

## DECLARATION OF RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

### *An Awakening Call for the Elimination of Gender Inequalities in the Agri-Food Sector*

We, 90 participants, women and girls from the rural communities of the municipalities of Elbasan, Kolonja, Korça and Puka, involved in various value chains in the agro-food sector, met at the fourth edition of 'Pro Rural Women' in the rural community of small village of Shirgjan, on October 15, 2022, together with representatives of civil society organizations and international organizations that support the social-economic empowerment of women, with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, municipalities, academia and the media. We are grateful to the GREAT Project<sup>1</sup> for supporting the 2022 Edition of 'Pro Rural Women Rural', turning it into a sustainable platform for the advocacy of women and girls in Albania's rural areas.

**Whereas we are aware that women are important actors in the agri-food sector** and the main contributors to the agricultural and rural sector as well as to the overall social economic development of the country; that there can be no progress in any sector, including the agricultural and rural sector, if we do not empower women to fight poverty and social exclusion; that gender equality is a prerequisite and at the same time an objective of the efforts and initiatives for sustainable social and economic development; and, that the rural communities must provide equal opportunities for all, both women and men, girls and boys;

**Whereas we evoke that this gathering is held at a time of significant economic, social, political, and health crises** and deem it is necessary to help actors engaged in socio-economic empowerment to benefit from a real and solid understanding of our concerns, priorities and aspirations; that the November 2019 earthquake, the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, the climate change and its negative effects on agriculture and rural development, the price crisis, weak social solidarity, etc., have pointed out our challenges and deepened inequalities; and that this edition marked an important moment to meet with women and girls from rural areas, to discuss concerns, priorities as well as concrete actions that should be encouraged and undertaken by institutions for the well-being of women and girls in rural areas;

**Whereas we are concerned that the agricultural and rural sector is not helping Albanian women and girls to improve their social economic status** due to the difficulties and challenges they experience and that these difficulties undermine productivity and entrepreneurial potential and that generate unequal benefits for men and women in value chains in the agri-food sector; that women are as productive and entrepreneurial as men but have less access to and control over productive assets and resources, such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets, and high-value food chains, and therefore receive lower returns for our products; that the agricultural and rural sector should offer equal opportunities and benefits to both men and women;

**Whereas we emphasize that gender inequalities in agri-food value chains undermine sustainable social and economic development**, we support and prioritize efforts that include and integrate gender equality in agriculture and rural development with the aim of narrowing the gender gap; that the development of gender-sensitive agro-food chains is a priority in this direction to offer women and men equal opportunities and benefits during their engagement in different links of the agro-food value chain; **Whereas we recognize and admit that the current position of women in the agricultural and rural development, especially in the marketing of local products, has been achieved thanks to the**

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***courage of women to challenge patriarchal mindsets***, we also point with great concern to the existence and negative effect of gender stereotypes and patriarchal mindsets in the well-being of women and girls in rural areas in general, and in the agro-food sector in particular; that irrespective of the main role of women in the sector, unfortunately they remain the invisible pillars of development, facing discrimination, as a result of inequality in decision-making, patriarchal mentality and harmful gender stereotypes and unequal distribution of contribution and unpaid work; that the women of Elbasan, Kolonja, Korça and Puka call for the creation of society-wide solidarity to empower women and girls in rural areas as well as for equality and social justice, especially in the agro-food sector;

***Whereas unequal access to property rights, such as control over land, is the most visible manifestation of patriarchal mindsets and gender-based discrimination***, and that unequal access to and control over agricultural land - the key productive asset for women's engagement in the agri-food sector- restricts our involvement in agri-food value chains and thus to the benefits achieved; and that failure to fully involve women affects the productivity of the entire value chain and leads to negative impact on the social and economic development of society;

***Whereas in reality women do not enjoy ownership right despite the law on ownership of agricultural land stipulates*** that all agricultural household members are entitled to it; that ownership titles on agricultural land are issued only in the name of the male representative of the household; and that this gender inequality has been reinforced by social norms regarding the role traditionally attributed to women in the Albanian society, further affecting the unequal access to agricultural land ownership;

***Whereas making women aware of consequences of their decision-making to give up the ownership and inheritance rights is urgent***; and that decision-making deprives them of property rights, limits opportunities for economic independence and minimizes spaces for other rights in the family, entrepreneurship and society;

***Now therefore,***

***We call upon the law enforcement institutions to effectively implement the law on the ownership of agricultural land***, especially in relation to the property rights of women as members of the agricultural households. In this regard, the State Cadaster Agency should generate gender-based data regarding ownership titles on agricultural land in the possession of women as members of the agricultural households, as well as women who have renounced this right. These data are important to understand the enforcement of the law and the magnitude of the phenomenon of agricultural land disinheritance by women and girls in rural areas.

In conclusion, the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls in rural areas should be promoted by **evidence-based policy and support instruments**. The development of **gender-sensitive value chains in the agro-food sector** is a must and a priority to be supported by public policies. Promotion of **joint land title between husband and wife** should be instituted by all law enforcement agencies of land ownership and other supporting actors.

**Elimination of gender inequalities is paramount for the social and economic empowerment of women and girls in the agricultural and rural development to make their contribution visible, to be active participants in the economy and community life and beneficiaries of equal opportunities in the family, business, and community.**