with. The composition of the sources of human capital need not be the same everywhere. Western experience, and western labelling of institutions as traditional or modern is just one possible variant. The components of civil society and their interactions can differ widely yet ultimately lead to similar results but by a different route. Thus where informal institutions are a major and trusted resource, it is often through their mediation, perhaps only in that way, that developments and initiatives initiated in formal institutions can be successful.

WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE FAMILY

8. There is no doubt that women are subordinate to men within the family, but in this respect it is little different from many other institutions of civil society, if not now, then in the recent past. A woman does have areas of autonomy once she becomes the senior woman in the household when she moves out of her mother-in-law's house or her mother-in-law dies. Marriage is thus a route to relative empowerment for women. Some women even feel that not being married (very few women do not marry) is a source of shame. Unmarried women, daughters, sisters, do not have money or property of their own, but work for the household. It is still rare and in rural areas unknown, for an unmarried woman, a divorcée or a widow without children to live independently. Much of women's activity (invariably work) takes place in the women's sphere (Elezi, 2002:72; Backer,

1983:52) and women usually have autonomy over their work. They also assist men with their work and if a family builds a new house all its members will participate irrespective of gender. According to the Albanian Family Code, spouses are equal and have equal rights in joint property (UNDP, 1999:19). Money is considered to belong to the whole family. All income, including that obtained by men, goes into the family fund. A wife often manages the budget in practice, but her husband will ask how she spends money. Some men take the decisions, such as the man in a market who was selling the family cow against his wife's wishes because he wanted the money, but some women claim they decide. Men take their pocket money, some make arbitrary expenditures and their wives have to cope with the consequences. A wife is answerable to her husband; he is not accountable to her. Men remind women of their subordination in other ways for which Nicholson uses the term 'petty patriarchy'. They ask their wives where they are going or where they have been. One man would not allow his wife to dye her hair (though almost every other woman does). If a man arrives home when a visitor is present, his wife will stop talking and he will dominate the conversation. Men make tiny criticisms in front of guests about their wife's cooking or how she served a meal ('there was too little salt in the soup'). It must be emphasised that not all men behave in this way. Younger men are more enlightened, older men seem to 'retire' from this kind of behaviour, and hen-pecked husbands are not unknown. However, as long as some men assert their superiority, even in these petty and irritating ways it is a symbol and constant reminder of the subordination of all women.

9. There is, however, another aspect to women's position. Marriage is virilocal, a wife moves to the home of her husband's parents, which will in most cases be in a different village. Her sisters do the same, and their mother did it before them, but the very strong bonds of affection that exist between them, and their parents and brothers, persist. A marriage joins two families, not just two people, they become *krushk*, affinal kin. Thus through women men gain access to a wider network of kin, and through women's female relatives, potential access to a wider network still, than through their own. Men's kin usually remain in the same village all their lives, so their networks are more restricted. Sisters-in-law (*kunata*) must by custom cooperate and spend a lot of time together, but it is rare for their relationship to give access to one another's networks. Men do not link women in the way that women link men. The size and gender balance of the networks of individual women are determined by accidents of birth (and death), but until recently families have been large, so many are quite extensive. Some are very strong indeed, notably if there are many sisters and if they have strong personalities. The institutionalising of the link between their husbands is recognized by a special term, *baxhanakë*. In a society where kin are trusted but others much less so, these relationships enabled by women are important assets to the family (Backer, 1983:56, 57-58). They are conduits for information and they provide contacts to individuals with a range of skills, abilities and resources. Thus while they do not give women power, in a subtle way they give them influence, because women are useful. For women as well as men, the family and kin represent a resource as well as a constraint. It is in the networks of which it is part that a family functions as an 'institution' of civil society.

ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS: PRIVATIZED AGRICULTURE

10. A major factor in the strengthening of the family unit has been the privatization of agriculture, for it has transferred to the household, usually a nuclear or stem family, a major economic role. The overwhelming majority of private economic units, both agricultural and non-agricultural (see Nicholson, 2003b; Nicholson, forthcoming), which

have replaced the much larger state institutions and cooperatives, are family units. Privatization presented a difficult challenge to individual families, but it also empowered them, and it has empowered women, as much agricultural work falls within the women's sphere. Families must somehow make a living with the land they have, but they are autonomous. Both men and women express satisfaction that now they work for themselves, not for others. They have put into practice on the tiny family plots and at secondary agricultural schools (Nicholson, 1999b), and taught themselves more. More women than men had worked in collectivized agriculture (Corrin, 1992:8) so they tended to have more skills. More men than women had off-farm jobs, in building, in industry, on the railway, as drivers and in state employment (as teachers, etc.). Women's off-farm work was more likely to be in the state sector or in the village shop (run by the cooperative or state farm). Many off-farm jobs were lost in the early 1990s, so more men do agricultural work than before, but many have sought work abroad, leaving women with more responsibility for agriculture, and more work, than is generally recognized. The tables of the 1998 Agricultural Census do not disaggregate the labour force by gender, though it does include a category for 'wives', but survey evidence from 1992 showed that women did 35.7 percent of general farming activities and 56.5 percent of activities in the livestock sector. In the peak periods of spring and summer this work took up 70.2 percent and 80 percent of their time (FAO, 1995:17). The division of labour is less rigid in Albania than many other societies, some men will not let women work with their sheep, but often women take over men's work when an extra hand is needed, which men are less inclined to do (but men also milk cows). This flexibility tends to increase the work done by women. Privatization and other changes in the past decade have thus resulted in many women gaining power and authority, but at the cost of a heavy work burden.

MICRO-ENTERPRISES IN AGRICULTURE

11. Virtually all families, and certainly in the more favoured areas, sought not only to feed themselves but to obtain income in cash. They did so by deliberately producing a surplus or by producing specifically for the market, and in many cases selling it themselves. Probably the biggest single marketing operation in the country is the daily sale of liquid milk to consumers (Nicholson, 1999b; Nicholson, 2003a:149). This trade is actually illegal and some urban dwellers tell exaggerated tales of the supposed lack of hygiene of the producers and poor state of their cows (e.g. Post, 1998:16). However, most women who produce and sell do their best to produce responsibly. They have kept town dwellers supplied with fresh food for over a decade and they make a major contribution to their family incomes. Women also grow herbs and green vegetables, sometimes on land they have cleared themselves, which they sell in urban markets (Nicholson, 2003b), though prices are kept low by competition from imports from the EU^c). In some areas they specialize in rearing turkeys to sell at New Year. These small enterprises on a holding are recognized as being the work of the person responsible, often a woman, reference will be made to 'Melaize's turkeys' (the income, like all income, goes to the household fund).

NON-AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISE: SMALL AND MICRO-BUSINESS

12. Urban women have set up small businesses, such as selling from market stalls. Some also sell at the larger rural weekly markets (Nicholson, 2001; Nicholson, 2003b), but few rural women trade in this way, and they tend to sell at smaller markets and make little money. Some do dressmaking at home, trim neighbours' hair or sell ice cream

around the village. In larger villages a few run shops with their husbands (Nicholson, forthcoming 2004), and some of the former shopkeepers who bought their businesses when they were privatized are women, but opportunities for non-farm micro-businesses, still less run by women, and thus for these to empower women, are few.

III. STATE INSTITUTIONS AND SERVICES

EDUCATION

13. It is a common complaint that educational provision has declined since the overthrow of the old regime. Corruption also occurs in the education system, but the evidence suggests this does not affect girls more than boys. Some school types, such as evening agricultural schools for adults (women as well as men) no longer exist. Much has been made of children being kept at home from (the obligatory primary) school to work, and the consequences, but this appears to disadvantage boys more than girls. At secondary level (*Shkolla e mesme*) in rural areas participation by boys has apparently been maintained, but it is evident in some villages that fewer girls attend school, though it is hard to quantify the decline from published figures, as some rural pupils attend urban schools. One reason for the decline is the cost for families who get little of their income in cash. One woman estimated that sending her son to a vocational school would cost her husband's entire income. There is also a question of fairness. A daughter needs a trousseau (*paj*), which in a society where everyone marries is not a trivial consideration. If the family also spends a lot of money on her education, then she will receive a larger share of its resources than her brother, though they should receive the same amount. The position has been made worse by the closure of rural secondary schools, blamed on a shortage of teachers, who have left to emigrate or get better paid jobs (UNDP, 1999:34). This increases travel costs, and some parents, alarmed by tales of drugs and unruly behaviour, are concerned about letting their daughters go to or stay in towns. Specialist schools in larger towns that take girl boarders keep a strict watch on them. The most many young rural women can hope to do is a 'course' in hairdressing or dressmaking, i.e. work as an apprentice (a system that empowers urban women with appropriate skills) in a town where they have relatives to stay with.

14. There is an apparently contradictory trend in tertiary education, where women increasingly outnumber men (there is no breakdown of statistics by urban or rural origins) (UNDP, 1999:36), which is probably due to the emigration of young men of student age. There are also students by correspondence, among them women in their twenties in villages with young families. At the present time this is an important means of empowering women who would otherwise be unable to benefit from tertiary education. According to survey evidence, 12.8 percent of women in rural areas have completed tertiary education (Tusha, 2000:14).

HEALTH SERVICES

15. Health services have suffered decline in the same way as education. Doctors given posts in rural areas sometimes refuse to take them up. Some medical personnel have emigrated (though some have returned). They are very badly paid and it is usual to pay backhanders for medical treatment; there is a generally known scale of tariffs. Hospitals and village health centres, many of which were damaged at the time of regime change, have been repaired and improved, usually by international bodies, such as ECHO, but they are not found in smaller villages. Probably the most valuable service in rural

areas is the system of ambulatory nurses, *infermiere në lagja*, usually women, who are responsible for a small group of villages and usually know their patients well. They play an important role in looking after women and young children and in training courses such as in family planning which have given them new skills. Abortion was legalized in 1991 and was initially used as an alternative to contraception, which, though available since 1992, was expensive at first (Corrin, 1992:5). Even this familiar and trusted service works alongside informal structures (Corrin, 1992:21). Advice from the local nurse is used in conjunction with the experience of, say, a sister, and if they differ, the latter is given greater weight.

16. There is a lack of information and education on fatal conditions such as breast and cervical cancer (UNDP, 1999:31), and many women seek medical care too late. Some doctors would like to initiate screening but they have little knowledge of experience elsewhere and how to assess in which circumstances screening is worthwhile (personal communication). Their access to information sources, in provincial cities even the internet, is limited. Women tend to see solutions to health problems as purely medical; one said she thought every woman should have a thorough examination once a year. There is some awareness of the importance of diet and lifestyle. Some messages have been clearly conveyed in the past but not nearly enough, and some rural women could help themselves more (i.e. they habitually sit on the ground while watching animals then complain about their rheumatism, though they know it is caused by damp). There is also a legacy of poor health from years of working in poor conditions and living in damp houses.

INFRASTRUCTURE: ELECTRICITY AND WATER SUPPLIES

17. Electricity supplies are unreliable everywhere but especially in rural areas and this affects women more than men because it hampers so much of their work. They need to see to animals in the early morning and to cook. As more people, especially in towns, have bought electrical appliances, supplies have become less adequate. In villages that have a water supply it is usually only available from the mains at certain irregular times, so women have to fill up containers with the day's supply. When there is a power cut water pumps do not work and there is no water. In the hills, some villages rely on wells, so women (and children and a few men) carry the water or transport it by donkey, usually uphill. Some villages on the plain do not have their own water supply and must transport it several kilometers, using bicycles, carts or vans. Those without their own transport pay others. In all villages poor water supply makes women's lives unnecessarily difficult, especially in winter. Villages are surrounded by a sea of mud, and women constantly have to wash their children's clothes.

IV. THE STATE, POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE

18. Data show that the proportion of women political representatives has gone down to 5.7 percent (Komiteti për mundësi të barabarta, undated). However, a quota system is under discussion to improve it (Women's Center in Tirana, Albania and Minority Rights Group International (MRG), 2004:4). There is some opposition to women in politics, a residual conservatism (Komiteti për mundësi të barabarta undated), though it is not universal. When women organized a campaign to support women candidates in the 1996 election, some women were subjected to violence (Fico, 1999:37). On average there are two women ministers in most governments, and perhaps three or four deputy ministers.

This lack of representation is not due to a lack of interest among women. They discuss politics among themselves, though in a partisan way, and women assist at election time with tasks such as publicizing meetings. In the early years of democracy they seemed to think it was necessary to wear their political allegiances like a badge (Nicholson, 1999a:561). However, Albanian politics are very confrontational, and politicians are seen as corrupt. Politics lack credibility, and because few think politicians deliver, 'the government does nothing', they do not see politics as a way to solve problems. Therefore women (and many men) are often ambivalent about becoming politically active (Fico, 1999:36).

19. However, women are quite numerous in senior public positions (the Director General of the National Statistics Office, the head of the Rural Development Fund, etc.), and it seems to cause no surprise that they (or government ministers) are women. This is perhaps a legacy of the old system, under which it was normal for many women to do "men's" jobs, which established a kind of equality that has been carried over into the new system. On the other hand, it seems to have had little effect on women's situation in general.

20. The ministerial body currently charged with looking after women's affairs is the Equality Committee, *Komiteti për Mundësi të Barabarta*, at the Department of Labour, which has a strongly committed staff of just nine. It is charged, among other things, with the implementation of government policies on women and family issues, the coordination of activities for the promotion of equality, the proposal of new legislation and the support and coordination of NGOs' activities in the field of women and family rights (*Komiteti 'Gruaja dhe familja'* 1999; UNDP, 1999:70). Their influence is strengthened by the importance attached to equality by international bodies and initiatives such as the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. The Albanian government aims to join the EU, and perhaps accedes to requests for its policies to conform to European standards more readily than otherwise might be the case. International organizations have also been willing to support some of the committee's activities.

V. NEW TYPES OF INSTITUTION

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOS

21. The Union of Albanian Women, a GONGO (governmentally organized non-governmental organization), funded mainly by the state (Fico, 1999:30-31), which had a branch in every village ceased to function when the institutions of that state collapsed. In Tirana several women's organizations were founded and over time some NGOs, most of them located in a small area close to the offices opened by international organizations, and this pattern continued for several years (UNDP, 1999:38). This concentration is beginning to weaken, but of the 70 women's NGOs currently listed on the Equality Committee's website (www.cwf.gov.al), there are still half with addresses in Tirana. At any one time only a small proportion are genuinely active (Sampson, 1996:134). The recurrence of the same names suggests an overlap of personnel, there is certainly cooperation between the most active groups (Fico, 1999:35), so the number of people who are active appears not to be large. Almost all the rest of the NGOs are in provincial towns. In rural areas they are practically non-existent and have limited spheres of activity (Sampson, 1996:133; UNDP, 1999:39, 40; Tusha, 2000:5-6). In practice, the majority of active rural NGOs are those promoted by international development organizations as part of their work (see Land O'Lakes, undated).

22. The Tirana-based NGOs have, however, had some influence in the rest of the country, including rural areas. The issues they have taken up and their initiatives on such things as family violence (Haxhiymeri and Kulluri, 2000; UNDP:38), previously not acknowledged, drug and alcohol abuse and family planning (Fico, 1999:38) have helped to get the issues widely discussed. Some international organizations with a lunch provided, for rural women (OSCE (OECD), 1999) recruited through their own networks and those of their local staff^{d)} where they discuss these and similar issues. Potentially that which is discussed circulates further through informal networks. Many village women are eager for knowledge and new ideas.

INSTITUTIONS RUN BY RELIGIOUS BODIES

23. A further type of institution, which in some respects overlaps with NGOs, is those that have been established by foreign missionaries. After 1991, the most numerous of institutions are probably those run by small evangelical sects, but there is significant involvement of the Roman Catholic Church (some in areas without a Catholic population) and there are some Muslim organizations^{e)}. These appear not to have been researched and are ignored in the literature on NGOs and development. As well as evangelizing (an activity that often seems to be aimed at young people), they engage in a variety of charitable work and some have established institutions for that purpose. In several towns schools have been established, nuns run courses in dressmaking for women, there are some orphanages, apparently part of a strategy to prevent women having abortions. Thus women are often their client group, or part of it. Some appear to only assist in existing institutions, by taking gifts to residential institutions for the elderly and people unable to care for themselves, for example. Muslim organizations run schools, engage in welfare work and provide copies of the Koran and other material for the instruction of people who are already muslims. There is a small degree of fundamentalist activity; a few young women with covered heads may be seen in Tirana but not in villages (some older women keep their legs covered, but this is not new). Islam in Albania is very liberal.

VI. PROBLEMS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

24. Empowering women presents a rather different challenge in Albania from countries where there is a more varied array of civil society institutions. The dominant institution, the family, is not amenable to the kinds of measures which could be adopted in formal institutions. Direct interventions, such as laws on behaviour within the family, can effect change, but past experience shows that these will only be successful if they are generally accepted, or at least not opposed, by the population, men as well as women. To be accepted, other civil society institutions must not conflict with the obligations of the family and kin group and they need to offer benefits that the latter cannot, but in such a way as to articulate with it. The context in which civil society institutions operate changes over time but it must always be taken into account.

25. A major problem for rural women, one which international organizations, especially their non-Albanian speaking staff, who are usually based in towns, fail to understand, is the degree of disparagement and the instances of discrimination shown to them by urban women, especially in Tirana. Their achievements tend to be played down, even by women prominent in women's organizations (see Ekonomi, 2000:1, Instat, 2000:141; Nicholson, 2001). Except for some of those who have come from the countryside, urban women in general are not interested in rural women nor in having contact with them (see e.g. OSCE (OECD), 1999). Foreigners mostly come from societies

that are predominantly urban and often fail to fully appreciate the significance of the scale of Albanian rural population.

26. Foreign assistance, including that from EU states, does not necessarily include gender mainstreaming. For example, the 1998 Agricultural census was conducted with technical assistance from ISTAT (Italy) and EUROSTAT and the technical support of the Italian Government (Instat, 2000:21). Though it recognized that it was necessary in the case of animals, with the exception of the category 'wives' (of the head of the household) it did not tabulate data on people by gender. This is even more noticeable because the Director General of Instat is a woman who is prominent in women's organizations in Tirana.

27. Many civil society actors in Albania are not Albanians. Early in the last century, an elderly Albanian commented to a traveller: 'We suffer from people who interfere and know nothing' (Durham, 1909:26), and many Albanians have had occasion to echo that comment in the last decade or so. This is a problem for everyone, including rural women. Ideas introduced by Westerners have often been misunderstood by people with no experience of the world outside Albania, but Westerners are at best only partly aware of this (c.f. Roggeband, 2004). As a consequence, Albanians and foreigners talk past one another, or Albanians learn the new words and pretend to understand so as not to be thought stupid or impolite. Rural women are eager to learn about new ideas, they have learnt a lot in the last decade by piecing together what they hear from different sources, such as their emigrant relatives and, of course, television. They are aware that the latter is not 'reality', perhaps some understand that the Latin American soap operas virtually everyone watches (when there is not a power cut) are misinformation, but they have little to compare them with. Punitive visa regimes, which have worsened since the implementation of the Schengen accord (exacerbated by corruption in certain consulates) make it exceedingly difficult for all except an elite few and those with foreign contacts to visit even neighbouring countries (Nicholson, 2002:438). Hence their understanding of the wider world, and alternatives that might be accessible to them, are, at best, only partial.

28. Albanians have the impression that the West has always been as it is (or they imagine it) now, and that NGOs have always been important, and not just the current fashion. They assume western models, idealized representations of the West, reflect western realities, which they try to imitate (Sampson, 1996:125, 129). From their experience in GONGOs (see above, para.21) they know how to set up semi-formal organizations, but for many, especially in the early years of transition, the step to initiating practical activities has been problematic (Corrin, 1992:14). They also had unreasonable expectations of what they might achieve (Sampson, 1996:137). Funding, most of which from western donors, is a major problem which puts those outside Tirana, and without language skills and self confidence, at a severe disadvantage (unless they have been promoted by a western agency). It seems to them that all western NGOs get funding (because they never see those who do not), so they despair at their own financial difficulties. They must manage with short term and insecure finance and negotiate the changing strategies of donor organizations (or their governments), while trying to sustain their programmes. They are aware that with their limited resources they do not come close to fulfilling needs, yet cling to a belief that they should be developing a large and powerful movement. Having taken at face value the rhetoric that they must find 'other sources' of finance for the longer term, and unaware that many western NGOs simply make themselves agents of governments, they blame their own shortcomings for finding

none (Fico, 1999:38, 39). What is held out as a means for empowering ordinary citizens, among them women, in fact empowers only the strongest and most successful organizations. Not only are the rest not empowered, those who do not get resources and cannot do what they set out to do, feel disempowered.

VII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

29. The following recommendations have been drawn up:

- In the dominant institution, the family, the aim should be to empower women *within* it, which will inevitably bring change in the institution itself and in other areas of society. Change and empowerment happen due to the penetration of ideas rather than direct interventions. Ideas empower women to find their own solutions to problems they face, taking account of their priorities and their situation. They also make other actors aware that change is necessary.
- Formal institutions should seek to pursue their aims by using the resources that exist, especially the informal ones, rather than necessarily building new structures. They should build the existence of women's informal networks, kin etc. into plans for spreading information, as these are more effective than formal means for reaching all women, and not just a few.
- In campaigning for women's representation on public bodies, non-elected as well as elected, in a country with a large rural population it is also necessary to ensure that *rural* women are represented in their own right. It cannot be assumed that all women representatives will necessarily have sympathy and understanding of the realities of rural women's lives; many do not.
- The areas in which mainstreaming is necessary must be carefully reviewed to ensure that those directly affect rural, but not necessarily urban, women are included. Special circumstances, such as those in a country where many men emigrate to find work, must also be taken into account.
- Research should be carried out on the activities of the various international organizations, governmental and religious as well as NGOs, to clarify to what extent their activities empower women. The results of the research should be taken into account in allowing them permission to continue working in Albania.
- More needs to be done to make rural women (and women in general) visible. It should be ensured more systematically that all official published data include the gender dimension, and non-public bodies should be encouraged to do the same. As far as possible, the rural dimension should also be included. For example, if education statistics were tabulated by the place of domicile of the students, and not just the location of the educational institution, there would be a more accurate picture of trends in the educational participation of young rural women.
- A special Mother's Day should be introduced. International Women's Day is understood in Albania as Women and Mothers Day, and people are firmly convinced that it is the same in the rest of the world. A Mother's Day would enable women to reclaim 8 March as their own without mothers appearing to be downgraded.

NOTES

- a) This paper is based on an ongoing research project in Southern Albania “Life in south Albania and villages from a women is prospective which began in 2000 and builds on earlier field research in the same area. Research was financed by grants from the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust.
- b) In the north, where work migration was less common in the past, a woman is still left in the care of another man if her husband goes abroad to work (DeSoto et al., 2002:59, 63).
- c) This is a complex issue. The seasons come sooner in Greece, giving local producers an important advantage. They also produce more because of subsidies, and they employ migrant workers (Albanian men). There is thus a possible conflict between Albanian women and Albanian men.
- d) Organizations such as Land O’Lakes have given opportunities to women from rural backgrounds educated in life sciences and agriculture to develop their careers.
- e) The Orthodox Church (the Albanian church is independent, but finance seems to come from Greece) has largely concentrated its efforts on building churches, not necessarily in areas with an Orthodox population.

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