

**CHART
FOR EQUAL
GENDER REPRESENTATION
IN DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES
IN RURAL AREAS**

Tirana, August 2013





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PREFACE

The Chart for Equal Gender Representation in Decision Making Structures in Rural Areas is the final product of the work with the Women's Leadership Forum for rural women.

Women's Leadership Forum was established as part of an initiative that Partners Albania in partnership with the Albanian Association of Communes implemented during June 2011-September 2013, which aimed to support and empower women in rural areas, toward an equal representation and participation not only in processes and decision making structures, but also in other areas of public and private life.

The initiative was supported by the European Union under the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Open Society Foundation for Albania.

The Forum of Women Leaders from rural areas has 24 members, among them is the only women head of commune in the country, two deputy head of communes, commune council members, and representatives of the organizational structures of political parties at the local level.

Partners Albania and gender experts assisted the Forum to draft the Chart for Equal Gender Representation in Decision Making Structures in Rural Areas, and increase their capacity regarding legal and regulatory framework and institutional mechanisms for participation and representation of women in decision making structures, mechanisms of participation in local decision making, techniques and mechanisms on advocacy and lobbying, communication with media and public, leadership and practical advice on professional development etc.

The Chart for Equal Gender Representation in Decision Making Structures in Rural Areas was designed to serve as a guide and motivator for women and girls in rural areas, to be more active in the life of their communities and to present to key stakeholders suggestions and recommendations to support and promote the participation of women in society, especially in rural areas. It is an advocacy tool to use in any lobbying campaign to increase women's participation and representation in political and social life of the communities where they work and live.





SUMMARY OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON PARTICIPATION AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION IN DECISION MAKING

Women participation in policy making is enabled through three main rights: women's right to vote; to run for election; and to take part/represent in public decision making (woman elected in public functions). Women's right to participate in the political life is guaranteed in the national legal framework of the Republic of Albania and in some International Conventions:

Convention¹ on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, approved by the United Nations in 1979, specifies:

Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) ***To vote*** in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) ***To participate in the formulation of government policies*** and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights²: The article 21 of this Declaration sets that: "**Everyone** has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

International Convention on the Civil and Political Rights of UN. Its 25th Article gives to every **citizen, without discrimination**, the right to vote and to compete for public functions.

Albania has a broad legal package on the gender equality issues:

The law "***On gender equality in society***"³, nr.9970 date 24.07.2008 in terms of women representation, the law specifies: "at least 30 per cent of appointed positions should be filled by the underrepresented gender - women".

¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article7>; CEDAW was ratified in Albania through the law 1769, date 9.11.1993 and in 2003 was ratified its Optional Protocol.

² <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

³ The law nr.9970 date 24.07.2008 "On gender equality in society".



Electoral Code⁴ (December 2008, reviewed in 2012): the Article 67, point 6. “For each electoral zone, at least thirty per cent of the multi-name list and one of the first three names on the multi-name list shall belong to each gender. The subject that submits the list declares the seats, according to the gender quota, in order to apply the exception, in accordance with point 2 of article 164 of this Code”.

⁴ http://www.parlament.al/web/Kodi_zgjedhor_i_Republikes_se_Shqiperise_5073_1.php

SITUATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

It is a known fact now that in Albania, women representation in decision making structures, elected as mayors in municipalities or communes, in municipal and communal councils or leaders in local administration, still remains at low levels.

Albania shows examples of women in key decision making positions such as Parliament Speaker, President of the Supreme Court, General Prosecutor, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, etc.

At the time of publication, there is only one female minister (or 7.1%) in the Cabinet, and eight female deputy ministers out of 35 (or 22.8%).

Women who carry such important functions serve as positive models and their presence in these positions is the result of a long road towards the change of attitudes about women's capacity to lead.

In the local government, unfortunately the representation of women is lower. Referring to the results of the last local elections, only three or 7.7% out of 65 municipalities are run by women. In the lists of candidates for municipal councils it was respected the gender quota of 30%, but out of 872 candidates for head of commune councils, only 14 were women and only six of them were elected.⁵

This is the current situation of women's representation at all levels of decision making, both at central and local level. There are no official data on the municipal administrations and even less about women in leadership positions in the communes or commune councils.

From the work conducted with the Women's Leadership Forum for rural areas, were gathered the following data regarding the situation in their commune administrations and councils with regard to gender representation: (*continues in the following page*)

⁵ACER, ASET, 2010. "The situation of Women leaders at the Local level in Albania, A Baseline Analysis", pg. 43. Online: <http://platformagjinore.al/wp-content/themes/theme1369/pdf/Studim%20mbi%20Situaten%20ne%20Shqiperi%20te%20Grave%20ne%20Nivel%20Vendor%20UNWOMEN%20ACER%20eng.pdf>



COMMUNE	WOMEN LEADERS IN THE ADMINISTRATION	WOMEN MEMBER IN THE COMMUNE COUNCIL	WOMEN HEAD OF COMMUNE
GJERGJAN	42%	20% (3 women out of 15 members)	Head of commune
NDROQ	80%	27% (4 women out of 15 members)	Deputy head of commune
MOLLAS	52%	7% (1 woman out of 15 members)	Deputy head of commune
KOZARE	12%	7% (1 woman out of 15 members, Head of the Council)	
XHAFZOTAJ	75%	12 % (2 women out of 17 members)	
KASHAR	13%	0% (no women out of 25 members)	
VËRTOP	67%	7% (1 woman out of 15 members)	
PETRAN	50%	8 % (1 woman out of 13 members)	
NOVOSELË	63%	12% (2 women out of 17 members)	
ULËZ	12%	30% (4 women out of 13 members)	
BICAJ	0%	0% (no women out of 15 members)	
SHISHTAVEC	22%	7% (1 woman out of 15 members)	
HUDENISHT	50%	0% (no women out of 15 members)	
BUSHAT	50%	4% (1 woman out of 25 members)	
SHUSHICË	30%	6% (1 woman out of 17 members)	
SHËNKOLL	30%	12% (2 women out of 17 members)	

We judge that this situation of women representation and participation in local decision making is a result of:

1. **Political parties** do not sufficiently include women in the candidates' lists for Commune Council members. Thus, they do not apply the gender quota as provided by law.
1. Often there is lack of **women ambition** to run, but this especially because of the difficult environment they find in the political parties on one hand and the mentality of the community on the other. Communities in rural areas usually

consider politics “a profession for men and not for women”. Although, the lack of ambition is combined with the lack of women trust in their individual capacities and winning skills, lack of successful models in politics, as well as lack of training and level of political education. We would like to highlight that the political pressure and the highly polarized political climate negatively affect the women ambition to actively engage in politics, along with the limited financial resources which is another hindering factor to their ambition to run.

2. **Family** is another hindering factor through lack of support, no equal division of family tasks or responsibilities, and through failing to create the necessary space and time for women to undertake political and public commitments.
3. **There is lack of initiatives for promotion of rural women in political life.** We would like to highlight the lack of right attention regarding women political representation in rural areas, even from non-governmental actors, civil society and media.
4. **Local authorities, with few exceptions, do not use mechanisms that promote women inclusion in the decision making processes that affect their lives.** The existence and implementation of these mechanisms in principle would enable women to continuously address their needs and priorities to local authorities, and to the latter to properly allocate local resources (however limited) according to these needs and priorities. We identified very few cases of such practices implemented in the communes we represent, but even where these mechanisms are already established (for example in Kashar Commune) there is still a low women participation because of unclear understanding of the value and results of such procedures.
5. **Women elected in the Commune Councils** do not always raise their voice enough to ask for response from the authorities in addressing women’s needs and priorities, while they cooperate little or at all with each-other beyond their political spectrum.

Meanwhile, we want to highlight the fact that women in rural areas are faced with multiple challenges:

1. **Economic challenges:** Self-employment in villages does not work because land remains uncultivated due to the high prices of diesel, seeds and pesticides. The uncertainty of the products sale market, the lack of irrigation and drainage systems are also hindering factors. **Low education level** (elementary and secondary education), not profiled according to the rural needs is a significant barrier for women in rural areas. **Poverty** in rural areas is addressed to the minimum subsistence because it is calculated based on land surface owned. The law on social assistance does not favor these families: a poor family receives not more than 5,000 ALL per month, but in most of the cases poorest families hardly get 1500 ALL/month. Meanwhile the challenges employed



women are faced with: uncertainty of the employment position for political reasons!!! In addition, there is a lack of initiatives from local authorities to encourage alternative forms of employment for rural women.

2. **Domestic violence:** It's really hidden in rural areas because of the mentality and the extremely economic dependence on men. Because of the patriarchal mentality, there were and still are women in rural areas that have experienced violence and have ended their life tragically, as the only way out from violence!!! In front of the hidden violence within the families and the mentality, the reaction from governmental and non-governmental institutions in rural areas is almost inexistent.
3. **Isolated from social and cultural life:** This is due to the lack of any initiative taken from local authorities as well as the civil society organizations in rural areas.
4. **Local infrastructure:** Child care, daily care institutions are inexistent structures in Albanian villages, rarely found kindergartens offer only part-time services. **Health care service** is extremely poor in doctors and nurses, ambulances, 24 hours service and emergency rooms are missing services. **Security:** police stations and patrols are quite rare and low in number, rural road lighting is bad or missing, and road infrastructure is very poor.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DECISION MAKERS TO IMPROVE WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN RURAL AREAS

Considering as very important the improvement of actual situation and the increase of women's representation in rural areas, we recommend:

I. TO POLITICAL PARTIES

- **Respect gender quota** to guarantee that at least one of the three first positions of the list to be a woman. ***There shouldn't be applied financial penalties to political parties that do not respect the quota, instead political parties should guarantee women positions in the list.***
- In your party statutes provide the **gender quota for leading positions within your political force.**
- **The mechanisms for selecting the candidates** should be well-defined, clear and should respect inner democracy and **create equal opportunities** to compete and be included in the candidates list.
- Take **concrete actions to promote women from rural areas in politics**, through encouraging them to candidate, support women who work with the community and encourage them to represent the community in decision making.
- Provide trainings or undertake other initiatives aiming the **capacity building of women involved in politics in rural areas.**
- Undertake continuous **initiatives that contribute to change the local communities mentality** (to contribute to the community education on the role women should play in society) which consider politics as a profession exclusively for men and not for women.
- **Women political forums** should raise women awareness and provide information on participation, and demand from the political parties not only to respect the gender quota but also to address in their political programs issues concerning women in rural areas. **Their role should be determinant in representation of women in political structures and in public functions** (elected).

II. TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- **Assure the gender balance in leading functions**, enabling leadership equally from men and women, based on merit.



- Local leaders and Commune Councils should **respect the law on Local Governance Functioning regarding consultation with the community, so with women as well**, and establish mechanisms to provide space and opportunities for women to continuously address their needs and priorities, as well as allocate local resources according to these needs.
- When **drafting and implementing local policies**, focus on addressing women needs and especially issues related to women's employment, poverty, local infrastructure from a gender priority prospective, violence against women, getting women out of social and cultural isolation etc.
- **Encourage organizations** working in rural areas to include women in their memberships, leading boards as well as in undertaking initiatives that promote women's employment.

III. TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- **Turn your eyes toward women in rural areas** with concrete initiatives that on one hand address the situation of under-representation of women in decision making in rural areas, and on the other hand address challenges like unemployment, domestic violence, social isolation, etc.
- Contribute to **building capacities of women in rural areas**, to create equal opportunities for them to compete equally with men.
- **Monitor and increase pressure on political parties** to increase women's representation in local decision making.
- Undertake **initiatives to educate voters and change the mentality of the community in rural areas** about women participation in politics.

IV. TO THE MEDIA

- Promote **role and importance of representation of women from rural areas** in decision making.
- Promote **success stories** to encourage ambition and increase confidence of other women.
- Contribute to **voters' education and change of mentality**.
- **Give space and voice to women living in rural areas** to address the challenges they face in their everyday life, to increase the decision makers' attention toward the needs of women in rural areas.



ADVICE FOR WOMEN TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES AND BECOME AN ACTIVE PART OF DECISION MAKING

Don't wait for the others to involve you, but be the one to influence in decision making!

Believe in your values, force and the product you can give to the policy or decision making structures. Don't wait for the others to raise their voice for you, but fight for your own rights! Continuously try to build your capacities and offer your best in the community.

Build family support, divide roles, tasks and responsibilities within the family!

Family is an important factor in terms of encouraging women to be part of political and public decision making. Such commitments require time, and consequently it is important that family tasks and responsibilities are divided equally among all family members.

Get involved and engage in political parties!

Women's political representation process passes through political parties. When the pressure for a higher women's representation comes from the inside of the political forces, political parties are most likely to react and changes may occur. Without doubt, this may happen when women are organized effectively and when it is their main objective to be represented within the political party structures and in the public political decision making structures. Don't hesitate to take specific tasks and responsibilities within political parties and raise your voice when women's issues are not addressed properly.

Get involved in community actions that build community trust and support!

Work with and for the community. The work and service to community is the best support to succeed and become part of decision making.

Address gender issues!

As Commune Council's members, elected women can concretely contribute in addressing women's needs and priorities to local authorities. Moreover, this requires collaboration among elected women, regardless the political force they represent in the Council.

Your success serves as a model for other women!

A successful woman inspires other women. So, when you work as a leader or elected official, keep your promises, work with persistence and willpower, be visible and open: informative, transparent, accountable. Work professionally and be politically unbiased when exercising public tasks.





SUCCESS STORIES AND MESSAGES

“Continuous communication and interaction with community, the key to success for elected local officials ”

**Erjeta Alhysa, 42 years,
Wife and mother of two,
Deputy Head of Ndroq commune,
Head of Socialist Party in Ndroq commune,
Member of National Assembly of Socialist Party.**



My role model in politics was my mother, a woman who served the community of Ndroq, initially as a head of department and later as Chair of this commune. I got from her the force to challenge difficulties and the will to find solutions through communication and interaction with the community I work for. During my political career, I have always had the support of my family, and of my community as well, who knew me at first as a teacher, and since 2007 know and support me also as an activist and local political leader. I am proud that nowadays, Ndroq is one of the few communes in Albania where 80% of Heads of Administration Departments are women. I can say without hesitation that the wide woman's presence in decision making positions has soothed political conflicts, has increased tolerance and undoubtedly has affected the quality and adequacy of services offered not only to the community in general, but to women in particular.

“Only with hard work, persistence, good will and increased professionalism you can achieve what you aspire”

**Suzana Gjyzeli, 50 years,
Wife and mother of two daughters,
Tax Manager in Xhafzotaj Commune,
Member of Democratic Party.**



It's been 30 years that I practice my profession as an economist, 10 of which as a Tax Manager in my commune. Except for the needed education, I have never stopped improving my knowledge not only in economical and legal field, but also in terms of gender issues. Every profession has its own challenges, but the biggest challenge I have faced was political: every political party winning the mandate to lead the commune, has tried to remove me from my job position. I managed to continue because I advocated to defend my rights to keep the job position, not given or granted

to me but achieved through many sacrifices and hard work. Unfortunately political parties still do not appreciate the capacities and the potential of the specialists, but reward the militants. This should come to an end!

“It is difficult, but not impossible challenging rural and patriarchal mentality”

**Elda Doçi, 26 years,
 Wife,
 Responsible of the One Stop Shop Office, Bushat Commune.**



When I started working in the Commune, the first challenge I faced was the mentality of a community that considers women only as housewives. I felt this consideration not only on the communication with the community during my work, but also from the reality I found in the commune administration where the only woman in a leading position was the head of Finance Department, and there was no women members in the Commune Council. What I want to do next is to spread my knowledge, also achieved as result of participation in this forum, through trainings and influence on the community and decision makers in order to change the women’s representation situation in this commune. I know this is difficult, but not impossible!

“More consideration from institutions to vulnerable women”

**Merita Dollaku, 47 years,
 Wife and mother of two daughters,
 Administrator of the Office for Economic Aid and Social
 Issues in Xhafzotaj Commune**



Since several years already I have been working in this function, so I am in continuous communication with members of the community. I regret the fact that often women limit themselves to the marriage and creation of the family and do not invest in their education and fight for their rights. Meanwhile, being in contact with vulnerable women, I have learned that they face high unemployment, economical difficulties, social exclusion, poor physical and social infrastructure etc. These groups definitively seek more attention and consideration from governmental institutions.



“My success within my political party is due to my persistence and hard working”

**Etleva Myftari, 43 years,
Wife and mother of three,
Head of Finance Office in Petran Commune,
Vice President of Woman Forum for the Socialist Party,
Përmet**



Coming from rural areas of Përmet, few people believed that I would succeed to be part of Socialist Party leading forums. I have worked hard, together with other members of this political force, and I became part of its leading forum. I have enriched my experience through seminars and trainings and everything learned helped me to improve the quality of my work. All these led me through success and today I am vice president of Women Forum of the Socialist Party in Përmet. It wasn't always easy, on the contrary! I have experienced gender based discrimination, even among my colleagues and co-members of the political force, but I have considered them battles to fight and I walked straight ahead. I think that through political parties passes the way to influence decision makers to address women's needs and priorities.

“Commune Council for me is a little parliament of Novosela inhabitants, as well as the place where altogether with two colleagues of mine I am the voice of women in this community”

**Matilda Beqo, 28 years,
Member of Commune Council, Novoselë,
Master of Arts in foreign languages-English,
Director of Novosele's 9 year school,
Member of Democratic Party Women's Forum for Vlora**



In Novosela Commune Council only 13% of members are women. The challenge we face continuously is the lack of support from other Council members, every time we raise the voice for decisions made regarding issues affecting women. Political parties should work to change this situation by increasing women representation not only in Commune Councils, but also within their decision making structures. Moreover, when selecting candidates, political parties should be driven by the qualities and values that the individual offer to the community and politics, regardless its gender.

“Women should build strong confidence on themselves, and especially rural women should estimate themselves more and dare to walk out of the fence of their houses”

**Lumturie Hoxha, 41 years, wife and mother of two,
Chairwomen of Gergjan commune,
Chair of Socialist Movement for Integration in Gjergjan.**



I feel privileged and at the same time regretful for being the only women leading a commune in my country. Women should build strong confidence on themselves, and especially rural women should estimate themselves more and dare to walk out of the fence of their houses. They should face the patriarchal mentality by getting educated, working outside their home and participating in political structures, thus better advocating for their needs and interests. My family and community have been the strongest supporters in my political path. My husband is an activist of SMI party for Gjergjan and I think that together we serve as a good role model for the families and especially for women of our commune, to dare and walk at the pace of their husbands or partners, why not even steps ahead of them.

“Increasing women participation within political parties, is an added pressure for them to respect gender quota”

**Adriana Dule, 32 years, wife,
Nurse,
Chair of Women’ Forum of SP in Udënisht Commune,
Pogradec**



My mother was the first promoter and support to my political engagement. While I was working as a nurse in Udënisht, I got fired because of my political beliefs. That was my second incentive, stronger than the first one, to get engaged more actively and to change this reality. Communication with people and connection with them helped me be more successful and a good leader of the Women Forum of SP. The biggest challenge I have faced while running this forum is women hesitation to be involved and active in a political force. This is due to mentality, lack of time and everyday heavy work. Another challenge is the respect of gender quota which we are working to address by increasing women’s role within our political force. As result, in the last two and a half years the number of women members of the party has significantly increased.



“Graduated in Italy, now serving the Kashar Community”

**Irena Bendo, 32 years,
Wife and mother of a child,
Head of Juridical Office, Kashar Commune**



I have studied in Italy and despite my family of origin lives there, I decided to come back to Albania and build my family here. I am aware that everybody who starts a new job faces challenges, but to me these challenges have been doubled. The challenge of being a new lawyer, and another one of braking communication barriers with some of the male colleagues and third parties whom I work with. They considered my position as tailored only for men, but my insistence on performing my duties correctly and professionally were the best way to break this mentality. I love my profession and I like to serve my community not only as leader and lawyer, but also by getting voluntarily involved in local projects. Helping others is an added value and makes you see things positively!

“The only women’s voice in Shishtavec Commune Council”

**Ramadanie Belaj, 54 years,
Wife and mother of four,
Member of Shishtavec Commune Council,
Chair of Democratic Women Forum for Shishtavec**



The biggest challenge I faced in the Commune Council is being the only voice for women of this commune in the Council. I always try to talk in the Council about women’s rights especially women in need, homeless, head of family etc. I ask for the Council to support them, although I haven’t always been successful. I work with groups of women in neighborhoods, meeting them every month. I have raised my voice even within my political force, asking for women to be more present in the Council. Women should be more active and raise the voice for their rights.

“My family, my work and their support led me through success”

**Zana Shehu, 40 years,
Wife and mother of two,
Chair of Democratic Women Forum in Bicaj Commune,
Chair of Democratic Party in Nang village,
Member of Democratic Party leadership forum in Kukës.**



I have been involved in politics since the ‘90 and in these 23 hard working years I managed to become the Chair of Democratic Party branch in Nang village where 60 members are all men, to run the Women Forum of DP in Bicaj

commune and be a member of DP leadership forum for Kukës branch. The main support has been my husband, together we have equally shared roles and responsibilities in the family, to be able to find the necessary time for this commitment as well. I have attended a number of trainings that helped me become a successful leader. I work constantly to encourage other women, especially the ones in my village, to break the barriers of patriarchal mentality and engage and be active in the community.

“From a successful nurse to Head of Commune Council”

**Pashke Shpani, 54 years,
Wife and mother of five,
Chair of the Commune Council of Ulëz,
Nurse in the Health Care Center**



I never thought or planned to engage in politics. The first incentive to run as candidate in local election 2011 came from my colleagues and community women who knew my work and my seriousness. I decided to candidate and the vote and support of the community made me the Chair of the Commune Council, where three other members are women. Our Council makes a distinction not only in regard to respecting the gender quota, but also because the male members of the Council support us whenever we discuss community women issues. Even my election as Chair of the Council where women are only in 30%, is an indicator of this support.

“Very limited local resources versus the needs of community women”

**Liza Rica, 54 years,
Wife and mother of three children,
Secretary of Ulëz Commune Council.**



In the position of the secretary of Ulëz Commune Council, I am continuously in contact with the community and women. Their economic situation is very difficult and local resources are very limited. It is very important a great and concrete support to the women needs in rural areas, especially in our commune.



“Breaking gender stereotypes in employment”

**Dafina Davidhi, 28 years,
Police Chief in Novoselë Commune.**



Since several months I run the little police unit of Novoselë commune. Being in the police force has always been my passion and when the commune proposed me this job position, I accepted without hesitation. My family were the first to get surprised, while community members often looked at me with irony. My challenge was not only the community opinion but also dealing the attitude of the two male police officers under my supervision, whom have difficulty accepting to be led by a woman. Several times I have been embarrassed, but I have always had the support of commune leadership. Now there are accustomed to my police uniform and I want to continue living my dream. The community is now aware that my presence is mitigating the conflictual climate.

“Equal access in services”

**Evisa Hoxha, 25 years,
Administrator of the Office for Economic Aid and Social
issues in Vërtop Commune.**



Even though I do not have a long experience in this job position, I have noticed that only men visit our offices. The long distances from the commune administration building keeps women away from services the commune offers. This obviously highlights the need for us to find ways to make services accessible to women as well as men.

“The challenges are made to be faced”

**Liljana Mara, 40 years,
wife and mother of two,
Deputy Chair of Kozare Commune Council,
President of the PD Women Forum Kozare.**



Women and girls of our community face ongoing challenges, starting with the creation of a family. For the time we live in, women are vulnerable, exposed to many risks and violence, because they are not protected even by law. I really hope one day their voice will be heard and they will be supported by everybody.

Every women and girl that has the ambition and will to join politics shouldn't be afraid to express their opinion on any issue they are concerned. They should dare walk straight on their path. The family support comes first in their efforts to succeed. Then, they should dare to overcome the patriarchal mentality, especially in villages where this challenge is even bigger. I wish to all women and girls who have the will and ambition to participate in political structures, to continue on their path and succeed so we can have a higher representation of women in Albanian parliament.

“Rely on yourself and walk on the path you build with caution and dedication”

**Ivana Shtylla, 47 years, wife and mother of two,
 Agronomist
 Deputy Chair of Mollas commune.**



All my achievements did not come easy or by chance, but through respecting personal and professional principles: determination, self confidence, honest work; study for professional growth in every aspect and area related to the local government unit activity; working without time limits toward improvement of the commune image, and improvement of social and economic life in our community.

Working with women in my commune has been an important part of my job, which I have always performed with dedication, never influenced by political affiliations or beliefs but looking at the women and girls as the main force for the development of life inside the family and in society, as the progress, and promoter of change.

My message to all young women and girls who want to embrace their future is: be yourself, support the progress to achieve the best for your families, the community and yourself. Don't discourage in front of obstacles because each of them can be overcome by women's strength and hard work.

“I knocked on every door and met every member of my community to listen closely to their problems and concerns”

**Shaqe Marinaj, 48 years, wife,
 Lawyer, Member of the Commune Council,
 Head of DP branch and Head of Women Democratic Forum
 in Shënkoll Commune.**



The valuable knowledge gained from participation in training programs related to women representation in politics, and experience gathered during electoral campaigns over years, I ran and was elected a member of Commune Council on the local elections of 2011, ranked the third on the



list. In my position as a member of the Council I raise the voice to advocate for citizens and especially youth and women, and contribute in increasing women representation in local governance.

“..only through hard work and professional growth you can achieve success and the steps of the career ladder should be climbed one by one, otherwise you fall!”

**Merita Tafa, 44,
Wife, mother of a child,
Tax Manager in Katundi i Ri Commune**



My political activism began with students’ movement of December 1990. I’ve participated in Democratic Party women’s forums. Since October 1992, with the new organization and functioning of the local government, I work in Katundi i Ri commune, Durres, where I’ve exercised and continue to implement important tasks of local governance. During this time I’ve participated in many trainings, organized from organizations, state and private institutions, domestic and foreign ones. I am committed to perform the assigned tasks professionally and by absolutely respecting the law. My career, started in 1991, has been growing since, thanks to my dedication and continuous studies.

Albanian politics should count only on honest and professional people dedicated to community service, and not on mediocre and unprofessional ones.

My message to young women and girls is that only through hard work and professional growth you can achieve success and the steps of the career ladder should be climbed one by one, otherwise you fall!

“We are not second hand citizens; we are half of world population”

**Etleva Mezini, wife and mother of a child,
Responsible of Children Protection
and Gender Equality Unit in Shushica Commune,
Head of Woman Forum of Socialist Party in Shushica,
Deputy Head of Woman Forum in Socialist Party in
Elbasan.**



I lived for 9 years in emigration. There I saw Albanian women working in very difficult jobs and being treated as second-class citizens. These difficulties of life in emigration made me reconsider expectations for my future, so I continued university studies in order to become useful to my family.

I decided to engage in political life in order to give my contribution to the community. I started as a member of Socialist Party, and then head of women forum of SP in Shushica commune and vice head for Elbasani qark.

Women and girls make up half of the population worldwide (men are aware of this too) and considering this, we must be aware of the role we play and our responsibility toward community.

We are the ones who take care for the family, children, land, cattle and if we were to compare how rural women and men spend their day, we would see that a woman works even 18 hours while a man 8-9 hours per day.

The same important as the role we play in families, we must consider the role we play in the community. So we should raise awareness and strengthen ourselves, get informed, be well prepared and able to prepare our children as well to face challenges and risks in a developing democracy and a constantly growing society. We should not never think that our political role or the one we play in the community does not count.

There are among us girls and women active in the political life, not only by voting, but by electing their representatives in local and central government very carefully.

We have 29 employees in the commune administration, eight of whom are women. One of the members of the municipal Council is a woman. We can not say that these are satisfactory figures but we really hope for this number to grow in the future.

I have had and continue to have cooperation with NGOs that operate in Elbasani and play an important role in empowering women in rural and urban areas, through meetings, trainings and projects.

I will continue to have these fruitful cooperation with all NGOs and institutions. Also, I believe and hope to have the support of all mothers, women and girls in our efforts to address problems and concerns of the community.

