BRIEF NOTE

Social Innovation in the Agri-food sector for Women’s Empowerment in the Mediterranean Sea Basin (InnovAgroWoMed)

Project overview

Current levels of post-crisis unemployment and socio-economic exclusion pose common challenges on the two shores of the Mediterranean. Both MENA and Southern European Countries display a common trend in terms of low women empowerment and participation to the labour force.

The InnovAgroWoMed project aims at boosting women labour participation and entrepreneurship, especially for those in the NEET segment, by leveraging on the potential of the agri-food sector - an industry closely resonating with the cultural identity of the Mediterranean Basin, and showing a significant level of untapped potential in terms of innovation and growth in the Mediterranean.

While countries such as Spain and Italy feature comparatively high levels of growth in agri-food, albeit with very low levels of women participation, the MENA agricultural business is still fragmented, and women employment is the lowest in the world. This is caused by economic and social reasons, as growth in this sector has not been inclusive mostly because of unequal opportunities and skills mismatch.

This InnovAgroWoMed project will focus on two European regions (Valencia, Spain and Sicily, Italy) and two MENA areas (Beja and Medenin in Tunisia, and Palestine), identified as suitable for the implementation and scaling up of a sustainable value model in agri-food: Rural Social Innovation (RSI).

The Rural Social Innovation model redefines the boundaries between organizations and the community, addressing broader societal challenges by seeking economic, social and environmental sustainability; balancing tradition and innovation; and explicitly seeking community development at the local level.

This entails tailored research, training and placement activities that will establish the core of the project:
- 35 women per country (140 in total) will be trained with marketable skills to improve their capacity according to the RSI model.
- 80% of the 140 women will find a job after the end of the training (28 per country) as the output of subsequent job matching and job creation activities.
**Project partners**

The project consortium is headed by the University of Rome Tor Vergata a leader organization in managing European projects (about 10mil€ managed in the last 6 years) as well as for research activities in the field of rural social innovation (RSI).

The other partners will focus on implementation of training and placement activities due to their relevant experience in the field.

The south med partners include:
- The Tunisian partner (**CAWTAR**) is a specialized centre for Arab women training with long time experience in international projects on women empowerment.
- The Palestinian partner (**ASALA**) is a dynamic organization engaged in improving women conditions in Palestine.

The north med partners include:
- The Italian partner (**CESIE**) a European study and initiative center founded in 2001 whose mission is to **promote innovation, participation and growth in the educational field** It can count on a network of 3,000 civil society organizations, universities, schools, research centers, public authorities and private institutions, youth centers, businesses and entrepreneurs active all over the world. Today CESIE is working on the implementation of over 120 projects in more than 80 countries with the support of numerous institutions and organizations.
- The Spanish partner (**Jovesolides**) is an organization working for equal opportunities in development, and promoting an active global citizenship that is committed to its environment. It has a large number of partners that are spread throughout the world, mostly in Latin America and Europe. This partnership model makes it possible to carry out our projects: cooperation, development education, innovation and social entrepreneurship.

**Main project activities**

The main project activities include:

- **Development of the training model**
  The first group of activities aims at defining a new and innovative training and placement model based on the rural social innovation (RSI) and tailored according to the specific drivers, barriers and needs identified in the four different regions involved. Each research team will investigate how the rural social innovation paradigm can be applied to its local agri-food sector in order to create new and sustainable job opportunities for young women.

- **Training and coaching**
  This group activities includes the project core and aims at delivering an innovative and effective training and coaching programs to increase the employability (including self-employability) level of the young women from the participating territories. The training model will be designed at local level according to the results of the research activities methodologically inspired by the rural social innovation model. All training programs will share a common framework based on two different (hard) skills categories **cross cutting skills** inspired by the Rural Social Innovation paradigm as Managerial, Community and Digital Empowerment and the **sectorial skills** including the production techniques, logistics and transformation.
• **Job matching and job creation**

To increase the employment opportunities of the young women involved in the project activities, they will be divided in two different groups considering their most suitable future career paths:

• **Employment path.** All women interested in working as employee in an agri-food sector company. The correspondent profile in the rural social innovation paradigm will be “agent for the transition” of agri-food enterprises from the conventional value chain to the innovative one.

• **Entrepreneurship path.** All women interested in self-employment and willing to create their own cooperative start-up in the agri-food sector. The correspondent profile in the rural social innovation paradigm will be “agent for the generation” of agri-food enterprises directly adopting the innovative value chain.

For each profile specific placement initiatives focused on employment or entrepreneurship paths will be organized. Employment initiatives include the organization of **business and career forums and the creation of traineeship programs** in collaboration with project stakeholder network. For women interested in self-employment technical support meetings for cooperative start-ups will be organized in collaboration with associate partners to support the launch of their own agro-food business.