

Ambassadors, Distinguished guests, colleagues, I'm delighted to be able to join this panel today...

In a research made in 17 rural areas of Albania interviewing women regarding their perception on freedom, justice and their truth, we championed 540 women age 20 -50 years old, when asked "what would be a change you'd desire in your life?" specifying that this was a question that was referring to their selves... 83% of them responded **I don't know!**

**Economic empowerment is firstly about personal empowerment.**

In 2013, some of the women of these areas said this... (VIDEO) although it seems so long ago this situation is very much relevant even now as we speak.

During these years MWL has built a strong relationship with its beneficiaries and stakeholders listening and working with them and deciding with them to ease the personal empowerment of women and girls living in the most isolated of marginalized areas of Albania.

One of the women in the video stated that one of the solutions of empowering women is to give opportunities to have a business as she believes that **when women have the power over their own money this doesn't only empower them on how to use it, but this is one of the best ways to help reduce poverty in general.** Her name is Rudina. When I met Rudina she was living in a tent with her 4 children and her husband was in prison and her only income was 40 \$ per month via economic aid. With a small grant She now owns a Flower Business, she has a proper house, her children are at school (two of them in University) and she also created a small cooperative of women who work on agriculture on harvesting the seasonal products either be olives or citric fruits.

Women's right to property is a complicated issue in Albania. Although the Albanian civil and family law recognizes women's equal right to land and property, only 8 per cent own land, because the laws are not implemented and women continue to be marginalized in matters of inheritance. Most of the women also lack information and awareness about their property rights, and even if they do so, tradition barriers are stronger.

**So community development approaches for tackling social and cultural norms that prohibits women from the celebration of human rights are needed and Free legal aid is crucial for women who don't have steady or adequate income.**

One of the most important factors in the empowerment of women is to **Increase women's and girls' educational attainment.** Programs for Education, upskilling and re-skilling— specially to keep pace with rapid technological and digital transformations affecting jobs—are critical for women's and girl's health and wellbeing, as well as their income-generation opportunities and participation in the formal labor market.

From our experience the **collaboration of CSO's with the public and private sector supports opening access to opportunities** not only at the basic levels of living standards, but to also achieve higher levels of security and well-being through education, training and employment opportunities.

One of our successful stories is the venture of Dafina and Lindita in one of Northern areas called Tropoja. 15 women from this area have seasonal incomes from a crafts and souvenir shop. Dafina manages the shop and Lindita organizes the women to produce according to the tourism market requirement, while the Municipality has provided a rent free place in the Tourism Centre of Valbona, and businesses in this area address their clients to support the women is selling their products. This has empowered these women in three ways: **economic security, development of entrepreneurial behavior, and increased contributions to the family.**

**Paid employment is one of the benchmarks for financial security, and a government provided, broadly based, financial safety net is essential if economic security for women is to be enhanced.**

I'd like to thank you **Ambassador Neil Bush** and the Swedish Chairpersonship for the invitation to participate in this important conference today. Thank you