SUPPORTING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE RURAL ECONOMY: THE CASE OF LITHUANIA

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In every country some discontinuities can still be found when talking about the women’s position in the labour market. The issues connected with the integration of women into the business activities in rural areas are a crucial problem. In Lithuania the effects of the emigration processes are still evident. Owing to the fact that Lithuania is a small county, which accommodates only 3.4 million residents, there should be found a way to attract entrepreneurs with the favourable opportunities to run businesses in rural areas. Especially it is important to engage rural women in such kinds of activities or to improve the conditions for further business development. This paper reviews the approaches that have been adopted in Lithuania to encourage these processes, including national legal acts, the central institutional initiatives and programmes of the Lithuanian Government, the initiatives of Lithuanian NGOs, and the European Union’s support for rural development in Lithuania.

Key words: agriculture and rural development, business development, gender equality, rural women

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Introduction

The population both in urban and in rural areas of Lithuania is decreasing every year. When we analyze these data by gender, the situation still is the same – the population still is decreasing and in this situation rural women are one of the most aggrieved parts of the population. The affirmation of that could be the fact that in 2008 the bigger part of the rural population consisted of elderly rural women (in urban territories there were 54 % (1.225 million) women and 46 % (1.026 million) men) (Statistics Lithuania, 2008a).

It is common that older people move to rural areas while young people between 25 and 29 years move away from the rural territories. Young women who stay in villages do not want to be involved in non-qualified activities. However quite often they do not have enough knowledge or investment to start their own business or individual activity and because of that they tend to migrate to urban areas or out of the county more often than do men. This situation is unfavourable for the efforts to improve the growth of the economy in rural areas.

The importance of agriculture as of an economic activity in rural area is diminishing. The majority of the residents of non-urbanised areas are living of the non-agricultural sector. The number of such residents is increasing especially during recent years. There are several reasons, which influence these processes. First of all in the post-industrial society the new conceptions of living accommodation are formed, consequently in the traditional rural areas more and more residents could be counted, who are not only working in the non-agricultural working positions, however their style of living also has no connections with the agricultural sector. Also the changes in the order of the land proprietorship and associated intercourses impel rural residents, who have no registered personal agricultural holding, to relate their professional career with the work places in urban areas. This way of the professional orientation is also acceptable for those, who consider that their farm or agricultural holding is not productive enough for the security of the sufficient living conditions, or those, who have special career ambitions, connected with non-agricultural activities (Dužinskas, Ratkevičienė, Jasaitis, 2007).

In Lithuania the employment of rural residents in the sectors of agriculture, hunting and forestry during the period from 2001 to 2005 decreased by about 9%; in 2005 it accounted for 42% of the total number of the employees in rural areas, and in 2007 for 32%. Most of the rural residents were employed in other, non-agricultural sectors (58%) (Statistics Lithuania, 2008b). In Lithuanian rural areas increasingly popular alternative, non-agricultural activities are rural tourism, maintenance of traditional heritage, and activities more or less related with agriculture. Extremely non-agricultural services are still not attractive (Petrauskas and Gaidys, 2008).

The number of small and medium enterprises (SME) in rural areas is increasing (in 2005 there were about 7547 SME), however mainly in the urbanized rural areas which are more attractive for business development. The largest share (73%) is micro enterprises; 22% are small and 5% are medium enterprises. The creation of such en-
terprises in remote rural areas is very slow. In 2007 there were 9169 SMEs and they composed 98% of all enterprises existing in rural areas. Most of the rural SMEs were engaged in trade (37%), whereas 19% were engaged in industry and manufacturing and 16% in hotels’ and restaurants’ businesses. 12% of SME operated in the areas related to agriculture, forestry and fishing. In comparison with 2005, the number of SMEs operating in agricultural and similar areas decreased and the number operating in the areas which are alternative to agriculture increased (Statistics Lithuania, 2008c).

With respect to the differentiation of employed women between different sectors of economic activities in the period starting from 2001, the number of women working in agriculture, forestry and fishing has decreased (in 2007 there were 28% employed women) (Statistics Lithuania, 2008b). However the percentage of women working in the service sector, i.e. employed in wholesale or retail trade, transport sector, industry, is increasing. Most of the employed female population is still working in such economic activities as health and social work, education, culture and sport, recreational activities, while men work in financial intermediation, insurance, the financial investments sector and so on. There could be seen a small increase of the number of women employed in public administration (civil servants), but most of the higher positions still are occupied by men.

A survey of SMEs (Statistics Lithuania, 2007) disclosed that the share of the surveyed women entrepreneurs constituted 25.8% and of men 68.7%. Even 83% of all entrepreneurs – women and men – stated that the main driver for them was the wish to be a boss for oneself. It was an impetus that urged them to begin their own business. However in 2007–2008 the situation changed: more and more Lithuanian women decided to start their own businesses (Statistics Lithuania, 2008c).

The most important factors influencing women’s capacity and initiative to create and develop alternative activities in the rural areas are the importance of the specific information and organization of the appropriate courses and training, the possibility to get financial support and the incentive shown by the governmental institutions (Ribčauskienė, 2007).

The integration of gender equality into the different spheres of national policy was encouraged by Lithuanian attempts to become a member of the European Union (EU). Historically, the European Community (EC) has normally succeeded in imposing norms (including those related with human rights) on the international community, including Eastern European (former Eastern bloc) states (Solomon, 2006).

This paper reviews progress towards the integration of gender equality into Lithuanian agricultural and rural development policy during the pre- and post-EU accession periods, particularly in support of prospective woman entrepreneurs. It describes the approaches that have been adopted to encourage these processes, including national legal acts, the central institutional initiatives and programmes of the Lithuanian Government, the initiatives of Lithuanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the EU’s support for rural development in Lithuania.

Methodology

The analysis is based on published data of Lithuania and on specific documents and reports prepared by the institutions of international organisations, national institutions and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) of the Republic of Lithuania. For both the pre-accession and EU membership periods, it was necessary to restructure the information collected by MoA and National Paying Agency of the MoA about the projects and their implementation under the EU’s support for agriculture and rural development schemes into the appropriate format to allow of the evaluation of the gender aspects.

Results and discussion

National legal acts and other issues for the development of the capacities of the women’s integration into Lithuanian rural economic activities. Lithuania was one of the leading countries in Eastern and Central Europe in which the legal basis under the gender aspect was created at the governmental level. An impressive example of this is the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men which came into force on 1 December 1998 (Official Gazette, 1998). This act was the background for the establishment of the Ombudsman’s institution in Lithuania which is responsible for human rights and the defence of equal opportunities in all spheres of state’s and society’s life. The institution of the Ombudsmen for Equal Opportunities (to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuanian) was established in 1999.

After these first attempts to integrate the gender sensitive aspect into national law, some other initiatives were created and met with political, social and ideological approval. For example on 18 November 2003 the Law on Equal Opportunities came into force and at the beginning of the 2008 it was replaced by a new version (Official Gazette, 2003; 2008). As an indication of the tolerable situation in the legal basis of equal opportunities, in 2006 the decision to establish European Union’s Gender Equality Institute in the Republic of Lithuania was finally adopted. Similarly the processes of integration of gender sensitive approach began to penetrate the areas of sectored policies’ areas and specific sectors of activities. For that reason new, inter-institutional structures and mechanisms started to function.

The central institutional initiatives and programmes for the successful integration of the horizontal gender mainstreaming policy aspects into national legal system. In Lithuania there is an institutional system for the implementa-
tion of gender mainstreaming policy. All institutions of the Lithuanian governmental system are somehow related with this, the existence of which began in 2003 when The National Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period 2003–2004, adopted by Government Resolution No 712 of 3 June 2003, came into force. At the central level of the Lithuanian institutional system a significant role is played by the Inter-Ministerial Commission of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. This is formed of representatives from all Ministries of the Republic of Lithuania and of representatives from the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and NGOs. The Head of the Commission is the Secretary of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania. This Commission and every separate institution which is sending representatives are responsible for the implementation of the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period of 2005–2009, adopted by Government Resolution No 1042 of 26 September 2005 (Official Gazette, 2005). Figure 1 shows the main institutional machinery which is coordinating the integration of gender mainstreaming in all political and administrative activities of the state.

**Fig. 1. Gender equality machinery in Lithuania**

One of the main aims of the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period 2005–2009 is to strengthen women’s capacities to tackle and develop their own business and motivate their economic participation. The most important measures created for that purpose are initiatives for supporting women’s business capacities (the activities, organized by Business information centres (especially in rural areas), for example, information days for business women in all counties of Lithuania and etc., initiation of information, consultation and educational services for the increase of capacities to profit from the financial support for the creation and development of business activities, the organization of courses about the opportunities of business start-up, development, employment of the first and the next worker and the activity according to business licenses) and actions dedicated to the increase women’s employment rates in rural areas (by providing consultations in rural areas for women who are starting or developing their own business which is alternative to agricultural activities, by organizing the information campaigns under the questions of project preparation in the spheres of creation of local employment initiatives and establishment of social enterprises).

The implementation of the Programme’s measures was distributed among separate Ministries and other involved governmental institutions according to their workloads. The MoA is responsible for the measure connected with the providing of consultations for women living in rural areas of Lithuania and starting agricultural activities or alternative business. This measure should be implemented in the period 2006–2009. The MoA encouraged the activity of rural communities in providing financial support for the implementation of the educational and information measures and cycles of seminars devoted to develop women’s business activities, solve problems of their social segregation, develop alternative activities, improve social partnership and quality of life in rural areas and participate in international projects assigned to the women living in rural territories. These ac-
Activities were organized by Lithuanian Women Farmers’ Union. The support for the implementation of these activities is allocated following the Special Rural Support Programme from the national budget of the Republic of Lithuania. The results of the implementation of this Programme are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the implementation of the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period of 2005-2009 (2006–2008, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period and activities</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sum of the allocation (EUR)</td>
<td>21.432</td>
<td>28.116</td>
<td>20.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of the organized events. From them:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conference “Rural women around the Baltic: Problems and Challenges”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other conferences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (“The Reductions of the Rural Women’s Social Exclusion”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expositions</td>
<td>3 (two of them – attendance in the festival of the little towns and villages of the European countries, attendance in the exposition “AgroBalt 2006”)</td>
<td>3 (the exposition of the works, made by Lithuanian craftsmen and of the culinary heritage in Italy, attendance in the festival of the little towns and villages of the European countries in Finland, attendance in the exposition “AgroBalt 2007”)</td>
<td>3 (seminar-exposition “The Manners, Traditions, Crafts and National Heritage of the Aukštaitija Region”, attendance in the festival of the little towns and villages of the European countries in Latvia, attendance in the exposition “AgroBalt 2008”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized seminars</td>
<td>23 (the cycle of the seminars)</td>
<td>23 (the cycle of the seminars “The Strengthening of Rural Women’s Initiatives and Capacities to Run Individual Businesses”)</td>
<td>22 (the cycle of the seminars “The Heritage of the Culture and the Culinary of Lithuanian Nation”, organized in rural areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research “The preparation of the measures’ plan for the development of women’s economic activities’ diversification”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The publication “The Input of Rural Women into the development of Lithuanian villages”</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of the Lithuanian Farmers’ Union’s internet site</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of the participants. From them:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the number of rural women</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>about 865</td>
<td>about 846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the number of rural men</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>about 777</td>
<td>about 787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the number of rural men</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>about 88</td>
<td>about 59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Despite the fact that the results of the gender mainstreaming implementation policy are improving, there are still some drawbacks which were emphasized in the concluding observations of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to the United Nations, made after the meeting with Lithuanian representatives in the forty-first session of the Committee in the period 30 June-18 July 2008. The principal areas of the concern and recommendations are (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008):

- The temporary special measures, which should not be treated as discriminatory and which can be applied in the specified legislation, still have not been adopted, including in areas such as politics, public life, education and employment in the public or private sector (the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania passed them);
The persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society in Lithuania which threaten to undermine women’s exercise and enjoyment of their human rights and are reflected, inter alia, in the recently adopted Conceptual Framework for a National Family Policy, the media, and in educational textbooks and materials;

The necessary steps should be taken in order to ensure that the gender equality machinery at the national level is strengthened both with respect to human and financial resources. The problem is that there are too few human resources first of all in all kinds of the institutional gender equality political structure. These specialists, who are responsible for the gender equality issues, are also responsible for other specified responsibilities, which often are these of the first importance;

It remains concerned at the high prevalence of violence against women in Lithuania, particularly domestic violence and, particularly in these circumstances, at the absence of a specific law on domestic violence;

The vertical and horizontal occupational segregation between women and men in the labour market could still be seen, together with the persistence of a gender-based wage gap and the low percentage of men taking parental leave;

The funding of the NGOs still is inadequate, especially women’s NGOs etc.

The initiatives of Lithuanian NGOs working in the sphere of agriculture and rural areas. The main upholders of the initiatives of rural women which successfully carry out their activity in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture are the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union (LRCU) and the Lithuanian Women Farmers’ Union (LWFU). The LRCU is an independent union (NGO) of acting rural communities registered in Lithuania as public organizations. It is coordinating and implementing the tasks given by the members of LRCU and representing its interests. The LRCU was founded in 2001, aiming to unite the communities of all regions of Lithuania and represent their interests. Presently there are more than 880 Lithuanian rural communities which are maintained as the members of LRCU. This organization is uniting active rural women – 2/3 chairmen of communities, managers are women.

The mission of LRCU is to ensure that Lithuanian rural areas are attractive and safe, having good infrastructure, viable agricultural, forestry, fishery and other sectors, a healthy environment, preserved and managed landscape. This process must be gradual in all Lithuanian regions, combining both the social and economic policy and their implementation. Other LRCU activities include: accumulation and analysis of information related to rural development, passing thereof to rural communities; consultations to rural communities in developing integrated rural development plans; training of the leaders of rural communities in carrying out rural research related to meeting the demands of rural communities, also development of projects, programmes; provision of information on the possibilities of establishment of alternative business; advertisement of regional products in order to facilitate entry into the market for small producers; development of sharing of good experience and partnership among rural communities and representatives of local authorities (LRCU information, 2008). Rural communities acquire a more important role in solving real problems of local rural populations in reducing social exclusion of women in the labour market.

The LWFU is an independent public organization established in 1939, re-established in 1992, and has continued its activity that was started after the war for 15 years already. The LWFU unites a large number of rural women, farmers – at the moment the union has 3000 full members and supporters amounting at approximately twice of this number in 188 local units. The LWFU is a member of Chamber of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania and World Rural Women’s Association. The Union successfully cooperates with NGOs from Norway, Germany, Poland and implements joint projects. The objective of the LWFU is to uphold the initiative supporting improvement of social welfare, training, health and physical, emotional and spiritual development. The LWFU aims at strengthening of rural women, enhancement of self-esteem thereof, development of skills and provision of knowledge especially in the field of alternative business.

In terms of activities, the Union organizes cycles of seminars for rural women including lectures in psychology training: how to achieve self-esteem, improve leadership skills, also organizes training in the fields of management, founding of alternative; organizes and participates in national and international exhibitions, fairs, events; organizes conferences on the issues of social and economic condition for rural women, maternity, family values, etc.; nourishes national traditions and preserves rural heritage by demonstrating authentic crafts of rural women, culinary products, elements of folklore (folk songs, dances). It also helps the MoA to implement the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period of 2005–2009, as mentioned above. It should be noted that following the project “Revival of Lithuanian Rural Communities” in 2000, initiated by LWFU and financed by the MoA, the model of a rural community was developed forming the basis for the development of rural communities (MoA, LWFU information, 2008).

The European Union’s support for rural development and women’s participation. Lithuanian legislation de jure provides for equal opportunities for men and women. However, it is even more important to ensure practical realization of legal provisions. In this regard it is expected that the possibility to use the support of the EU initiatives will make a real contribution to the achievement of this aim by establishing equal opportunities for
everybody to participate in implementation of special measures designed for the assimilation of this kind of the support (during the period of 2000–2004 farmers, rural residents and microenterprises were able to use the EC support under the SAPARD programme, during the period of 2004–2006 – under the Lithuanian Single Programming Document (SPD) and now, in the period of 2007–2013 – under the measures of Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007–2013 (RDP). All the measures and initiatives proposed are open to men and women equally. However, it should be noted that historically ownership of land in most cases is in the hands of men, so they very often have the deciding role in investment development which take place on farms. However, the situation is slowly changing and more and more women are getting involved in farming. All support available under the EU’s programmes and initiatives is available to applicants regardless of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation once they satisfy defined criteria.

The different periods of Lithuania’s pre-accession and membership of the EU will be discussed separately.

**SAPARD – the pre-accession period.** During the period of the implementation of SAPARD programme (2000–2004), 16.7% of all supported projects were implemented by rural women. The majority were prepared under the measure “Development of economic activity and encouragement of alternative income” (most were rural tourism projects). This group of projects, implemented by rural women, secured 53.2 % of the allocation designed for this activity (Table 2).

Table 2. Support disbursed under the SAPARD programme, 2000–2004 (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of agreements, signed with men (%)</th>
<th>Amount of support, received by men (%)</th>
<th>Number of agreements, signed with women (%)</th>
<th>Amount of support, received by women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Investment into the primary agricultural production</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Development of economic activity and encouragement of alternative income</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural tourism</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Water management</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Lithuanian Single Programming Document (SPD).** The analysis of the 2004–2006 programming period shows that under the measures of rural development and fisheries of the Lithuanian SPD, there were 2345 projects prepared. The financial support was designed for 1854 projects (for 79.1% of all projects). Of these, 21.4% were prepared and implemented by rural women (Table 3).

Table 3. Support under the Single Programming Document, 2004–2006 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of agreements, signed with men or enterprises, managed by men (%)</th>
<th>Amount of support, received by men (%)</th>
<th>Number of agreements, signed with women or enterprises, managed by women (%)</th>
<th>Amount of support, received by women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment into agricultural holdings</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of young farmers</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of the marketing and the reproduction of the agricultural products</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement of adjustment and development of rural areas</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural tourism</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects under the LEADER+ measures</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation for the offering of the professional education activities</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity related to fisheries fleet</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities (related with fishing)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>301.965</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most popular with rural women were projects related to professional education and measures related to the LEADER+ concept. In the projects related to agricultural activities and businesses, the rate of rural women’s activity was lower. The most popular were projects related to rural tourism (41.2% of the projects connected with rural tourism initiatives were prepared by women). Compared to the SAPARD financial period the main trends remain the same, however according to the observation of all measures implemented in the period of 2004–2006, the number of active rural women increased (Šukytė et al., 2008).

Under the SPD period legally both men and women had equal rights. There were equal chances both for men and women to obtain credits, to establish business, etc. During the ex-post revision it was observed that all these initiatives create favourable conditions for women to take active part in the rural development process as well as politics (especially under the LEADER+ initiatives). Women in Lithuanian rural areas hold high level positions in local authorities, they are very active in social and public life, they are extraordinary active within rural communities as well as the Lithuanian women farmers’ union. The biggest part of local rural communities consists of women, they hold leader’s positions. Within rural communities women organise cultural and all other events, take care of occupation of children and youth, organise training and awareness and information dissemination. For this reason, a closer analysis of the beginning of implementation of LEADER is worthwhile.

Support under SPD LEADER+ measure and initiatives by women. Up to June 2007, 40 local action groups (LAGs) were registered in Lithuania. LAGs are established following the principles of involvement of women / girls into the activity and equal possibilities of men and women, i.e. not less than 40% of the LAG must be made up of women and at least one person under 25 years of age. The territory represented by LAGs comprises over 97% of all rural areas of Lithuania. LAGs unite the non-governmental (makes up to 50% of LAG), local authority and business sectors in developing local development strategies providing the most effective solution of problems of rural areas in the opinion of rural population. At the end of 2005, six out of ten LAG beneficiaries (each received 144810 EUR) drafted trial integrated strategies of the topic “Improvement of life quality in rural areas”. These strategies are aimed at solving also the problems of women / girls in rural areas. The number of rural residents who were attending learning courses organised under this group of LEADER+ measures, was 6308: 4622 rural women (73.3%) and 1686 rural men (26.7%) (MoA, 2008).

The current EU financing period and the Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007–2013. Before the creation of the RDP, the analysis of the agricultural and rural development and equally the analysis of previous experiences were made. Statistical information shows the main weaknesses of the rural territories in Lithuania still are (RDP, 2007): strong dependence on one source of income – from agricultural activities and services; the high youth unemployment rate in rural areas; and an increasing gap between incomes earned by urban and rural residents. Also the fact was taken into account that in the period 2007–2013 the European Union’s rural development policy is oriented into three main areas: the economy of the agricultural and food production; environment protection; and wider economy of rural territories and wellbeing of rural residents.

The global objective for rural development in Lithuania is to ensure growth through improving the competitiveness of agrifood and forestry sectors as well as creating possibilities for diversification of economic activities and improving the quality of life in rural areas while enhancing the human, environmental and other countryside values and reducing disparities between rural and urban areas as well as between regions (RDP, 2007).

In order to promote equality between men and women and ensure that any other discrimination is prevented during the various stages of implementation of the RDP; the MoA has consulted the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. The most important recommendations on the RDP were provided by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (RDP, 2007).

Firstly, it is necessary to ensure the equal opportunities for all the rural population to use the EU support; to integrate aspects of equal opportunities into the various levels of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the RDP. The office emphasized that it is necessary to ensure that in the process of planning of the RDP measures the local communities and NGOs have been consulted, as they are often able to provide essential information inaccessible at national level on socially excluded groups of society, as well as on the informal obstacles hindering the possibilities to integrate socially excluded groups of society into the labour market.

Secondly, it is necessary to allocate resources for the collection of such information during the implementation of the RDP.

Thirdly, the data on rural women’s employment and size of wages show that measures oriented into rural development have to contribute to the improvement of the economic life of rural women. Thus it is necessary to provide measures which would encourage women’s economic life and would ensure elimination of the direct or indirect discrimination in their daily activities.

The MoA took the recommendations of by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman into account and the evidence is that, of the activities addressing gender issues in generating jobs and incomes and both product and services development in rural areas, the most important III axis Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activities and its
measures were established on the strength of the RDP. The measures of Axis III (311 Diversification into non-agricultural activities, 312 Support for business creation and development, 313 Encouragement of rural tourism activities and 322 Village renewal and development) are strongly related with the measures of Axis IV Implementation of LEADER method.

In accordance with the first recommendation of the Ombudsperson, all measures of the RDP were selected in close cooperation and partnership with social and institutional partners and with representatives of the relevant NGOs. The measures were selected in order to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination and aspects of equal opportunities were included in the various levels of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the RDP. The new tendency was that in the prepared measures there are more gender sensitive positive means created. Some of them – priority criteria, which are composed as gender sensitive. Another example could be the evaluation criteria created for the monitoring and supervision of the successful programme’s implementation processes, which are also gender sensitive and related with the increase of working places, improvement of rural economy and working conditions and etc.

Responding to the second recommendation, in order to collect statistical information which is not available at the current situation or which is specifically necessary for the monitoring and implementation of RDP, the MoA allocates finances from Technical Assistance for the studies, experts or thematic groups on equal opportunities.

According to the third recommendation, many of the measures of Axes 1 and 3 were selected in order to encourage women’s economic life and prevent indirect discrimination based upon other grounds. Considering the current situation of rural women and their needs, it is predicted that women shall particularly be interested in participation in measures of Axis 1 as Vocational training and information actions, Use of advisory services, and in Axis 3 measures such as Diversification into non-agricultural activities, Support for business creation and development, Encouragement of rural tourism activities. Moreover, as far as gender is included in the selection of LAGs criteria, it is predicted that Axis 4 shall have great influence in gender equality mainstreaming.

It is important to note that under the measure Diversification into non-agricultural activities specific attention is paid to the activities of rural women. In the evaluation process of the projects seeking support from the EAFRD, the priority criterion is that the applicant or the head of the micro-enterprise should be a rural woman. The applicants in this measure could be farmers or micro-enterprises which act in the agricultural sector but wish also to try to create a non-agricultural business in a rural area. EUR 97 million are allocated for this measure in the period 2007-2013. At the same time another Axis III measure Support for business creation and development is designed for the rural residents or micro-enterprises which have non-agricultural businesses in rural areas and want to improve their quality. Also the applicants under this measure could be persons who want to create a new micro-enterprise in a rural area of Lithuania and in this way the creation of new workplaces in rural areas is maintained. In the period 2007-2013 EUR 75.7 million are allocated for this measure. Encouragement of rural tourism activities is designated for farmers or rural residents and in the period 2007-2013 there is allocated EUR 82.3 million for this measure.

Regarding Axis IV Implementation of LEADER Approach, the board of the LAG prepares a local development strategy in which the needs of rural areas are observed and concrete measures to solve the problems are indicated. Support is provided not only for the implementation of the local development strategy but for its preparation as well (100%). In the RDP the LEADER method is applied for the implementation of Axis III measures. It is state policy that 73% of Axis III measure’s Village renewal and development budget must be obtained by applying the LEADER method. As mentioned above at the moment there are 48 LAGs in Lithuania covering almost 99% of the rural areas of Lithuania. There are 1500 rural communities established in Lithuania that are mainly run/represented by women (Experience of LEADER, 2007).

In comparison with previous programming periods, for the period 2007–2013 the amount of financial support for the diversification of agricultural activities and for the development of rural economy in Lithuania was increased. Through the comprehensive SWOT analysis of the situation of rural areas in Lithuania after accession into ES and after the SPD period, the number of measures designed for the development of the alternative, non-agricultural activities in Lithuanian villages was increased too. Also considerable attention paid to the issues connected with the development of suitable conditions for the small and medium business activities in rural areas (especially for those which are not suitable enough for profitable agricultural activities).

It is still quite difficult to summarise the first steps of the implementation of the RDP and the effectiveness of the integration of gender equality aspects and gender sensitive criteria into the processes of monitoring and evaluation of the achievements made. Furthermore, at the end of 2008 Lithuania and other European countries were faced with the challenges of the worldwide economic crisis. However during the first collections of applications under the RDP measures the tendencies still are quite similar to earlier periods – preliminary the most popular with rural women was the Axis III measure Encouragement of rural tourism activities (the total number of the projects collected were 122, however the process of the evaluation of these projects still is not finished). The sec-
ond more frequently popular between rural women is the Axis III measure Support for business creation and development, which is designated not only for the alternative activities and businesses but also for the nurture of the traditional crafts and ethnic traditions (the total number of the projects collected were 122). The Axis I and II measures, designed for the development of the agricultural activities and reproduction of alimentary products, forestry and environmental initiatives, still are more dominated by rural men.

Conclusions

There are many examples of good practice cases in the Lithuanian policy of equal opportunities, including the following:

1. In the periods of pre-accession and accession into the EU the policy adoption and implementation processes were stimulated faster. Now the Lithuanian law and institutional system, related with equal gender opportunities’ policy issues and aspects, is properly developed.

2. The Ministries and other central institutions of the Republic of Lithuania are implementing the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period of 2005-2009. The MoA, implementing the measure of this Programme, coordinates the activities with the representatives of the non governmental sector - with the LFU.

3. The rural women’s active participation in the public life is rapidly increasing, especially through the activities of the rural communities or local action groups (LAGs). During the seminars and the lectures designed for the implementation of the National Programme of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for the period of 2005–2009, or the seminars organized under the LEADER initiative in Lithuanian rural areas, rural women procure new abilities to prepare the Local Action Strategies, projects, also business plans and other capacities.

4. In the Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007–2013 there are some gender sensible positive means created, which are related with the processes of the selection of the projects, which could pretend for the EU financial support. Also the new type of the gender sensible evaluation criteria, committed for the monitoring and supervision of the successful programme’s implementation processes, were formulated.

5. Through the comprehensive SWOT analysis of the situation of rural areas in Lithuania after accession into ES and after the SPD period, the number of measures designed for the development of the alternative, non-agricultural activities in Lithuanian villages was enlarged. Also considerable attention was paid to the issues connected with the development of suitable conditions for the small and medium business activities in rural areas (especially for those which are not suitable enough for profitably agricultural activities).

However our research offers some other important insights:

1. Despite the fact that the results of the gender mainstreaming implementation policy have improved, there are still some drawbacks, which were emphasized in the Concluding Observations of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against women. One of these drawbacks, the significant vertical and horizontal occupational segregation between women and men in the labour market, the persistence of a gender-based wage gap, and the low percentage of men taking parental leave, still exists.

2. Despite the efforts to make the living and working conditions in rural areas more attractive, the index of the migration processes in Lithuania is still negative.

3. The benevolence of the labour market for the employees still is unsatisfactory. Still there are some gaps of the organization of the social policy (especially in the organization of the social insurance and guarantees), issues related with the stereotypes and discrimination in labour market and some other aspects.

4. Most employed women are still working in such economic activity spheres as health and social work, education, culture and sport, recreational activities. The gap between ‘male’ and ‘female’ occupations had also a tendency to decrease (but not so fast as expected).

5. Rural women, in comparison with men, most often are employed as part time workers. However this tendency is decreasing.

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