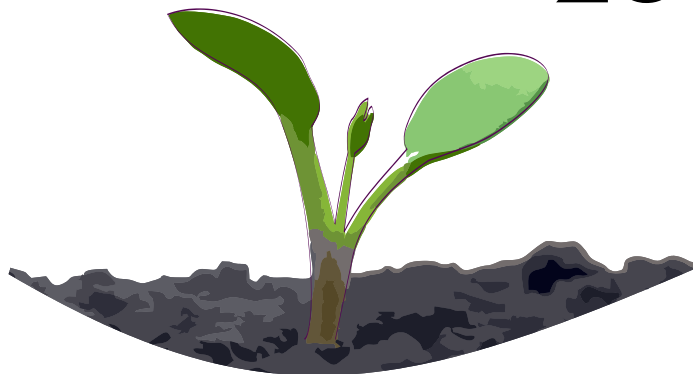




Kosovo Women's Fund

Little Grants,
Big Changes
2013



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www.womensnetwork.org

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About the Kosovo Women's Fund

Since fall 2012, the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) has provided 34 grants, totalling €66,209, to its member organizations through the Kosovo Women's Fund. In 2013, these initiatives **directly benefited 1,883 diverse women** including women with limited physical abilities, from rural areas, of various ethnicities (e.g., Turkish, Gorani, Serbian, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, and Albanian), youth, and pensioners. Many more people within their communities benefited indirectly. These little grants (up to €3,000) have achieved big changes in a short period of time. This booklet tells their stories.

But first, we would like to share some history about the Kosovo Women's Fund. With generous support from Kvinna till Kvinna and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), KWN established this Fund to provide small grants to women's organizations that lack access to other sources of funding. The Kosovo Women's Fund was established following a series of consultations in 2012 with KWN's member organizations regarding their needs and vision for the Fund.

The Kosovo Women's Fund meets a crucial need to support grassroots women's organizations amid shifting aid priorities in Kosovo. Shrinking budgets have forced many donors in Kosovo to close their grant programs or decrease funding for non-governmental organizations. Other donors have funds that are extremely difficult for local organizations to access. Women's groups that have limited English language skills struggle to obtain such funds. Yet, women-led organizations are well-placed to undertake very efficient and effective initiatives towards gender equality and women's rights at the municipal level, as our Kosovo Women's Fund has

illustrated. Through the Kosovo Women's Fund, we seek to ensure that their important efforts continue receiving support.

Kosovo Women's Fund Key Achievements

- More than 2,811 diverse women and girls have benefitted since fall 2012
- Increased KWN members' capacity to write proposals
- Diverse KWN members, including rural and minority groups, have access to funds
- Municipal Gender Equality Officers and other institutions involved in KWN members' initiatives
- KWN members gained advocacy skills using a "learning-by-doing" method
- KWN members provided substantial co-financing for their initiatives
- KWN members and beneficiaries have undertaken additional initiatives on a voluntary basis after their initial projects ended
- KWN members are more visible to the public via television, online media, newspapers, the KWN website, and Facebook
- High demand for continuation of Kosovo Women's Fund

How does the Kosovo Women's Fund work?

Three times per year, KWN's diverse member organizations are encouraged to submit applications for initiatives that will contribute to realizing Strategic Goals identified in the KWN Strategic Plan for 2011-2014. KWN members themselves selected these goals through a consultative process. They include:

- Strengthening KWN and its members
- Furthering women's participation in politics and decision-making
- Improving women's access to quality healthcare
- Combatting domestic violence and trafficking of persons
- Empowering women economically

Women's organizations may apply for funding in either Albanian or Serbian languages, using the Application Form available on KWN's website (www.womensnetwork.org). In order to apply for grants from the Kosovo Women's Fund, an organization must be a KWN member; plan and implement activities in accordance with their own organizational strategy; undertake activities that contribute to the KWN Strategic Plan; reach grassroots and/or vulnerable persons and groups; and lack other opportunities to secure funds.

Since January 2013, initiatives supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund lasted up to six months and received up to €3,000. The Kosovo Women's Fund Grant Review Committee, elected annually by KWN members, meets three times per year to decide whether grant proposals meet the aforementioned eligibility criteria and to award grants using a points-based system.

KWN also provides capacity development opportunities for grant applicants and grant recipients to strengthen our

member organizations and our network. KWN offers hands-on workshops, as well as individualized mentoring in grant-writing, project cycle management, and financial management, furthering organizations' capacities to apply for funding from other donors in the future.

KWN support for grant recipients does not end once a grant is given. We continue providing one-on-one mentoring for each grant recipient throughout their initiative, and often beyond. This includes site visits, skills-building in financial management, assistance with

organizational management, advice in effective advocacy strategies, facilitating networking with government officials, and problem-solving. We also support our members in thinking proactively about sustainability, which includes planning initiatives and gaining community level support that will enable their initiatives to continue beyond the life of these short projects. In 2013, KWN provided more than 300 such mentoring sessions for its members via phone, e-mail, or personal contact.

For more information about the Kosovo Women's Fund, visit our website at: <http://www.womensnetwork.org/?FaqlD=33>. KWN staff members can provide additional information via e-mail at grants@womensnetwork.org or by phone at +381 (0)38 245 850.

Please contact us if you or your organization is interested in supporting the Kosovo Women's Fund.

**"We are very grateful
for the support that we
receive from the Kosovo
Women's Network
through the Kosovo
Women's Fund."
- KWN Member**

Municipality Supports *Gruaja Hyjnore* to Empower Women

Several women are unemployed in Gjilan region. Without employment and income, some women struggle to participate in decision-making within their families, let alone in the public sphere. Many women also lack knowledge about their rights to inheritance and gender equality.

Knowing well the challenges that women face within their community, NGO *Gruaja Hyjnore* (Divine Women) set out to educate women about their rights, as well as support them in generating income towards their economic empowerment. Knowing their rights, coupled with greater economic independence could empower women's improved participation in decision-making, they believed.

Although *Gruaja Hyjnore* had operated informally since 2005, they could not afford an office space. Support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,420) enabled them to advocate successfully for the Municipality of Gjilan to provide an office space free of charge for the organization's activities. Since May 2013, the Municipality of Gjilan has provided a free venue for the organization's use. This cooperation with the Municipality has enabled *Gruaja Hyjnore* to decrease its operational costs, contributing substantially to the organization's sustainability.

"The Municipality of Gjilan is trying to pay a lot of attention to women's rights and interests, as we know that the role of women in society is indisputable," said Omer Daku, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Gjilan. "We, as the Municipality, are trying to create more space for women to act and undertake more activities."

Gruaja Hyjnore has used their new space to empower women economically. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund, they have held 10 workshops on gender equality, women's rights

to property inheritance, and advanced techniques in the art of handmade crafts for 40 women ages 25 to 40.

“The NGO’s activities have helped me, as a woman with no higher education, get out of my daily routine; meet other women; exchange experiences; attend trainings about new techniques for handmade products; receive certificates; showcase my work in different exhibitions; and, above all, feel more valuable,” said Alije Ajeti, a participant. “Another very important thing is that I’ve been able to sell my handmade crafts. In this way, I have supported my family economically. Now, even my husband’s support has grown stronger.”

Gruaja Hyjnore also has collaborated with the shelter in Gjilan by inviting women to attend their workshops. This provided the opportunity for women who have experienced violence to learn how to make handcrafts, which they can then sell. In addition, they found the lectures on property inheritance and gender equality very useful. They have requested that *Gruaja Hyjnore* continue organizing similar activities in the future.

In addition to gaining knowledge about their rights, through this initiative 36 women have sold their products at fairs. The four women from the women’s shelter earned approximately €400 in total from the sale of their products. This initiative thus has contributed to empowering women, both economically and towards their enhanced participation in decision-making.



Gruaja Hyjnore celebrates the opening of their new space, provided free of charge by the Municipality of Gjilan.

“Piazza” Raises Awareness about Women’s Rights, Generates Income

The new “Women’s Piazza” on Mother Teresa Boulevard in Prishtina innovatively sells women’s products and simultaneously organizes street events to raise awareness about women’s rights.

Starting in summer 2013, the Women’s Piazza, managed by NGO Rikotta, began selling women’s baked goods every day on this busy pedestrian square, located next to the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports. This summer, six women took home profits from sales. One hardworking woman earned up to €780 per month during the three summer months thanks to this initiative.

In addition to helping their women members earn some extra income, Rikotta used this public space to organize three street campaigns on topics including: women who suffered domestic violence and trafficking; children with Down syndrome; and children with Autism.

Rikotta opened the Piazza because they were concerned by the lack of citizen initiatives for furthering women’s rights and participation in public life.

“Citizens’ initiatives are very good tools for promoting solidarity among women’s organizations, as well as gender equality,” said Pranvera Bullaku, Rikotta’s Executive Director.

The Women’s Piazza is a collaborative initiative undertaken with the Municipality of Prishtina, which provided the venue free of charge. Agim Gashi, the Head of the Public Services Department at the Municipality of Prishtina, officially opened the “Women’s Piazza” on 12 August.

“We intend to support all positive initiatives of Prishtina citizens, particularly those focusing on supporting women’s rights and women’s hard work,” said Agim Gashi.

This initiative also received support from the KWN Kosovo Women's Fund, from which Rikotta received a grant for €2,990 in July 2013.

Building on their positive collaboration with the Mayor, the Women's Piazza will be able to apply again in June 2014 for a free space on Mother Teresa Square for the summer months.

The publicity and media coverage received by the Women's Piazza has attracted the attention of other women who are interested in joining this initiative. In 2014 four additional women will become part of the Women's Piazza's team.

Even though the Women's Piazza will not be situated on the square during the winter months, women are committed to continuing their work. To learn more about their initiative and/or to purchase products made by women, you can call +377 (0)44 429 432.



Pranvera Bullaku from NGO Rikotta sells women's products at the "Women's Piazza" on Mother Teresa Boulevard in Prishtina.

Venera Offers Free Legal Aid

Few Kosovars can afford to hire a lawyer when they need legal advice or assistance. Thus, NGO Venera in Peja has regularly received requests from citizens for assistance with various legal matters. At the same time, young women lawyers had approached Venera with their concerns: as young women, they struggled to secure jobs in Peja or work experience that would enable them to apply for jobs. Seeing the challenges faced by young women and local citizens, NGO Venera representatives had an innovative idea.

Venera decided to pilot a small initiative through which young women lawyers would provide free legal aid for people who could not afford it otherwise. In this way, young women could hone their skills as lawyers, furthering their work experience. At the same time, they would meet important needs within their community.

With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,666), Venera hired two young women lawyers who began offering free legal services to citizens in August 2013.

"I used to work as a lawyer at the Municipal Assembly," said Shqipe Sheremeti, a lawyer at Venera. "But this job is very fulfilling for me. Here, I am closer to people, and I can help them."

Under the careful direction of seasoned lawyer Miradije Gashi Sheremeti, Executive Director, by November the organization already had helped 17 people who would not have had access to such services otherwise. This included assisting with official authorizations, legal advice, and paying and/or contesting fines, among other services. In total, they provided the equivalent of more than €2,570 in legal services, free of charge to their clients.

“I had written so many requests to the Municipal Assembly about my problem,” one of Venera’s clients said. “But here with Miradije, Shqipe, and Syzana it’s different. They are very kind and easy to talk to. I was very happy when they offered to help me for free.”

Although Venera’s support from the Kosovo Women’s Fund ended on 30 November, they can see from their work to date that the needs are great. They are continuing to work on a voluntary basis, including assisting their clients in completing the processes that they began in prior months. They plan to apply to the Kosovo Women’s Fund, as well as other donors in the future towards reaching additional beneficiaries in years to come.



Miradije Gashi Sheremeti from Venera prepares documentation as part of the organization's efforts to provide free legal aid to people in need in Peja.

Women Farmers Hone Business Skills

Krusha e Vogel is among the areas most affected by the 1999 war in Kosovo. Not only did almost every household lose several family members (especially men and boys), but they also lost their livelihoods when the town was burned to the ground.

Soon after the war, the Krusha e Vogel Women Farmers' Association was established to support women, particularly heads of households, in developing their skills as farmers so that they could carve out new livelihoods. The Association has since expanded, involving women from several nearby villages, including Has, Randobrave, Pirana, and Serbica.

The Association is not a typical farmers association in that it has coupled capacity development opportunities for its members with psychosocial support. As of 2013, its 180 women association members already had developed skills in handcrafts, agriculture, and farming. Now they wanted to identify ways for better managing their work, so that they could become more economically empowered. This included furthering their knowledge in how to open and run small businesses. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,390), the Association has been able to support its members in improving the quality of their products, towards enhancing their sales.

For example, some Association members were having problems with their milk expiring prior to sale. Seasoned businesswomen Dile Prekpalaj, Executive Director of the Association, helped women farmers improve milk hygiene. As a result, 22 women were able to permanently increase the life of their milk and thus their income by approximately €160 per month, in total.

Twelve women specializing in handcrafts received practical advice for better managing and marketing their products,

including skills towards business management. Eight of them went on to sell their products, making approximately €120.

Meanwhile, women members working in agriculture learned seeding techniques, as well as strategies for running a successful business. A delegation of 19 women farmers travelled to Koretin village in Kamenica Municipality, where they learned from Skender Dervishi and Ibrahim Bunjaki, owners of the “Centre of Seedlings”.

“This visit supported the exchange of experiences and learning in the area of agriculture,” said a participant. “Experts explained how they run their business, which seedlings they cultivate, and details about the seeding process.” Women had the opportunity to learn concrete ways for better organizing the planting of seedlings, as well as to see new types of seedlings that they had never seen before.

“The trainings have been very important for us,” a member said. “And this visit was something very good and new. We had a fantastic time. We escaped from our daily routine and learnt a lot of new things.”

The experience was not only educational, but empowering. For some women, it was the first time that they had travelled outside their village.

Although the project ended in July, eight women plan to open their own businesses in the future, where they will continue using the knowledge that they gained through this initiative.



Members of Krusha e Vogel Women Farmers' Association learn seeding and business techniques.

Ag Trainings Empower Women

Due to social constraints, many women in the villages of Lipjan Municipality have limited freedom of movement. Sylbije Sahiti, Executive Director of *Parajsa Jone* (Our Paradise) found a way to break through these constraints: organize trainings in horticulture, vegetable and fruit cultivation, pasteurizing food, and marketing products. These topics rallied so much interest that more than 120 women ages eight to 55 attended the trainings. Women even offered to share their homes as training venues.

“I am very happy to share this space with women,” said Hanife, a participant who hosted a training in her garden. “It’s hard for women to leave their homes. This is a perfect excuse for them to get out of their daily routine.”

During trainings held this summer, Sylbije showed women how to plant seeds, using her leadership skills to motivate women. They could undertake initiatives to earn their own money and even start their own businesses, she said. “Do not be ashamed or afraid of sharing your ideas with others and making your dreams become a reality,” she told the women, who had gathered on plastic lawn chairs for a training in Krojmir village. “When I first started this initiative, I didn’t have support from my family. My husband didn’t think I could do it. However, today he has seen the success and he is very supportive. Now I can

provide income for my family,” she said. “I believe that each of you has unique ideas, can become successful, and can earn money for yourself and your family.”

For this six-month initiative, *Parajsa Jone* received support from the Kosovo Women’s Fund (€2,656).



*Women learn techniques
for planting seeds.*

Blind Women Bring Braille to School

Although blind children have the right to attend public schools, sometimes schools lack sufficient conditions for accepting them or they are not accepted socially due to false impressions regarding their capacities to learn.

The Committee of Blind Women has involved youth in raising awareness among school directors, teachers, and pupils about the challenges that blind students face, their needs, and the importance of using the Braille alphabet in schools.

"I need you to get good grades at school and set an example of excellence for other students in order to convince people to help us achieve our aim," the Committee's Director, Bajramshahe Jetullahu, told blind youth who had gathered in September to learn about and join the initiative.

The Committee of Blind Women sought to encourage and empower youth to advocate for their right to education, supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,878).

"Our greatest need is to have the understanding of citizens," said a young woman participant. "They need to understand that you can never know what life will bring you. Maybe one day they will become [blind] like us, and they will need somebody to help them."

In close cooperation with two school directors, the Committee has introduced Braille



Blind youth test the Committee's Braille Tables for schools.



Bajramshahe explains Braille to students in Prishtina.

tables in two primary schools in Prishtina. The nearly life size tables are used to explain the Braille alphabet to pupils within public schools. Thus, introducing the tables also has involved organizing lectures for approximately 140 pupils and teachers about Braille, as well as sharing information about the particular needs that blind pupils have.

Pupils actively took part in these discussions, curiously asking questions. Some students scribbled down information about the Braille tables in their notebooks with fascination.

“Can I be excused for two minutes,” a student said. “I just need to go get my notebook because I want to write down these explanations and share them with my family and friends.”

Beyond introducing Braille in school, the initiative educated students and their families about the challenges faced by blind people and the support that society can provide. The Committee of Blind Women believes that such awareness-raising initiatives can contribute to implementing the Law on Pre-university Education, which gives every child the right to attend public schools and receive basic education.

In the future, the Committee plans to advocate for the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to use this as an example for installing similar Braille tables in other primary schools throughout Kosovo.

Prehja Raises Awareness about Breast Cancer

Many women in Kosovo cannot afford to pay for healthcare or preventative screenings that may enable them to diagnose cancer early on, improving opportunities for treating it.

“Most women hide,” a woman said. “They think it’s a shame [to complain about illnesses] and that they must withstand pain instead. They feel bad telling their husbands that they are sick because they know that medical care will cost money, and their families do not have enough money.”

Therefore, with support from the Kosovo Women’s Fund (€2,160), Women’s Centre *Prehja* decided to teach rural women how to conduct self-exams towards early detection of breast cancer.

“Just last year we lost six women in our municipality to breast cancer,” said Jeton Rushit, Project Coordinator at *Prehja*. “They didn’t have good economic conditions to carry out regular medical examinations. Our project aimed to raise awareness among women to prevent breast cancer. We think that such initiatives have a vital role in making women aware of breast cancer, as well as enabling them to receive medical examinations free of charge.”

Prehja began by organizing lectures to raise awareness about breast cancer in four villages of Skenderaj in May 2013.

“It’s of vital importance that you have regular medical check-ups,” Dr. Maloku-Krasniqi told the 200-some women who took part in the lectures. “Only in this way can we take preventive steps and fight breast cancer,” she said.

Prehja plans to continue assisting women suffering from breast cancer by organizing self-support discussions, where women can speak with psychologists and receive advice on how to cope with cancer emotionally.

Association Institutionalizes Deaf Interpretation Services in Prizren

If gynaecological check-ups present problems for most Kosovar women, deaf women face additional challenges. They must overcome widespread negative stereotypes about women visiting gynaecologists, especially male doctors, as well as explain their health problems to gynaecologists using sign language. Even then, deaf women cannot understand gynaecologists' diagnoses or instructions for treatment without assistance from an interpreter.

The Association of the Deaf in Prizren sought to address this challenge by involving sign language interpreters in accompanying deaf women to gynaecologists. Their initiative, supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€1,312), assisted five women in leaving their homes independent of family members, some for the first time. Further, more than 25 young women learned techniques for overcoming the challenges they face in their everyday lives.

The gynaecological visits revealed that one deaf woman had health issues. Through this visit, she was able to identify the issue early on. Regular visits to the gynaecologist, with the Association's assistance, enabled her to treat this issue and heal quickly.

Further, through this initiative, the Association advocated successfully for the Municipal Officer for Gender Equality and the Health Directorate to institutionalize sign language services. Soon after, the Municipality hired an interpreter who now provides interpretation services at the Municipal Assembly and within the Health Directorate twice per week.

However, reaching these achievements was not easy. During this initiative, women faced a series of challenges, including discrimination by male colleagues within their own

Association. Therefore, an additional outcome of this initiative was that deaf women decided to found the Association of Deaf Women in Prizren in July 2013. The new Association aims to empower deaf women and attend to the unique challenges that they face *because* they are women.

“I wanted them to have more space, since this space wasn’t provided in the other NGO so far,” said Krenare Ajdini, an interpreter who supported women in founding the new Association.

Krenare found her beginnings as a women’s rights activist while working as a sign language interpreter during Kosovo Women’s Network meetings. She attended her first such meeting in 2012 as an interpreter for the Association of Deaf People. “During this meeting I learnt a lot of new information about NGOs and their work,” she said. “When I saw the possibilities that the network offers women, I decided to start a new NGO for deaf women.”

Krenare admits that creating a new organization is no easy task: compiling a statute, forming a board, and other administrative issues. However, “KWN staff were always there to help me with documents, procedures, and any other issue,” she said.

“So far, I am really satisfied with the interest and cooperation shown by our NGO members,” Krenare said. “Together we’re working on finding ways to fund our ideas. In this way we will be able to empower deaf women in our municipality.”



Krenare interprets for deaf youth, encouraging them to discuss their needs.

Sexual Violence Survivors Seek Justice

Survivors of sexual violence perpetrated during the 1999 war in Kosovo have not received sufficient attention from Kosovo's political leaders. The issue of sexual violence has not been raised in negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. There has never been an official apology for the crimes committed against women, let alone a single court conviction or reparations.

By and large, society has ostracized and failed to support women who suffered this terrible crime. As a result, many women have attempted to continue their lives without ever learning how to psychologically deal with their pain. This often has in various health repercussions, including trauma, phobia, and untreated physical injuries. Identifying women who have suffered such crimes is crucial for providing them with much-needed assistance in developing coping mechanisms that will enable them to live their lives.

The Centre for Promotion of Women's Rights began efforts to reach out to women who had suffered sexual violence during the war in 2012. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund, they referred the 37 women that they found in 13 villages of Drenas region to organizations specializing in offering psychological and medical rehabilitation. Further, the Centre gathered women together to identify and deliver eight demands on behalf of women survivors to the President of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga.

Their effort was so successful that they received additional support from the Kosovo Women's Fund in 2013 (€2,707), which enabled them to build on last year's accomplishments by reaching out to women in 15 additional villages. In total, since 2012, they have reached 69 women.

“The silence has been broken,” said Kadire Tahiraj from the Centre. “We have worked with great willpower, and we appreciate the help and support that we have received from the Kosovo Women’s Network.”

Beyond providing women with psychological support and medical assistance, the Centre has encouraged and supported women in expressing their needs to public institutions. This has included the unique opportunity for women to meet with the President of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga, in order to verbalize their concerns and request institutional support. Following the receipt of their eight demands last year, President Jahjaga visited the women in 2013 and discussed how the government could better support them.

“The key to our lives has been opened,” a woman receiving support from the Centre said. “The hope to continue living life has been born. I feel stronger, and I won’t stop until justice has been served.”

Ikebana Produces Tea Independently

An interethnic group of women in Shtrpce always dreamed of forming an organization through which they could collect and market herbal teas. They aimed to prepare products with quality ingredients in an environmentally friendly manner. Some medicinal

plants with which they wanted to work are well-known in the pharmaceutical industry. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,707) and Caritas Switzerland, they were able to realize their dream, opening their organization, "Ikebana".

Establishing a new organization is no easy task. Ikebana members needed support in order to put in place systems, policies, and procedures for their organization to function independently. Kosovo Women's Network staff members mentored them in developing these. Then Ikebana purchased machines for drying and producing teas. They began work, learning from each other. Women also took part in trainings that equipped them with theoretical and practical information. They used their knowledge to begin collecting and producing teas in June. Although they began as a small group, with time their group has grown.

"We were constantly looking to find a way to start working, to show that we can work," said Ankica Zivkovic, the Executive Director of Ikebana. "Now with funds from KWN, we are showing our potential. We are very thankful to the Kosovo Women's Fund for this opportunity."



Ikebana members dry wild teas in Shtrpce.

***Foleja* Offers Health Education**

In Prizren, many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian girls drop out of school before completing compulsory education, often due to early marriage. NGO *Foleja* decided to organize discussions in order to inform mothers, families, and young women about the importance of education, as well as to provide healthcare information, which they may not have had access to previously.

Foleja invited a doctor to visit Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women in their neighbourhoods. During a series of intimate discussions, she provided information about sexually transmitted diseases and how to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Mothers also received brochures with tips for caring for their infants.

"This project is very important for educating young women about how to create a family and basic things that they need to know in order to raise their infants," said Gjyzel Shaljani, *Foleja*'s Director. During the interactive lectures, participants could ask her and the doctor questions and receive guidance in addressing the challenges they face.

"I am very happy with the work that Gjyzel and the doctor are doing," said Lindita Qylangji, a participant. "We are learning a lot."

More than 400 women have received information through *Foleja*'s Kosovo Women's Fund-supported initiative (€2,740).



Women discuss the challenges that they face during a training in Prizren.

75 Women Receive Free Check-ups

Many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women are unaware of the potential consequences of not visiting the doctor for regular check-ups. Some women know the importance but cannot afford to visit the doctor, while others do not trust medical workers.

Knowing these issues from their prior work with Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women in Mitrovica, NGO *Lulebora* decided to organize lectures with gynaecologist Vjollca Thaqi, supported through the Kosovo Women's Fund (€1,370). Three times per week she provided information relating to personal hygiene, contraception, and breast and uterine cancer. They also discussed the importance of visiting gynaecologists. During the lecture, women actively engaged, asking questions.

"Most women did not even know what breast cancer was," said Albulena Sinanaj, *Lulebora's* Project Coordinator. "They only knew that it is a disease. With the help of the gynaecologist, they learned how to identify potential symptoms of breast cancer."

Following lectures, *Lulebora* arranged for more than 75 women to visit a gynaecologist, many for the first time. The Municipal Officer for Gender Equality supported this initiative, requesting from the Directorate of Health that the public hospital provide free check-ups. The initiative also enabled the Officer for

Gender Equality to fulfil its aim: ensuring improved access to healthcare for women in need.

"This project is very special for us," said Drita Salihu, a participant. "There are so many women that cannot afford to go to the doctor. I am very thankful that *Lulebora* involved us and helps take care of us."



Women await their turn, visiting the gynaecologist free of charge.

Women Tap into Tourist Industry

Many women in Novoberd spend most of their time at home, caring for children and doing housework. In the snowy winter months, they hunker in, spending their days and nights sewing and weaving. The Foundation for Education and Development inspired women to become active outside their homes whilst contributing to their families' income.

The Foundation began by organizing training in products, marketing, and markets, supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,600). They concentrated on reaching women heads of households and those dependent on state social assistance. In September, they assisted women in opening a kiosk and outdoor pavilion at a prime location, near the Novoberd Tourist Centre. From there, women could sell their homemade products to tourists visiting the Novoberd castle.

"This project is very important for us," a woman said. "It is not only about the profit, but it made us active as well. I make homemade jams, teas, and handcrafts. Now I can sell them. People even started to call me and ask about my products."

According to Vjollca Zeqiri, the Foundation's Director, the initiative not only contributed to improving 10 women's economic situation, it also supported women psychologically. "Now women can sell the products that they have made during the winter in the summer," she said. "Regardless of when they make each product with dedication and love, every product will be sold."



Women sell their handmade products to tourists in Novoberd.

Dragash Women Secure New Market

Several women from Dragash possess unique skills in manufacturing traditional handmade clothes. However, since they live high in the mountains, few women can access markets in order to sell their products. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,800) and the Municipal Assembly of Prishtina, NGO *Rona* helped women from Dragash access a new market in Prishtina.

Women's colourful handmade products decorated Mother Teresa Boulevard for eight days in October. Nineteen women's organizations from throughout Kosovo, including Dragash, averaged more than €500 in sales per organization (totalling approximately €9,500).

"This project was very helpful, especially for women from Opoja in Dragash," said Serbeze Sylejmani, Director of *Rona*. "They didn't have the chance to sell their products before." The initiative had the added benefit of enabling women from other organizations throughout Kosovo to sell their products, as well, she said.



On Mother Teresa Boulevard, clients peruse women's hand made products.

"Fairs are always good," said Xhejrane Lokaj, a women's rights activist also working in Dragash. "I am very thankful also to the Kosovo Women's Network for supporting *Rona* in organizing this fair. In addition to securing some financial profit for women, we are preserving the culture of handmade work."

Bliri Opens Discussions about Sex

Premarital sex is a taboo topic in many rural areas throughout Kosovo. Few parents discuss sex with their children, especially their daughters. Nor does the public school system provide sufficient sexual education.

Therefore, between August and November, NGO *Bliri* took the initiative to invite doctors who could explain to girls how to protect themselves from early pregnancy, among other reproductive health issues. Altogether 740 mothers and daughters participated actively in these discussions. Few had had the opportunity to discuss these topics together previously.

“We raised the awareness of women who never went to school and who never attended these trainings before,” said Mahije Ismajli, *Bliri*’s Director. She thus considered the initiative a success.

During these meetings, women also learned how to conduct their own self-exams towards identifying breast cancer early on.

“Life is a gamble,” one participant said. “One can never know whether or not one might get breast cancer. Therefore, it’s very good that I now know how to examine my own breasts to see whether I might have breast cancer.”

Bliri plans to research women’s and girls’ health situation and needs in their region. They will use the research to inform recommendations for institutions and other actors.

Bliri’s initiative has received support from the Kosovo Women’s Fund (€2,500).



Bliri involves mothers and daughters in discussing their health.

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