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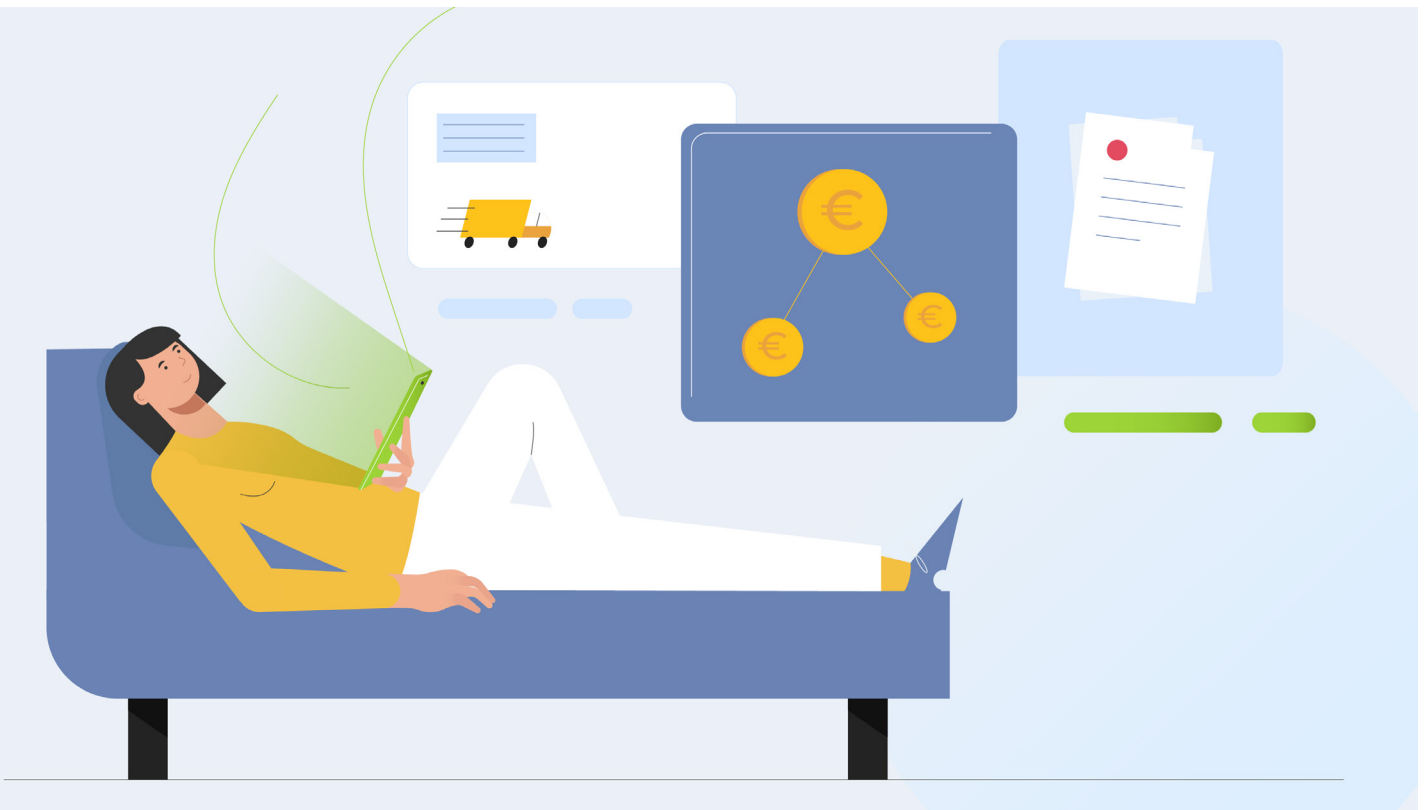
Training Via Messaging App for Rural Women

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Newsletter.

PROMOTING
PRIVATE SECTOR
EMPLOYMENT



Digital Platforms to Support Local Businesses

As the world became increasingly digital throughout 2020, it presented both a challenge and an opportunity also for Kosovo businesses to adapt, transform and evolve. Experimenting with various online sales channels, moving operations entirely online or enhancing the online presence were some of the immediate and mid-term actions that our partners put in motion.

To facilitate our partners' response to the moment's exigencies and to lay the digital foundations for a longer term the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) project Promoting Private Sector Employment (PPSE) supported several digital initiatives from businesses in the food and natural ingredients and tourism sectors. Their different needs influenced the business models and types of support needed.

One of the biggest challenges – and setbacks

– for the farmers, producers, and food processing companies this year was the disruption of the traditional sales channels: markets, restaurants, and shops. To address the situation, PPSE partnered with several private sector actors who acted swiftly to create new online channels for such products.

'Shija e Kosovës Online' (A Taste of Kosovo Online) is the newest online sale platform to be launched soon by GjirafaMall.com. It will facilitate a new sales channel and promotion for some 30 local businesses offering final food products. Along with www.shitjaonline.com platforms which creates e-shops for grocery shops, bakeries, hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, and others and www.flizza.shop – a place to buy your groceries online, these online sales channels are serving both the producers and customers.

In the tourism sector, the newest digital plat-

form www.kosovapass.com is already up and running and doing business for several months now. This platform enables tour operators to buy and sell tourism products online, and clients to get outdoor experiences around Kosovo with just one click.

Our other partner, United Pixels Academy, has made great strides this year. First, they successfully delivered online training courses for graphic designers and social media management. These courses were designed to meet the needs of businesses. That evolved into the recently launched platform www.krypune.com where freelancers and businesses can find employment and professional services.

All these initiatives bring smoothly together the digital shift and its impact on the overall private sector ecosystem, creating more opportunities, and new jobs..

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR WORK

A Platform for International Networking and Marketing

■ “The Kosovo Association of Processors and Exporters of Non-Wood Forest Products and Medicinal Aromatic Plants ORGANIKA now makes sector information available globally through [a database integrated in its website](#). This sector database gives interested foreign and domestic business representatives access to detailed and useful information on individual businesses in Kosovo and useful information for doing business. The goal of the database is to promote this sector of Kosovo’s economy with particular focus on foreign markets, and increase networking and export opportunities, which in turn contributes to new jobs created. The database contains detailed information on each company’s products/services and contact information. It is another tool to facilitate access to information for potential business partners, with a focus on international business linkages. The ORGANIKA database was developed with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation through PPSE.



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■ “The contract farming model is a win-win strategy for all: contractors and farmers”. Fahrije Hoti, founder of the “Women’s Cooperative of Krusha” shared her insight about this model of farming, promoted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Kosovo, with the President of the Swiss Parliament Isabelle Moret. In November 2020, Madame Moret, accompanied

by MP Mauro Tuena and Ambassador Thomas Kolly visited the “Women’s Cooperative of Krusha”, where they met with women employees, cooperative managers, and contracted farmers. Ms. Hoti shared the story of how the cooperative came into being, its challenges and growth over the years, how the business is operating and expansion plans for the future.

Specialized Seedlings Make All the Difference for Farmers

■ A farmer’s life becomes so much easier when seedling production modern technology meets the right expertise. These are the seedlings produced for Visar Vokrri’s farm, who did not even imagine such quality was possible. “Receiving healthy seedlings ready for planting saved time, efforts, and resources. Besides, the seedling producer was available at all times to provide additional advice and support,” says Visar, a young farmer from the region of Podujeva/o. He used one plot of land to plant cabbages with seedlings from

Agrobora and with traditionally-grown seedlings: the difference is visible to the bare eye, as he says.

“This quality is a result of implementing advanced seedling production technology in our nursery. We truly thank the PPSE staff, Sherif Kuçi for his ideas, and prof. Astrit Balliu for the professional advice,” says Flamur Sylva of Agrobora, the first specialized seedling production nursery established last year in Kosovo through support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.





Traditional Guesthouses: Experiencing the Rugova Way of Life

■ One of the favorite accommodation types for foreign tourists and local visitors in Kosovo is the traditional guesthouse. A typical day at the guesthouse starts early in the morning before the sun rises. The family that manages the guesthouse prepare breakfast: eggs, cheese, yoghurt, sour cream, pancakes, homemade bread, vegetables from the garden, jam and fruits, tea, and coffee. A hearty, generous breakfast that gives visitors the right amount of energy for the day ahead.

This is how Xhevahire and Ilir Shala describe a typical day. The couple manages the guesthouse “Shqiponja” (“Eagle”) in Drelaj village. Surrounded by the mountain greenery, the trees and flowers in the beautifully arranged garden, this guesthouse looks like it sprung out of a fairy tale. Since 2011 it welcomes guests of all ages, from around the world. Leafing through the guestbook, “thank-you” notes in many different languages create the map of countries where the guests arrived from.

“Our guests are mostly German, but we have them from other countries too” says Ilir. Before, he used to do different jobs around the family farm, while wood carving is his passion. Now, for almost ten years, he welcomes guests at the guesthouse. Other family members are engaged in this activity. They buy all the food from the village locals.

The Shalals run a guesthouse with a capacity of 30 people. Apart from the bedrooms, the accommodation features the common areas where tourists and hosts spend time together. The family constantly invests in fixing the space, although this is not now always easy from the financial aspect, especially this year, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the entire tourism sector hard.

“We had some 36 groups booked for this season but none of them arrived” says Ilir. Although a tough period, he used the time available to fix the guesthouse. “We invested in the dining space for guests. We closed it off with glass panels and created this warm and comfortable space” says Ilir, adding that the investment was enabled through the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Kosovo, through the Swisscontact’s project that supports tourism. “This was the only support in this difficult period” he says.

“Shqiponja” guesthouse is one of the 10 guesthouses that benefitted from the SDC support through the guesthouse refurbishment activity targeting guesthouses in Rugova to get them ready with improved facilities for guests once free travel resumes.

This article was first published in Albinfo.ch magazine in October 2020.



DID YOU KNOW...?

A

...that you can take a walk down 400 meters of the Nature Trail at the Bear Sanctuary PRISHTINA, and get to both experience the peaceful nature and learn more about the wildlife? The Bear Sanctuary PRISHTINA, some 20 km from the capital, combines animal welfare, sustainable tourism, and environmental education for all ages. The Nature Trail and Entertainment Park is the newly inaugurated addition to the area through a co-investment of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Vierpfoten Kosova. It offers both recreational and education opportunities to visitors, adding to the attraction of the park. The recreational and education products such as the ant hill, labyrinth, bear cave, spider net, bird nest feature tables with information on each role and function.

B

...that you can add a different taste – and healthy nut-based ingredients to your diet, all made in Kosovo? All it takes is a trip to the artisanal shop Peline’s (<http://www.pelinis.net/>) in Pristina. Nut-based types of butters and cold-pressed oils are the staple products of Peline’s, a family-run business established in 2018. As a promoter of ‘farm-to-fork’ approach, the company predominantly uses products sourced from local farmers. The retail store in Pristina is a zero-waste shop selling fresh, unpackaged healthy bulk foods items. In partnership with PPSE, the company is increasing production capacities.

C

...a medieval fortress will soon complete the tourist offer of Gračanica/Gračanicë? The construction of the theme park some twenty meters from the Monastery is about to be completed. The theme park extends to 670 square meters and comprises of one tower, museum, observation tower, and other objects that complete the infrastructure: a mini market, a souvenir shop, a medieval tavern, and an archery terrain. The project is partly funded by PPSE.

D

...what’s in the fruit bars that come in different flavors? Our partner Kodra e Diellit has already tested at least 10 new fruit bar original recipes – a mixture of various fruit and other ingredients. These new products are a result of the collaboration between Kodra e Diellit and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation that consists of the co-financing of the machinery to produce fruit rolls and bars, implemented through the PPSE.

BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

Training Via Messaging App for Rural Women

At the start of 2020, Arbesa Lushtaku Veliu, a newly graduated agronomist, got a job with Agroflorentina, a company for the collection, cultivation, and processing of wild mushrooms, wild forest fruits, and aromatic plants.

Just a few months into her first job, everything changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restricted movement and increased health safety measures disrupted everyone's life. For rural women, this meant fewer opportunities for gainful work, and even less access than before to training, networking, and having more perspectives.

Along with 26 other women working in cultivation of medicinal aromatic plants (MAPs) across Kosovo, at the beginning of the summer season, Arbesa enrolled in a 4-week long training program on how to manage cultivation of MAPs and the farm. The training is regularly delivered by the Kosovo Association of Processors and Exporters of Non-Wood Forest products ORGANIKA. This year though, there was a catch to it: COVID-19.

The obvious choice was to deliver the training online. However, use of more advanced online training platforms required a certain degree of familiarity and skills with such tools. "Women living in the rural areas cannot always make time at the appointed schedule to attend online lectures, due to their workload and various obligations

around the farm and household," says Faton Nagavci, Executive Director of ORGANIKA.

The solution was as resourceful as it was simple: the training would be delivered via Viber, an instant messaging software that is very popular in Kosovo, especially among rural women.

ORGANIKA set up five Viber groups, one for each participating company. The training material produced was Viber-friendly, in the format of short explanatory videos, posters, and text advice. The groups also enabled discussion among participants, seeking further clarification or additional information on the video material.

Says Arbesa, "The training was very useful, especially for the women involved in cultivation. Since I am still new in farm management, I learned a lot about cultivation and keeping notes.



The method of delivery was also spot on, perhaps more understandable than just listening to lectures. And the platform chosen – Viber – was the right one, as it was much easier for the women to use. They are very happy with the program."

[Click here](#) to read the full story published on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women.



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Promoting Private Sector Employment

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation project Promoting Private Sector Employment is implemented by Swisscontact and Riinvest Institute.