

## SDC Gendernet: Partner Learning Day 2021

### Gender and COVID19: Case Study

<b>Project/ intervention title:</b>	<b>PPSE (Promoting Private Sector Employment) Kosovo: Social Media Training during Covid-19</b>		
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#### Overall goal

##### Main aim of your project/ intervention

- The PPSE project has as its main objective the creation of gainful and inclusive employment for young people, women, and minorities in SMEs in the food and natural ingredients as well as the tourism sector. It contributes to innovations, efficiency and competitiveness of these SMEs
- The “Digital Sales Channels for Small-Scale Processors” and the social media training of craft makers, artisans, guesthouse owners, or smaller farms aims at making these businesses more competitive, advance their efforts through increased online access and visibility especially in times of Covid-19, so that they can participate and benefit from being part of a digital economy.

#### Location

##### Country/ national and/ or sub-national

- Kosovo (no specific region)

#### Core problem

##### - Main issue(s) addressed

- Most of the small-scale processors (SSPs), particularly those in rural areas, face poor market penetration because of their limited processing capacities and scarce planning of their sales. Usually, the sales of SSPs are ad-hoc, based on orders. At the same time, these processors are in some cases also using social media for sales but lack skills and knowledge on promoting their products in a genuine manner. In 2021 SSPs have faced a difficult period due to Covid-19 measures and have been heavily affected by the lockdowns.
- Businesses in the hospitality sector are often individual businesses and do not have in depth knowledge on the importance of social media networks as a marketing tool.

#### Intervention

##### - Main strategies undertaken

PPSE started the intervention with a focus on women-owned businesses (February to August 2021). The project engaged several social media experts (5) to train small businesses from the food processing and tourism sectors. The training concerned the use of Facebook, Instagram or other platforms to develop the online brand, creating and managing business profiles on these platforms, create posts and contents, strategies to reach the right audience and to extend it, create strategies for paid post campaigns and manage such campaigns, open new sales channels by familiarizing with website and online selling platforms, tips about content, email marketing and influencer marketing. Next, each business received support tailored to each business type and needs. The main activities were as follows:

- Together with PPSE identify small-scale processors operating in the food sector and small-scale businesses in the hospitality sector.
- Assess their current sales channels and marketing strategy, and provide with a feedback on aspects which companies must improve and develop.
- Train small scale processors on e-commerce (online sales) and small-scale businesses in the hospitality sector on online marketing, develop content strategy, develop creative content.
- Coach the businesses to sell their products/services online, creating and monitoring campaigns

##### - Systemic issues: main structural barriers tackled/ to overcome?

- Women who own small businesses have lower visibility in the market.
- They have fewer access to resources to grow their businesses and expand customer base
- In particular rural women have lower mobility, which affects their ability to work outside of their homes
- There are fewer services available to women-owned businesses in rural areas and in general
- Rural women have less access to market information due to their workload dominated by unproductive work (care for the elderly and children, unpaid farm work).

The social media training intervention benefitted mostly women-led businesses, as they are in their majority small-scale businesses.

## COVID19 Effect

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting online marketing, getting small-scale businesses to “jump on the train”</li> <li>Selling through social media platforms is more affordable for smaller SMEs who cannot bear the high costs of sophisticated e-commerce platforms or retail chains. It creates new sales channels for whom selling in retail chains is costly and almost impossible, due to the necessary preconditions to enter such retail chains.</li> <li>Selling through social media gives businesses the opportunity to develop their brand and directly communicate with clients and receive recommendations regarding the quality of their products.</li> <li>It gives these small businesses the opportunity to produce tailored products for niche market and secure a portfolio of regular clients; as well as new ones that approach these businesses from referrals from existing clients.</li> <li>The small, family-run, rural, women-owned businesses have the advantage that they cultivate the raw materials that are used in the final products themselves. This helps them to position themselves on the market as “authentic and fresh” products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reach clients that are interested in the type of products that small, women-owned, rural businesses offer, basic social media skills and soft skills are indispensable.</li> <li>Limited social media skills and knowledge</li> <li>Considering that these women-owned businesses are mainly run only by them, they have limited time to engage in promoting their business through social media.</li> <li>Social media platforms are very dynamic and it requires the businesses to constantly be up to date with these dynamics, which requires a budget for the expertise in this regard.</li> </ul>

## What are key conclusions

Key good practices	Key lessons learnt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct communication of experts with SMEs (the activity was face-to-face training)</li> <li>As a result of this direct communication, even after the completion of training, the experts established a professional relationship with these businesses outside PPSE support, and offered additional support to these businesses when more clarifications were needed.</li> <li>This activity has initiated a behavioral change among both businesses and consultants. Businesses are beginning to realize the value added of hiring professional services, whereas consultants were exposed to a previously unexplored target group.</li> </ul>	<p>It is difficult for small businesses to fit in big e-commerce platforms, due to high costs of promotion and product placement in these platforms. For that reason, it is necessary for projects to design tailored supporting activities that respond to the needs of smaller SMEs of the private sector.</p>

## Key recommendations

In Kosovo, the social media experts are available in the market, however, smaller SMEs who mostly need these services, are not used to buy these kinds of services. With the PPSE support, by introducing these services, SMEs have had the opportunity to see firsthand the benefit of such services, thus it will create a new opportunity for social media experts, as more demand for such services will be created. Most importantly, this will help SMEs grow their portfolio of their clients, increase sales and better market their brand and products. It is thus beneficial both ways, for experts and SMEs.

When working with women-owned businesses, it is important to include training on soft skills to improve their business communication besides the support for equipment and/or access to new sales channels, since this is critical for them to make smart decisions for business growth.

