

How to resolve the incompatibility problem between CAP / RDP and Gender Equality?

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1. Introduction

Commonly, agricultural policy and rural development policy are seen as ‘gender neutral’ policies but all over Europe the institutionalised patterns of policies for rural areas tend to favour male perspectives. It is generally assumed that both women and men can benefit from the effects of politics, programmes and measures. But due to the largely different living conditions of women and men – differences in the participation in the working sphere, household and care work, mobility, income, qualification – political measures and instruments have different effects on women and men. Compared to men, women have limited opportunities to take an active part in the shaping of common agricultural policy (CAP) and rural development policy (RDP) (Oedl-Wieser 2008a). Since the 1990ies the European Union (EU) has made considerable efforts to establish a supra-national gender (equality) regime which affects also the so called ‘gender neutral’ policy fields (Abels 2008, 306; Locher and Prügl 2008, 5). The promotion and the implementation of gender equality issues through the strategy of gender mainstreaming (GM) in the EU Structural Funds programmes and in the rural development programmes have become a great challenge and an important commitment for the Austrian RDP (Oedl-Wieser 2004). Actors in RDP and stakeholders in rural areas are explicitly requested to contribute through their work to equality between women and men.

In these days 94 rural development programmes of the new period (2007 – 2013) all over EU have started to work and it is time to ask several relevant questions: (i) why is there an incompatibility problem between CAP, RDP and the gender equality policy in the EU, (ii) which progress has been achieved by the gender mainstreaming strategy to ‘engender’ the CAP and the RDP and (iii) which further steps are necessary to resolve this incompatibility problem. The supposed incompatibility problem between CAP / RDP and gender equality will be exemplified on the case of Austria. Since Austria’s accession to the EU in 1995 RDP has received increasing political and economic attention. During this dynamic process, many

new actors have emerged at various spatial levels and the professionalization of RDP as a result of the framework of EU programme planning is evident. But until now the actors in RDP find it hard to see the importance of gender issues for their own field of work although they are committed to implement gender equality.

At the beginning of the paper a brief overview about the generation of CAP and RDP in the EU will be given and its main turning points and reorientations will be highlighted. In the following, the gender equality policy in the EU will be portrayed, with special attention on its possible implications for the so called 'gender neutral' policies CAP and RDP. In the main part of the paper the implementation of gender equality in CAP and RDP in Austria will be analysed. Therefore especially the role of the responsible Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW) will be examined. Which efforts have been made so far to implement gender mainstreaming in its administrative structure? And, how far is gender equality a constituent part of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes in Austria? In this context the implications of the patriarchal rural gender regime in Austria will be revealed and discussed. The state is per se not 'gender neutral' and acts in a patriarchal manner in enabling or hindering the integration of gender equality issues in CAP and RDP. Decisions about rural development are taken, in a federal state like Austria, to a large extent also on provincial, regional and local level and therefore an assessment will be made how actors on the different spatial levels are dealing with their tasks to implement gender equality in programmes, measures and projects of rural development. And, finally, future strategies for enhancing and resolving the incompatibility problem between CAP and RDP and gender equality will be outlined and discussed.

2. Evolution of Rural Development Policy in EU

Common agricultural policy (CAP) has been the European Union's most important common policy for more than 40 years and traditionally it has consumed a large part of the EU's budget (European Communities 2007). The CAP, as it has developed since the early 1960s, has been a highly protectionist and strongly interventionist policy. The consequences of this policy were huge surpluses of agricultural products which precipitated a budget funding crisis in the European Community in the mid 1980ies. Since then the restructuring of CAP in EU started with reduction of market interventions, product prices linked closer to world prices

and direct payments as compensation for farmers (Prügl 2008; Feindt 2008, 209). The crisis of legitimacy of CAP has led to a stronger emphasis of RDP in EU and a discourse began on the new role of agriculture that included questions of multi-functionality, environmental performance and social aspects of agricultural activities (Copus and Dax 2008, 24). The report of the European Commission 'Future of Rural Society' from 1988 signaled an attempt by the EU to take a broader approach to rural regeneration beyond only focusing on agriculture (European Commission 1988; Shortall 2003).

The Agenda 2000 reform provided a new framework for RDP, which was established as the 2nd pillar of the CAP in addition to the agricultural market policy (1st pillar). The member states could choose from a set of 22 measures, which of the objects such as agricultural restructuring, local development and environmental integration, would be best suited to meet the needs of their rural areas. The main innovation in the policy was, that measures had to be included in a Rural Development Plan which followed programming methods, previously known from the Structural Funds programmes (European Communities 2008, 5; Copus and Dax 2008, 24).

In the programme planning period 2000 – 2006 the expenditures were particularly focused towards agri-environment schemes, payments for less-favoured areas and to a much smaller extent to measures for development of rural areas, the so called article 33-measures, although in the previous programming planning period (1995 – 1999) the article 33-measures had been financed within objective 5b areas to a more significant extent (Copus and Dax 2008, 33).

But despite the great choice in RDP programming, new strategies for rural regions and reorientation in activities for rural areas remained very limited. Application of RDP is driven by historic experiences and priorities and reflects national co-financing decisions.

Nevertheless there is a quite significant variety on the predominant measures selected for rural development between the Member States. About half of the funds are devoted to agri-environmental measures and LFA support. In several countries (Austria, Finland, Sweden) these two measures even make up for more than 75% of RDP budgets. The expectation that the programme would open up to some degree to non-farming actors as well could hardly be realized and even the marginal target level of 10% of RDP budgets for rural economy measures (group 3) was not achieved in most countries. Only in a few cases, like in Germany,

a much more balanced programme spending has been achieved.

In general, it can be said that the share of EAGGF-Guidance funding within all the CAP budget has increased gradually over the period, starting at a portion of about 10% (2000) and achieving more than 15% (2006) at the end of the period. However, this relationship also marks clearly the restricted shift in the priorities of CAP between the two pillars (Dax und Hovorka 2007, 5).

2.1 Gender equality in the RDP period 2000 – 2006 in Austria

Since the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 equality of women and men is one of the main objectives which has to be implemented in all activities of the European Union. In the guidelines of the Structural Funds for the programme period 2000 – 2006¹ it is regulated that the promotion of gender equality has not only to be implemented in the social but also in the regional objectives. In this context it is important to mention that people in rural areas were supported directly only to a small extent in the Rural Development Programme eg. through setting-up of farmers, vocational training and a number of diversification measures (article 33-measures) (Oedl-Wieser 2004). In the Austrian Rural Development Programme (2000 – 2006) the most important measures were the agri-environmental programme (ÖPUL) (61%) and the compensatory allowance for mountainous and less-favoured areas (26%). The budget for human resource related measures, which were of big importance for rural women, was very low in Austria compared to other EU member states: young farmers (1.2%), diversification measures through article 33 measures (3.3%) and vocational training (0.6%). In respect to gender equality in the previous Austrian rural development programme only a general clause was included that all measures of the RDP are eligible for both men and women. This formal declaration supporting equality between men and women in the RDP was not followed through the creation of some women-specific or gender-sensitive measures (Oedl-Wieser 2007).

As described above CAP and RDP are policy fields which were originally not much concerned with gender equality issues. At a first glance it seems rather problematic to implement the strategy of gender mainstreaming in policies which provide market support, pay direct payments on heads of cattle or pay compensatory allowances for mountainous or less-

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21. June 1999. Laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds, ABl. L 161 26.6.1999

favoured areas. But women and men are living and working in rural areas, on farms and they are both affected by these policies – often in different ways and intensities (Shortall 2003). Stakeholders of RDP are explicitly requested to contribute within their work to gender equality between women and men. Experiences show that the ‘gender competence’ of rural stakeholders is not very well developed and that gender equality issues are not seen as a priority in the implementation of the RDP (Aufhauser et al. 2003; Oedl-Wieser 2004; 2006). To reach a substantial and long-lasting effect of GM in RDP ‘personal commitment’ and ‘gender know how’ are important elements to raise gender awareness and sensibility. By taking account of the different needs and situations of women and men in rural areas, policymakers could ensure better policy targeting and greater gender equality.

2.2 The current framework of RDP

Following the reform of the first pillar of the CAP in 2003 to realize an allocation system that is independent from production the Agricultural Council adopted in September 2005 a fundamental reform of RDP for the period 2007 – 2013. The Council Regulation (EC) No. 1658/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (European Commission, 2005) lays down the general rules governing rural development policy for the period 2007 to 2013, as well as the policy measures available to Member States and regions. The Rural Development Programmes, which were designed by the Member States and by regions for the period 2007-2013 are now under implementation (European Union 2008, 35). The core objectives are:

- Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry
 - Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management and
 - Improving the quality of life and encouraging diversification of economic activities
- (European Commission 2005)

It accentuated the complementarity of the two pillars of the CAP, introducing decoupling, cross-compliance and modulation (i.e. the transfer of funds from the 1st to the 2nd pillar), to be implemented as obligatory elements of CAP from 2005 onwards. A thematic axis corresponds to each core objective in the rural development programmes. The three thematic axes are complemented by a “methodological” axis dedicated to the LEADER approach (Leader axis). A minimum funding for each axis is required to ensure some overall

balance in the programme (10% for Axis 1; 25% for Axis 2; 10% for Axis 3 and 5% for the Leader Axis, respectively 2.5% in the new Member States). As building blocks for each thematic axis a range of pre-defined rural development measures is available from which the Member States can choose (European Communities 2008, 8ff).

Committed to the GM strategy which has been declared in the Treaty of Amsterdam for all policies of the EU the RDP in the new period 2007 – 2013 has to implement gender equality in all stages of the rural development programmes (European Commission, 2005):

Article 8: Equality between men and women and non-discrimination:

“Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women and shall ensure that any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is prevented during the various stages of programme implementation. This includes the stages of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.”

Furthermore the pro-active promotion of women in rural areas and their access to the labour market under the point ‘Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification on the rural economy’ is declared in the Community strategic guidelines for rural development (European Council, 2006). But in relation to the general EU gender equality regime the equality legislation in the member states is of core relevance. There is considerable space to implement these requirements within their own institutional and legislative framework at national and regional levels.

3. Gender equality policy in the EU

In the early 1990ies the Structural Funds were committed to take gender equality between women and men into account when designing, implementing and evaluating the Structural Funds programmes. During the 4th UN Women’s Conference held in Beijing in 1995, the EU was very active in embedding gender mainstreaming in the UN Platform for Action. Since then, gender mainstreaming has steadily grown in importance and in 1996 GM was launched to promote gender equality in all EU policies. The new policy had the aim to transform mainstream policies by introducing a gender equality perspective (Stratigaki 2005, 165; Verloo 2004, 1f). Early assessments of GM in the EU were generally positive but nonetheless more than a decade after EU’s initial commitment to gender mainstreaming, its rhetoric has

not led to consistent and effective implementation (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2008, 2). While originally focused narrowly on non-discrimination in European labour markets, the scope of the EU gender regime has expanded over time which in theory at least brings gender awareness and action into all fields of policy (Locher and Prügl 2008; Hoskyns 2004, 5). GM goes further than the promotion of equality because it is promoting long-lasting changes in the roles and behaviours not only of women but also of men. It widens the scope for agenda setting and introduces gender concerns in all policy domains. In this meaning it is a very 'demanding strategy' (Van der Vleuten 2004, 12). Many analyses on GM revealed that it is a strategy that complements but does not replace previous gender specific equality policies like equal treatment legislation and positive action (Stratigaki 2005, 168). However in many cases throughout Europe resources of positive action and funding of women's projects were cut down, often legitimized by reference to gender mainstreaming.

Research on GM in EU Structural Funds revealed that there are barriers within the EC and concluded that the EC is stronger on policy formulation than on developing accompanying arguments, procedures and instruments for transforming policy into practice. It has been also evident, that the most strongly 'neo-liberal' DG's including those focused on competition policy or the DG's dealing with agricultural or environment policy have been reluctant in applying gender mainstreaming (Braithwaite 2000; Locher and Prügl 2008, 10). But also the member states are not very ambitious to implement the GM strategy in Structural funds and rural development programmes. This existing gender-bias in CAP and RDP has been made visible by assessments of the implementation of GM in the EU Structural Funds by the European Commission (2002), highlighted and by the following statement of the European Parliament (2007):

“The formal commitment to gender mainstreaming is present in all the Operational Programmes, but only in some cases a specific Mainstreaming Strategy can be envisaged. Gender Mainstreaming often emerges in equal opportunities general objectives, again finding in the labour market (and partially in community building) the most favourable ground to tackle the gender discrimination and disadvantages.”

As outlined above, gender quality issues are not very well embedded in the so called 'hard' or 'gender neutral' policies. In the following the awareness and sensibility for GM will be illustrated on the example of the RDP in Austria. This policy field will be explored on the one

side, by addressing the status of implementation of GM in the BMLFUW as responsible ministry for RDP and in administrative structures on regional and local level and on the other side, the integration of gender equality concerns in the strategy and structure of rural development programmes will be analysed.

4. Implementation of GM in RDP – the Austrian Case

The Austrian landscape is characterised by a high proportion of less-favoured areas (81%) whereby most of it is classified as mountainous area (70%). Farming in mountainous and less-favoured areas has a key role in safeguarding the sensitive eco-systems, the multifunctional landscapes and the general living and working spaces. These regions in Austria are mainly characterised by a high environmental quality, large forests and environmentally friendly agriculture. Since Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995, RDP has received increasing political and economical attention to support the structure of its rural regions. It is no longer exclusively about agriculture, but has to address specifically all different economic sectors and actors in the regions. Although rural development policy can be widely characterised as cross-cutting issues, gender issues are yet not very well embedded. However, the gender dimension becomes relevant if effectiveness and efficiency of public subsidies are called into question. Often it is assumed that women will "automatically" participate in the economic growth – at least indirectly.

The importance of rural women for the rural development process has been often emphasized by regional studies and included in official documents of the European Union. In the Memorandum of the Council from April 2002 the implementation of the principle of gender mainstreaming is considered as absolutely necessary and urgent (Rat der Agrarminister 2002, 2). It is a main overlapping objective which has to be considered in all political and administrative activities of the European Union. The reason for this clarification statement was that the actors in rural development policy still find it hard to understand the importance of gender issues for their own field of work and there is still great scepticism regarding the possibility and necessity of linking gender-equality policy with initiatives and implementation of the rural development processes. This missing gender awareness and competence in rural development processes by the stakeholders in politics, administration and sectoral stakeholders have considerable adverse implications to rural women (Oedl-Wieser 2004; 2006).

4.1 The rural gender regime in Austria

In general, the rural gender regime in Austria can be described as hierarchical and unbalanced. Research reveals (Oedl-Wieser 2006, 80ff), that in all relevant institutions of the agricultural sector and in RDP the main leading positions are held by men: the percentage of women in the committees of federal and provincial parliaments dealing with agricultural policy and rural development is very low – below 20%. Nearly 100% of the members of federal or provincial governments which are responsible for agriculture and rural development issues are men. In the Austrian Chambers of agriculture most of the leading positions are held by men.

The state plays a crucial role in the reproduction of patriarchal gender regimes. It is not gender-neutral and acts in his patriarchal manner in enabling or hindering women's involvement in the decision-making processes in the agricultural sector and in rural development. It promotes the current structures and ways of acting that restrict the women's personal, social and economic chances and ensures male dominance (Alston 2000, 52). This depicts elements of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2006) which can be described commonly as the subordination of women and different groups of men under a dominating masculinity. It is characterised by specific ways of acting, institutional arrangements and the relations and networks between men. But not only the state, also the politicians, the administration and the Chambers of agriculture, the agricultural statistics and the educational system are reproducing "hegemonic masculinity" in the agricultural sector and in rural areas in Austria.

The narrow personal interweaving of men in the agricultural politics, in the administration and institutions at national and provincial level in addition the 'exclusion' of women from the respective policy networks can be underlined by recruitment processes and the almost exclusively participation of men in decision making. These are significant indicators for "hegemonic masculinity" in this sector. In this male policy network it is very difficult for women to act as active citizen for example to participate in the formulation and the implementation of policies in rural areas. Only in legislation and administration a higher share of women ('femocrats') have already reached middle-ranking positions (Oedl-Wieser 2008a).

The low rate of participation of women in relevant agricultural bodies indicates that

decisions on agricultural policy and RDP are made primarily by men. The representation of women in the Austrian political arena differs considerably across level and region. At high political level more women are participating but especially at regional and local level there is a dramatic underrepresentation of women (Oedl-Wieser 2008a). Being a mayor in Austria is a 'typical male' position. In 2008 only 3.2% or 74 of 2.359 mayors are women. In many rural municipalities and especially in the agricultural sector the gender roles are firmly established and not flexible. These circumstances and the underrepresentation of women in the public sphere in rural areas have considerable implications for the shaping of RDP in Austria. Through the upgrading of rural and regional development policy in the EU Structural Funds and the establishment of intermediary structures (regional managements, local action groups, etc.) a new quality of networking and co-operation between the various actors on regional and local level have been achieved. The fact that in most executive boards of the local action groups of LEADER the mayors of the municipalities are participating, the underrepresentation of women in these new regional and local intermediary structures is reproduced. In the LEADER+ period (2000-2006) there were only 3.5 female chairs and 12.4% female board member (Oedl-Wieser 2006, 108).

4.2 The Ministry of Agriculture as key actor in GM

The BMLFUW is the main player in the above mentioned male-dominated network in the agricultural sector and in RDP. As responsible administrative unit for the planning process, the implementation and the evaluation of the Austrian rural development programme 'LE 07-13' it is committed to integrate gender equality both in its own administrative structures and in all stages of rural development programme (BMLFUW 2007). In the following the process of application of the gender mainstreaming strategy in the administrative structures of the ministry will be analysed. Furthermore it will be examined to which extent the BMLFUW has fulfilled the commitment to integrate gender equality and GM in the planning process and the ongoing implementation of the current rural development programme.

With the Amsterdam Treaty Austria is committed to implement GM in all policy fields. The Austrian constitution, Art. 7 Abs. 2, addresses these issues in its objectives: "The federal state, the provinces and the municipalities declare the equality between men and women. Pro-active measures to promote the real equality between women and men to eliminate existing inequalities are permitted." Since 2000 the Austrian government has declared five

resolutions on the implementation of GM in politics and administration (eg. Gender budgeting). Furthermore GM is part of the legislation of all nine Austrian provinces.

The tasks of the BMLFUW are manifold and even extended since its unification with the Ministry of environment protection in 1999. Considering the gender relations in management positions it is obvious that there remains a clear dominance of male heads of departments. First activities to raise the gender awareness in the BMLFUW were made in the early 2000s e.g. gender training for the minister and the heads of departments according to the 'top-down focus' of the GM approach.

In 2000 an inter-ministerial working group for gender mainstreaming (IMAG GM) was formed. Its task is to watch, to advise and to co-ordinate the implementation of the GM strategy at the federal level. The GM representative of the BMLFUW, member of the IMAG GM, and the GM working group of the BMLFUW started their first activity with awareness raising of the importance of a gender-sensible language in all publications and media of the BMFLW (Manual 'Blickpunkt Gender'). The members of the working group are female and male representatives of all hierarchical levels in the ministry. Now the activities have been intensified and since two years the GM working group has its own budget. Studies were ordered, for example, how to argue the necessity of implementing GM in the 'gender neutral' BMLFUW or how to implement gender-criteria for the allocation of subsidies of the BMFLUW. Further activities are a pilot project on gender budgeting in the Ministry and the establishment of a female expert data bank together with the Ministry of Infrastructure (BMVIT). The circumstance that all members of this GM working group have their 'normal' job, it is crucial that financial resources are available to commission tailored gender expertise or to order studies on gender issues. In a policy field which has originally hardly linkages with gender equal issues this point is extremely important.

Nevertheless, there are considerable activities of implementing GM in the internal structure of the BMFLUW, the same progress can't be observed in the case of the rural development programmes of the previous (2000 – 2006) and the current period (2007 – 2013). Gender equality issues are still not an integral part of the programmes. Although representatives of women's groups were invited to the four dialog conferences during the planning period of LE 07-13, gender impact assessment was not carried out for the different measures of the programme. A summarizing text on gender equality and non-discrimination (chapter 15) was

attached to the programme during the finalisation period and this happened only because of the mobilising and lobbying of feminist activists.

One major barrier for applying projects in LE 07-13 are the too strict rules for the administration and the lack of experience with cross-cutting projects and less sensibility for gender issues of the civil servants in the agricultural departments in the provinces. Responsible civil servants don't realize the importance of gender issues for their own field of work. There is still great scepticism regarding the possibility and the necessity of linking gender equality policy with initiating and implementing rural development processes (Oedl-Wieser 2004).

LEADER is now not anymore a Community Initiative but it is integrated in the RDP 2007 – 2013. In the previous period (2000 – 2006) some problems were seen by applicants for LEADER projects in the often very bureaucratic procedures for application and in the delay of approval. The rather restrictive guidelines of the EU Commission for LEADER projects were hindering the implementation of 'innovative' or pilot project ideas (Resch et al. 2003). As the results of the MTR show, only 7 projects with an explicit orientation on gender issues were conducted until 2003. For the monitoring system there have been only limited gender indicators available and the MTR was not analysing very deeply the impacts of the Leader projects on women.

In the new period in which Leader is integrated in the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 as axis 4, some new procedures are integrated in the programme. For the project selection group within the LAG structure it is necessary that the critical mass of women is reached. Furthermore only half of the members might be politicians and half of the members have to represent the civil society of the region. In some new LAG programmes the implementing of the gender mainstreaming and non-discrimination principle was presented in a very comprehensive way – from the definition of an overall objective to implement gender mainstreaming in concrete project proposals which are targeting women, the youth, the older generation and migrants. One very interesting objective in the new programmes is the willingness of cooperation between different communities in rural areas for example to establishing inter-generational or youth services (Oedl-Wieser 2008b). LEADER can now be implemented using the measures of the other three activity axis. Especially the axis 3 'Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural

economy' together with axis 4 'Leader' are offering interesting measures for women in rural areas. But also for the measures in axis 1 and 2 it is important to monitor the data gender-disaggregated. In axis 1, for instance, especially for Austria with its high proportion of female farm managers, it is important to collect gender-disaggregated data about the participation of men and women in the measure 'vocational training', in the measure 'setting-up young farmers' or in food quality schemes. In the axis 2 it is of interest to make visible how the subsidies are distributed between the farms of male and female farmers – women have on average the smaller farms in all regions of Austria (Oedl-Wieser 2007).

There is a strong demand for implementing gender mainstreaming, gender-equality and anti-discrimination in the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. Pro-active action for women's integration was formulated and women- and gender-related projects are explicitly welcome. Especially axis 3 and 4 measures will be very relevant for women.

5. Conclusions

Although the commitment for implementing gender equality in the Structural Funds and Rural Development Programmes of the EU since the early 1990ies it seems that in many cases the efforts are often not more than rhetoric. The different living and working conditions of men and women in rural areas are hardly taken into consideration in regional development strategies. Planers, regional and local stakeholders and policy makers are not aware of the failures by not addressing gender inequalities and unequal access to regional resources by men and women. RDP is still seen commonly as "gender-neutral" in its effects but de facto it has different impacts on men and women in the regions and often reduces the relevance and efficiency of interventions of regional policy. In Austria gender equality is still discussed primarily as social issue and not as an economic one. As long as the question of 'equality between women and men' is not a priority of the political agenda on all levels, including the stakeholders involved in rural actions, there will be no meaningful reflection about the own 'doing gender' in the political and administrative processes. To be more sensitive and open for gender issues and to get gender competence in CAP and RDP it would be necessary to start a process of self-evaluation and to change the political culture fundamentally.

In awareness that GM is a strategy with 'top down focus' it is necessary that the BMLFUW, as responsible ministry for LE 07-13, is influencing and encouraging the stakeholders of RDP in

the agricultural departments in the provinces, who are implementing the measures of LE 07-13 at provincial level, to act more gender-sensitive and to promote women- or gender-specific projects. Also at local level efforts of local action groups for more gender equality in the selection of projects have to be increased. In many cases the LAG managers are interested in GM but it is difficult for them to convince the board members – to a large extent conservative, male and middle-aged mayors – of the importance and advantages of GM for their region. It is obvious that the BMLFUW has the responsibility – in the sense of GM as ‘top down’ strategy – to enable and enhance the participation of women in the rural development processes and programmes. Moreover, there are many instruments like delegation of members to the advisory boards of the rural development programme LE 07-13, monitoring schemes, different kinds of evaluation to control the stages of implementation of GM. Women have to be seen as active partners with high potentials in the regional development process and not primarily as a problem group, which is often the perspective. The objective of the rural development process is to create a positive climate for the big variety of capacities of women and men living in rural areas.

Furthermore it is necessary to empower the already existing and new rural women organizations and networks to strengthen the ‘velvet triangle’ on regional and local level. This term refers to the cooperation between ‘femocrats’, feminist activists and female experts. It is crucial to give financial support to local women’s networks also through subsidies from the LE 07-13. By supporting such new structures important incentives could be provided to the development of rural areas because these groups have the will and develop the power to change the conservative gender role-models in the heads of rural people.

There is a lack of awareness of the existing variety of life models in rural areas and of the big potentials this variety bears. The administrators of the rural development programme at national and provincial level are called upon to develop more flexibility to finance also projects, which are innovative and cross-sectoral, but are much more demanding in implementation due to the existing programme framework. In the previous LEADER period the experience has been made, that really innovative projects had hardly any chance to be financed. The preconditions will be now that LE 07-13 is communicated in a much more proactive way to people, and especially women, in rural areas who are interested to make an

application for a project. GM can use the potentials of new (female) actors and the financial allocations can be ordered in a new way. If RDP is considering the different needs of women and men it can lead to a new quality of life in the rural areas. A very important component when implementing GM in rural areas is the climate towards social changes in the region. If the climate is very closed and not open-minded, it will be difficult to implement innovative projects which are challenging the conventional gender roles and aiming to reach gender democracy. Therefore it is necessary to intensify the dialog and to develop a new 'culture of conflict' between the stakeholders of rural development. Only under these conditions it will be possible to meet the huge challenges in the future of rural areas.

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