

Women Against Stereotypes

Although one could almost argue that the age of classical patriarchy is a thing of the past, in the still present stereotypical ways of thinking, attitudes, and life patterns, the assumptions of gender inequality are beyond obvious. It is against such beliefs that the organisation Open Door from Kosovo is fighting. Since the end of the war in Kosovo in 1999, this organisation has been offering assistance and much-needed support to women and those who have experienced war violence.

Along these lines, Open Door has organised numerous trainings and educations on women's rights, health, business start-ups, ISO standards for healthy food and similar topics. Since cooking was the favourite activity of most of them, members were provided with the necessary equipment: pots, stoves, jars and other kitchen utensils. As a result, some of them started exporting canned food. In 2017, the idea arose to provide an opportunity for women with good culinary skills, to prepare food and turn it into a business. On Valentine's Day, a year later, thanks to the financial support of GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation), eShpis' was founded in Pristina. Since the Law on Social Entrepreneurship was not passed at that time, it was registered as a non-governmental organisation. Eight women were involved in the production and storage of local, traditional food, and thus began to operate and run the business of a catering service.



Motives and deliverables

The whole idea was triggered above all by the desire and moral duty to initiate economic and financial independence of women, and to strengthen their role in decision-making within the family, and in society alike.

"The women we employ never had the opportunity to earn income from their work before. Now they run their own bank accounts and manage personal finances," says Beti, a founder and CEO of eShpis.

All the employees agree that it brings them great joy and pleasure to work together, prepare food and socialise. They admit that before this business experience they were extremely with-

drawn, with not much of self-confidence, while today they gladly and openly talk to clients, but also to journalists about their work and success. One of the always smiling ladies says that her role in the family has changed now that she contributes to the household income. The children are happy because she can afford clothes and books for them, and the husband shows a higher level of respect, so he involves her in making important decisions.

No stopping

Not everyone is as fortunate, but the path of setting up and developing this business went relatively smoothly, with no negative surprises on the way.

"I am the happiest when I see that everything is going according to plan: clients are satisfied with food, and women with work and income. I am glad to say that we have not had any negative experiences at work. As far as the government and institutions are concerned, we carried out promotional activities and presented them with the deliverables of our work and activities, and started cooperation. Since the government changed, all of this had to be set up from the scratch. We believe that in the future, external relations will function without problems," says Beti.

This statement confirms the fact that the business has progressed greatly in very short time, attracted loyal customers and sufficient income, but due to harsher pandemic conditions, some changes were made.

"It is true that we have gained loyal customers and continued to promote our work at the local level, so that we can maintain business, not only with foreign organizations, but also in the community. But, due to the pandemic, we lost a good part of our target group, because trainings, conferences, or campaigns could not be organized, where we would bring food. We held up well for several months, using our reserve fund, because we did not want women to suffer, but unfortunately, in November 2020, we had to halve the amount of salaries. The support from the Government of Kosovo was for two months, where the workers were awarded 130 euros each." Betty added.

They are proud of the innovation they have given to their community, and delighted with the response of the environment and the awareness of citizens that new, started activities are of great importance for women's rights activism, and to break beliefs that have long ruled from the shadows. It seems that it is the right time to take steps, and that the environment is ready for change.

For more information on NGO "eShpis", see: facebook.com/eShpise.

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