



INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME • INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME

**MAIN PROJECT
FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

Project Name: Developing Rural Women´s Entrepreneurship

Project Registration Number: 02/02/21

Measure: 2.1. Sustainable use of nature and natural resources

Project Website: www.matkakori.net

For completion and submission to the Northern Periphery Programme Secretariat by:

30/11/2006



Executive Summary

The peripheral regions are suffering from depopulation, especially among women. Due to a predominantly male focused labour market as well as leisure time activities, women may choose to leave the region. Even if work opportunities may still exist for men, they often decide to leave as well as due to the limited social life created by the departure of the women, which has also led to decreasing birth rates. Improving the local economy and local opportunities to access training has been one of the key issues to emerge in all communities. In addition, many communities are concerned about the trend of their population to be increasingly ageing and non-economically active. Employment possibilities and alternative income generating opportunities for women are badly needed in Northern regions. Many entrepreneurs also lack marketing skills, which are most important if they wish to succeed.

The aim of the project Developing Rural Women's Entrepreneurship, Rural Business Women, was to focus on the development of the inhabitants and entrepreneurs in rural areas, especially women's small-scale entrepreneurs and tourism businesses in Northern Peripheral areas. All partner areas have high rates of female unemployment in common, as well as poor infrastructure, depopulation and many natural resources. The main function of this transnational project was to sustain the local economy and create employment possibilities for rural entrepreneurs in nature and tourism business, and related areas, by promoting female entrepreneurship and providing support for the establishment of local business.

Several concrete objectives had been set, such as giving better knowledge and skills to entrepreneurs about product development, marketing and markets, finding new raw materials from nature, and using nature in an environmentally sustainable way. It is necessary to determine women's motivation and the perceived obstacles for income-generating activities based on entrepreneurship, and to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences through networking, workshops and seminars with residents of the participating countries and networks.

In this project there were eight partners from four different countries; from Iceland Centre of continuous education and Iceland Regional Institute, from Scotland Moray College, Nairn Learning Centre; Scottish Agricultural College and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority and from Sweden Kvinnokooperativet Saga and from Finland Agrifood Research Finland and Kainuu Rural Advisory Centre as a lead partner. The project started in June 2003 and the activities ended in May 2006.

The project's national and inter-regional activities included practical workshops of entrepreneurs and rural authorities, study trips, exchange of experts, personal and enterprise-specific face-to-face advising, product development, market and economy analysis, dissemination of results in international and national seminars, guidelines for utilising natural heritage in tourism, exhibitions, enterprise contacts and co-operation networks as well as information leaflets and WWW-pages.

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Project Information and Objectives

The need to develop rural women's entrepreneurship was apparent through the whole project area in all four participating countries. The core problem was and still is the same; the peripheral regions are suffering from depopulation, especially among women. Due to a predominantly male focused labour market as well as leisure time activities, women may choose to leave the region. Even if work opportunities may still exist for men, they often decide to leave as well as due to the limited social life created by the departure of the women, which has also led to decreasing birth rates. Improving the local economy and local opportunities to access training has been one of the key issues to emerge in all communities. In addition, many communities are concerned about the trend of their population to be increasingly ageing and non-economically active. Employment possibilities and alternative income generating opportunities for women are badly needed in Northern regions. Many entrepreneurs also lack marketing skills, which are most important if they wish to succeed.

International partnership is seen as a new opportunity to learn from other examples, to innovate new product ideas and disseminate the knowledge from each country. In Northern Peripheral areas there are good natural resources in berries, mushroom, and herbs but the degree of usage could be a lot higher. There are other products, for example an increased interest in local and natural food products with associated quality labels, throughout the region. Another example is forest materials, which have recently increased in popularity, not only through the use of flowers and other material in decorative ways but also forest textiles, made from natural material. Since it is a quite new way to use raw material, there are problems concerning allergens, colour and material sustainability. It is important to consider issues of natural diversity and balance when harvesting natural materials. The extent of the benefits of ecologically sustainable collecting systems connected to tourism and rural entrepreneurship is as yet unknown.

Understanding of markets and their requirements is often lacking and there are continuing issues with quality standards and presentation of products. Similarly there may be only a poor understanding of the quality assurance requirements within a production chain from pickers/producers/processors to consumers. In the beginning of the project it was obvious that there exist opportunities within the new Scottish National Parks to mobilise producers to develop product added value systems, including benchmarking and quality assurance marks and labelling.

The main target groups of the project Developing Rural Women's Entrepreneurship, Rural Business Women, RBW, were entrepreneurs and inhabitants in the Northern Periphery region, especially women.

The main point in this transitional project was to sustain the local economy and create employment possibilities for rural entrepreneurs in the nature and tourism business and sectors connected with it by promoting entrepreneurship and providing support for the establishment of local business. Several concrete objectives had been set, such as giving better knowledge skills to entrepreneurs about product development, marketing and markets, finding new raw materials from nature, and using nature in an environmentally sustainable way. It is necessary to determine women's motivation and perceived obstacles for income-generating activities based on entrepreneurship, and to promote the exchange of knowledge and experience through networking, workshops and seminars with residents of the participating countries and networks.

Expected results were:

- To create new working possibilities and preserve existing working places
- New international networks for partners and target groups are created
- The development of new raw materials from nature and foresting and the use of nature in an environmentally sustainable way
- New food and tourism products and marketing opportunities
- Networking among women with university degrees or corresponding education in leading positions in organisations in rural areas focusing on leadership
- Information leaflets and www-pages

In the longer term, activities carried out in this project were assumed and also succeeded in some stages to provide possibilities to keep people in rural areas and decrease depopulation of the Northern Periphery region. The focus was on networking of the entrepreneurs, research stations, universities and advisory centres, as well as increasing their co-operation, and also improving the methods for use of natural products.

Networking between countries by exchanging experiences and creating enterprise contacts were seen as a great possibility to bring wider benefit the nature resources.

In order to create qualified and durable products from nature and rural tourism the focus in the project was in supporting female entrepreneurs and their interest of utilising nature in their business, by improving their skills in collection of the material, product development, marketing and entrepreneurial issues. The project's national and inter-regional activities included practical workshops of entrepreneurs and rural authorities, study trips, exchange of experts, personal and enterprise-specific face-to-face advising, product development, market and economy analysis, dissemination of results in international and national seminars, guidelines for utilising natural heritage in tourism, exhibitions, enterprise contacts and co-operation networks as well as information leaflets and WWW-pages.

In this project participated eight partners from four different countries; from Finland two partners, from Iceland as well two, from Scotland three and from Sweden there was one partner. In below there is closer description of the partners and their roles in this project.

Kainuu Rural Advisory Centre/Kainuu Centre of Women's Advisory Organisation for Development of Rural Areas, Finland is the regional development organisation within 10 municipalities of Kainuu. It is a generally useful, non-profit and non-governmental association, which finances its operations primarily by service fees, the state subsidy covering one fifth of the expenses. The main task of Rural Advisory Centre Kainuu is to support farms and rural enterprises in running successful business. Kainuu area comprises 24 million hectares total land area, of which 22 million hectares is forest, mainly used in the male-dominated forest industry for exporting wood and paper to world markets. However, multiple-use of forests and nature entrepreneurship is rising and presents a broad challenge for the area. In the nation-wide research of Kainuu Centre of Women's Advisory Organisation for Development of Rural Areas (2001), the results showed that women were interested in new and multiple collection products as a source of additional income as much as traditional berry processing. Also they were interested in nature tourism, and those women were also more motivated in training themselves to the tourism business and starting business through this method.

The main task of MTT Agrifood Finland, Kainuu Research Station was to perform cultivation and/or semi-cultivation trials on natural by-products. We concentrated on willow cultivation trials and pre-feasibility study of birch sap production with new technology. With the help of willow cultivation trials, 27 willow taxa were tested for performance, winter hardiness and yield potential in Kainuu to support entrepreneurs interested in willow production and product development.

The Finnish activities to improve women entrepreneurship in nature business were as follows:

- 1) preliminary small-scale research into quality routes from nature to consumer, green travelling packages and markets, learning best-practices on environmental code systems (e.g. genuine Finnish farm product) and the social environment Improvement of female entrepreneurs
- 2) product development by research of new materials used in forest textiles and new products from nowadays not usable natural materials, green travelling packages (nature trips, picking trips, well-being treatments, organic food, outdoor snacks, colour from nature products, courses etc.) and marketing analysis for new products
- 3) research into natural by-product cultivation and semi-natural cultivation together with Agricultural Research Station and farms (for example decorative willow cultivation farm tests) to improve the use of wild plants and yields, and product developing research by experts.
- 4) face-to-face advice for entrepreneurs in primary production, financing, marketing, product development, environmental and quality issues
- 5) marketing activities: marketing contacts through networking (by entrepreneurs, consumers, restaurants, retail stores etc.) and national and international study trips for entrepreneurs; markets and events; local courses about marketing, natural by-product tourism, product development, semi-wild cultivation, picking, quality, environment systems and well-being and health know-how; study trips; activities and events; promotional materials drawn up with entrepreneurs and experts, for example, leaflets about nature by-product buyers, counsellors and pickers in Kainuu district, marketing leaflets about products, WWW-pages for entrepreneurs,
- 6) hand-book of quality and environmental issues for nature enterprises (in Finland), CD-rom about enterprising, laws relating to nature entrepreneurship, product development, environmental and quality issues.

The beneficiaries in Finland were women who work or want to work as entrepreneurs with nature by-products and/or with tourism.

The Swedish partner Kvinnokoperativet Saga is a co-operative for women run by women. The co-operative was founded in 1998 and given the status of Regional Centre for Women in the county of Gävleborg, Sweden in 2000. The aims of the co-operatives are to create meeting points for women and promote and establish local, national and international networks. Saga works with different projects both national and international. In the county of Gävleborg steel, iron and forestry are the traditional industries, which has led to a very male-dominated labour market. Women work mostly in the public sector or have small business of their own. The women in the region need to give their businesses financial strength. The northern part of the county is a rural area with a small local market. The entrepreneurs must find new markets on a national and transactional level.

The Swedish partner worked on following sectors:

1) Forestry

Target group: female forest owners or a mixed group

The purpose was to form a group which is interested in developing products from forests. This group has its starting point from the results of the preparatory study.

b) The provision of accurate education and training, in how to run enterprises, administration, accounting, product developing, marketing, and especially in how to form a co-operative enterprise, with the Co-operative Centre in Gävleborg and the Association of small enterprises in Gävleborg.

c) Product development.

d) Research and marketing, on local, regional, national levels, and how to export, together with the trade and industry organisation in the municipalities and the Chamber of Commerce in Gävleborg

2) Food sector

Target group: local female farm producers

a) Form a group who are interested of developing products out of their own production.

b) Give them accurate education (see point b) in the previous group)

c) Developing of new products.

d) Research and marketing on local, regional and national level.

3) Highly educated female groups within the forest sector

Form networks with women working in a traditional man-dominated branch as the forestry sphere, offer them meeting points, interesting workshops and opportunities to make study trips.

Scottish partner who worked as a national co-ordinator in this project was Rural Tourism Department of the Scottish Agricultural College, Auchincruive, Scotland. The priorities of SAC are to sustain the local economy and our procedures for doing this is through skills development, technical and management advisory work and providing support to the establishment of local business networks and farmer/tourism discussion groups. Essentially they call this Knowledge Transfer and they do this through a variety of mechanisms: education, training, on-line learning, consultancy and advisory work, information leaflets and supporting farmers and other business meetings.

The overall aims of this proposal were to promote sustainability within the rural economy, create employment opportunities and support female entrepreneurship.

This project was addressed three of the key aims identified in the Scottish Executive Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture (FSSA):

1) Focusing on producing food and other products the customer wants

2) Playing a major role in sustainable rural development and helping maintain the prosperity of rural communities

3) Embracing change and new opportunities

Project activities targeted small and micro rural enterprises including farms with the aim of improving the quality of management activity within existing businesses and ensuring diversified activities and new start enterprises aspire to overcome benchmark and quality standards for operational, production and management activities.

There was a related need for building and developing marketing expertise through greater understanding of food chain issues thereby building relationships of trust within the production chain and understanding of the needs of the marketplace. This project aimed to bring together all these issues (highlighted in the Forward Strategy) to develop a holistic programme of training workshops:

- Developing & diversifying new and existing rural and farm food products
- Identification and adoption of quality marks and branding for rural and farm products
- Development of existing and identification of new markets and new marketing opportunities
- Improvement to entrepreneurship skills
- Developing production and marketing networks for rural and farm products

The project addressed these training and skills development needs and develop personal development profiles through a programme of training needs analysis / focus group activities and skills delivery through training workshops. In addition to technical and production skills the project delivered business management and marketing expertise, and information technology skills.

The programme was offered to two groups of rural business women within the Highlands and Islands area Argyll/Cowal and Moray/Strathspey. Partner organisations (Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority [LLTNPA] and Moray College) have identified these areas from previous research and development work as requiring the support potentially deliverable through this project. In Argyll and Cowal, the project worked closely with community and economic development activities within and surrounding the LLTNPA and:

- built on the good levels of participation in the Community Future programme
- continued to employ local Community Agents to ensure widespread knowledge of the project
- addressed declining employment and training opportunities for women and young people

In Moray and Strathspey the project built on and extended into the NPP area existing work which SAC is carrying out on behalf of Scottish Enterprise to improve business skills of Farm Women within the Cairngorms National Park area. The Scottish component within this project offered food/culinary, activity tourism and new natural product (forestry) development as a rural enterprise diversification activity within the overall context of developing improved rural product marketing. SAC and our partners (Moray College, LLTNPA) have staff experienced in these vocational areas. We also have considerable experience in the area of food marketing & processing (especially small or farm scale production), new product development, outdoor activities and business development.

This was achieved through the development and piloting of a training and personal development programme aimed at supporting rural women diversifying into the food and rural tourism market, project activities included:

- 1) Market appraisal of opportunities for business diversification-farmers markets network, food tourism outlets and networks etc.
- 2) Development of benchmarking exercises for food and rural tourism businesses
- 3) Development from new and existing learning materials of a 'training workshop programme' consisting of a series of structured learning sessions designed to:
- 4) Provided food and tourism product and market knowledge
- 5) Encouraged an understanding of market needs
- 6) Improved entrepreneurial skills

Activities commenced with a personal development need analysis undertaken through training needs analysis and focus group work. This provided both personal development information but the focus group work was also helped to draw the group together. The programme involved a series of one-day expert training workshops each commencing with a presentation from the topics listed below. These were followed by visits or practical case studies of good / best practice led by host farmers and business owners depending upon the overall topic of the workshop. Inter-regional partnerships was developed through existing Partner networks in particular through the LLTNPA with National/Regional Parks in Scotland. Experience with previous women's groups has shown that participants also look for a range of practical skills in addition to the broader skills of business diversification. For example female business skills on farm - "Making the farm a business".

Workshops addressing the theme of business development and marketing in local production, rural and food tourism would included the following:

- Diversification and grant schemes
- Marketing Research
- Case studies – previous people diversified

- Promotion
- Direct marketing and marketing your business / group marketing
- New product development
- New product appraisal
- New product identification and processing
- Quality labelling schemes
- Farmers Markets
- Business start-up and motivation to do it!

Also addressing Business Skills for Rural / Farm Women.

- Administration
- Business management
- Business appraisal
- IT Skills
- European Computer Driving Licence

Group development activities

- Group working
- Capacity/confidence building
- Communications and networking
- Local area appraisal

The plan was that the groups would operate independently but would be brought together at least once per year to exchange experiences, ideas, network amongst themselves and potentially develop collaboration. The work of the groups were supposed to utilise the films and case studies prepared under the NPP Article 10 project, Northern Women, New Images, a project led by Moray College.

The Institute of Regional Development is a non-profit organisation funded by the government which lies under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The Institute monitors and researches regional development in Iceland. Its main function is to contribute to regional development through the implementation of government policy via the introduction of regional strategies. Its operations are aimed at strengthening settlements in rural areas through the support of viable, long-term projects with diverse economic bases.

The area covered in the Icelandic national activity is the Norðvesturkjördæmi (North west region) and Norðausturkjördæmi (North east region), the North-west with a population of around 30 000, and the North east with 38 000 inhabitants. The reduction in population is present in all the area and a decrease in the income of farmers and their number (average age amongst them has been rising in the past years). Sheep farming is widespread and also a costal access of many farmers, both giving possibilities for many interesting raw materials for natural products. In these regions are smaller areas where the main focus will be set. Each course will be offered in a smaller area, 3 areas in each region (west and east), organized with communications and relatively easy transportation in mind. Target areas are chosen by level of unemployment of women (also hidden unemployment, which is common amongst farmers), reduction in population of women and low average income of women.

The plan was to focus on large regions in the courses, because of scattered population in the area. That called for the element of distant learning, in the form of video-meetings and computer communication. The main objective was the use of natural resources for a sustainable business. By natural resources Icelandic focused on by-products from farms and unused natural resources, and placed emphasis on quality management and product development.

Project's inter-regional management, reporting to EU and co-ordination of international activities were carried out in RACKainuu (including staff of part-time international co-ordinator & part-time project secretary). Each region had a special budget for the project management. Each region took duty on collecting national co-financing, national financial and activity reporting in 6 and later in 3 months periods, over-all national activities & regional auditing. The national responsible bodies arranged a national co-ordinator to carry out the activities (full-time or part-time for 3 years, with the experience on project management, Eu-procedures and international co-operation), and financial secretary services for financial reporting and accounting.

Project Implementation

In Finland the interest in usage of natural resources was enhanced especially by organising courses which reached larger group of people. In the courses the participants were taught to collect and harvest raw materials from nature as well as produce utility articles and decorative products from willow and birch bark. Most of the participants of the courses were seeking a hobby for themselves, however at least five entrepreneurs in the area produces and sells products from willow and they have get most of the willow research made with the help of this project. The willow product development was not only the material research but also new ways to join willow and other materials, ie. yarn. The willow turned to be a very versatile and flexible material from which can be made animal statues, flower holders, table cloths, wall textures and Christmas decorations. The inspiration was sought in study trips to handicrafts fairs both inside the Finland and to partner countries. The natural way to get benefit from surrounding nature is to collect herbs, mushrooms and berries which can be preserved and sold for customers. During courses the flora was used without prejudice; for example wine was made from dandelion and rhubarb. But also old methods to use nature gathered also young people interested in grand mothers' know how to use nature as a source of herbs, food stuff and healing plants.

The product and production are the pre-conditions for the enterprise. In many cases the product and/or service is good quality but the markets and customers do not meet each others. Well developed business plan helps entrepreneur to assess resources, skills, markets and set the goal to his/her business. In Finland seven business plans to female entrepreneurs were made. This project offered the possibility to gain new customers as arranging the spring and Christmas fairs in which the entrepreneurs from rural area get market place in the city for two days and could by this way to tie new customer relationships as well meet other entrepreneurs. The knowledge of marketing among entrepreneurs was enhanced by providing courses in marketing and by assisting entrepreneurs to create an own web-page. The six days series of lectures from raw material to a product handled crucial issues which have to be remembered when the new product is planned to bring into markets. The project acted as a facilitator which gathered together the business advisors and the entrepreneurs. Far too often the entrepreneurs lack the network through which they could reach the professionals of ie. the product development. For example in developing the mushroom sausage the project arranged the kitchen, the specialist in cooking of sausage and the entrepreneur had the idea and the raw substance. The product samples were tested and tasted by the sample group and their opinions were collected in the fair.

When producing food the great attention has to be paid to the product safety and quality. The base food stuff has to be handled carefully all the way from the nature to the customer's plate. The courses of product quality were arranged 3 times.

The quality of the cottage accommodation was lifted by filling a cottage book for the use of tourists in which the basic information of the cottage ie. the location, emergency instructions, was written down in five different languages; Finnish, Russian, Swedish, English and German. Enclosed were three guidance books about sustainable use of environment, concerning energy and purchase.

Strengths: Good relationship between partners made it easy to take contact. The experience in project coordination from several previous projects facilitated the project administration. The project made the courses and individual business counselling possible also to the minor enterprises which do not afford to buy it from the markets.

Weaknesses: Changes in project staff. Some entrepreneurs seem to be opportunistic and always want to take most of all the projects in the area. They learn to get advising free and think that everything has to give them free of charge. Also the appreciation and commitment to the free business advising weakens because of the doubt 'cheap cannot be good'.

Opportunities: This project gave a good basis for enhancing nature based and tourism businesses in rural areas from which to continue. The networks created are valuable in the channel to exchange best practices.

Threats: The entrepreneurs rarely have time to sustain the networks created in this project if there is no facilitator who actively organises the meeting points ie. benchmarking and study trips to the them.

Unfortunately this kind of work is possible only with the help of project funding.

In Sweden the main activity was short courses in Book accounting, price-setting, product development – carpentry, and repairing. One long course "Rural tourist development, culture heritage and local meal" has been developed during the project, together with Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan and the tourist and food expert

Urban Laurin. Other main activity was seminars; one inspirational one, two marketing seminars, two product development seminars, a) design and wood and b) logotypes and trademarks, one seminar on "How to set the right price" in 2005, two seminars on "Rural tourist development, culture heritage and local meal" and one final seminar in may 2006, which summarised the project. Events were arranged; Dal-britta fair, three times of which the project itself had a stand once, International Womens´ day twice with on own stand and lectures. Fairs in order to reach larger audience; Presentation at Nordanstigsmässan and Framtidsmässan Dellenbygden. Presentations in Venice at Intereg IIIc "Study visit and seminar", two project leader conferences for northern periphery programme in Umeå. Regional study trips , two (Gästrikland and Hälsingland), *National study trips*, four to Södermanland, Jämtland and two in Dalarna. Transnational study trips, in which all the partners and some of their entrepreneurs participated were arranged altogether four times; once to every partner country, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Scotland.

Because of the lack of resources the individual business advising was used only in six cases. Five reference group/steering group meetings have been held and also, a number of planning meetings with Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan. Among other activities partly involved in the project is local development work within the region.

One of the main methods was to arrange meeting-places. That has been in forms of courses, seminars, events and study trips. The project hasn't evaluated the different forms. A small group that regularly meets has its advantages for each person attending. The seminars and the study trips, on the other hand, gave an inspirational input, which often gave further impulses to develop new ideas for some entrepreneurs and business contacts.

What we can see is that the project seems to have made the participating individual woman beware of her opportunities as a business woman in her rural surrounding. Also the whole group has been acknowledged.

Weakness: Many other projects exist within the area. The entrepreneurs have been interested in courses on different subjects for instance "IT". But often the course hasn't taken place as the participants lack time or a sometimes similar offer from other organizations or group. The area for the project is hard to overview with such a small budget and the entrepreneurs are not keen on travelling too far. The project has given contact names, but the budget was too small to follow up these advise but we know some entrepreneurs have for example got help from IT-rådgivarna (IT-advisors). (A partner in Sagas Ruta Fem-project. See below)

Strength: Established co-operation with Hushållningssällskapet (The Rural Economy and Agricultural Society) with different courses and their two projects; "local food and tourism" and "lamb". Contact with Wij Trädgårdar, as a form of market/trade place for local products. Wij arrange a big Nordic food-seminar in June 2006 in cooperation with the Local Women's Resource Center (WRC) Rut in Trönö and Saga. A new regional project on regional and local growth and development with 17 partners has started in December 2005. (RuTa Fem) Main subject for the project is co-operation on entrepreneurship.

Threat: Small local entrepreneurs will not be able to compete with big national businesses because of lack of money to invest and fear to leave a paid "half-time job".

Opportunities: The knowledge and experiences on how business life is for rural women has made it possible to a new project on entrepreneurship. The partnership for the project consists of important organisations on the regional and local development. There will be activities offered to women on a more individual base.

Scotland's focus groups were held in both the Moray area and Cowal areas at start and during project to:

- understand barriers and difficulties
- establish need for training and support
- create networking opportunities

These focus groups were attended by staff from Moray College, SAC, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, and Local enterprise Companies

The project is also designed to be family friendly with allowances provided to improve access to learning for lone parents, the geographically remote & the financially disadvantaged

Group training sessions were held in both the Moray area and Cowal areas throughout project:

- Responsive to needs and circumstances
- With childcare provision (particularly in the Cowal area where this was seen as more important)
- At times and places to suit women

These training sessions were staffed by a mixture of staff from Moray College, SAC, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, private training companies and Local enterprise Companies.

Formalised Network established:

- Promotion of the RBW project through leaflets, poster and notice boards in both the Moray area and Cowal areas
- Secured additional funding for the Cowal area
- Enabled the group to form partnerships with other agencies
- Continued focus for women's enterprise in Cowal
- Continued focus for women's enterprise in Moray through strong links to private enterprise and training companies.

Transnational Links

- Visits to partner countries in Sweden, Finland and Iceland
- Hosting visits from Swedish, Finnish and Icelandic staff and entrepreneurs
- Organisation of and participation in final seminar at Aviemore Scotland.

Individual Mentoring at end of project offered in both the Moray area and Cowal areas was used to assess "business health" of individual women's enterprises.

Final Evaluation session was organised with participants in which the review of inputs, process, outputs and outcomes of the Project the Moray area and Cowal areas was presented. The focus was to help to guide future development of the network particularly in the Cowal area.

Strengths: Establishing the Network unlocked full potential of project, providing childcare enabled more young women to attend training and sharing of information/ideas between partners.

Weaknesses: Slow start of project – missed opportunities, not enough time to research training provision – not always good trainers and complex financial reporting took a lot of staff time away from project delivery.

Opportunities: Able to offer training which is not generally available - e.g chainsaw safety, photoshop and network has been able to access funding and support in their own right

Threats: Perceived as a National Park project, and therefore not available in wider Cowal area – feeling of exclusion. Volunteer fatigue – same women participating and supporting network, with little time available.

The project implementation in Iceland was a combined construction of:

1) Short courses, focusing on the usage of herbs. Several methods were used to reach the many interested women all over rural Iceland.

a) offering a day's course in combination to a conference and a fair(held by the Directorate of labour), teaching business management, marketing, business planning and self empowerment building, offering different courses for the same travelling group of women entrepreneurs in autumn 2003 (around 150 participants, Þorlákshöfn south Iceland, Seyðisfjörður East Iceland, Akureyri North Iceland, Borgarnes West Iceland), .

b) teaching the same course in 3 different places spring 2004 (106 participants, Egilsstaðir East Iceland, Húnaþing vestra, North Iceland, Þingborg South Iceland), about the basic needs of the herbal entrepreneurs and about organic certification process.

c) Teaching by video conference, about herbal cultivation and product development, spring 2005 (around 50 participants, Akranes West Iceland (source), Egilsstaðir East Iceland, Höfn Far south east Iceland, Akureyri North Iceland).

d) By sending self learning material to entrepreneurs in autumn 2005 (108 receivers). Teaching about habits of Icelanders in herbal drinks through time.

e) A course for our foreign visitors during their stay in august 2005, a very successful course done by the herbal pioneer Jón Gunnlaugsson (firm Ísplöntur). Covering the "do's and don'ts of herbal entrepreneurship".

The video conferencing, although a difficult form of organizing and teaching turned out to be the most successful method, both considering the reach to very distant places, but even further in the women realising what a big and powerful group they are, seeing and hearing each other. The cost was moderate for that type of a course, not having to transport staff for very long distances, and not the entrepreneurs either. Also it was a very important factor that the lectures were reachable on the projects web site after that, and until the end of the project.

Our main strengths in this field was to have not tied our program down from the beginning, making us able to fulfil needs as they occurred and the project developed. Also our very good network of specialist who were ready to join in and teach and our focus on herbs as a main theme. Our main weakness however that the participants were scattered all over the country and had not always opportunity to travel to reach us, due to weather, domestic duties, seasonal work etc.

- 2) Personal business advice and coaching to women entrepreneurs in the herb business. Having two professional consultants for a long period of time during the project (Bjarnheidur the whole period and Helga Björg for 1 ½ year) was vital for the success of the project. Women could reach them at all times with all kinds of questions concerning developing a business idea, running the business or financing development. We also had good connections to expertise at the Agricultural university of Iceland, having Ásdís Helga Bjarnadóttir to answer all kinds of specific questions about cultivation of herbs and the biological certification process.

The basic message to the women was that no matters were too small to discuss and the problems that came up were only there for solving. The most common matters of the women were pricing, packaging for a new product, ways of selling, finding finance for turning a business idea into product, getting information for the legal framework around herbal business etc. Through the time we developed a small data bank on the website with the most common matters (see 4.).

Our most active entrepreneurs had really coaching through the whole process of developing a business idea and turning it to reality. Their opinion was usually that the framework of resource centres, innovation offices and local consultants have not enough interest and were not ready to shed blood, sweat and tears with them, so to speak. Many of our entrepreneurs had had the experience that business consultants found their ideas too small and therefore not appealing.

We did not limit this part entirely to herbs, but involved natural tourism and usage of natural resources in general, for example, seal watching, using nature as a frame for private owned health care and using volcanic sediments for ceramic glazes.

Our most valuable strength in this field was our knowledge about the needs of women entrepreneurs, our skilful staff and a very good network of consultants all through the country ready to assist us in all kinds of ways, so we could service our women better. Our weaknesses were not having a strong background in environmental issues (which was solved after Gudrun Tryggvadottir joined the project) and in herbal usage and biology (solved by many consultants).

- 3) Consultants assisting women entrepreneurs in applying for funding for product development, marketing, research of raw materials, packaging development etc. (from various innovation funds in Iceland).

The Institute for regional development had in the beginning of the project just finished a very big research about public innovation funds and their grants through several years, divided between men and women. Bjarnheidur and Helga were a part of this research team and the result from that research was basically that women were getting 20% of all grants from the funds. We knew therefore that our first step would have to be to break barriers. During 2004 we encouraged women to join us in sending very many grants applications to all the possible funds and helped them to write qualified applications, and simultaneously worked through the directing boards, talking to everybody, trying to open their minds to the importance of the herbal business for rural development, and as a fresh and innovative concept in

the Icelandic business environment.

In the spring 2005 we got our harvest and are still seeing very much result from this groundwork. Over 15 millions of Icelandic kronur (over 15 thousand €) were granted (by many Icelandic funds) to very many and different herbal businesses, and not only to the women we were encouraging and assisting, but also noticing other similar opportunities, that were not related to RBW. That was very pleasing and not expected side effect.

Most of the grants have been to support product development and marketing, but also technical research and setting quality standards. The types of herbal businesses range from nature orientated tourism, to herbal cosmetics and retail of herbal products.

- 4) Dissemination of information from various sources about: multiple usage of herbs, business start-up and management, funds supporting entrepreneurs, legislation environment in the herb business in Iceland, published books and other written material about herbs, herbal businesses in Iceland and more.

Our web site www.freyjur.is has been a very valuable tool to publish all kinds of material, to give information and to reach women in distant places. We were clever enough to form it well for these needs from the beginning and it has been very much used, both by women in the project and all kinds of people outside it.

Not only have very many Icelandic firms and persons contacted us through the web, searching for example for herbs, but also foreign ones with same intentions, wanting to buy Icelandic herbs.

- 5) Study tours to the other countries, showing the women the similarities of the situation and the differences, broadening their view, getting them interesting ideas and the most important thing; to get to know all the other women in the project.

It was somehow not so easy to get women going on trips to other countries, but the ones who went are very much inspired and have had much head start in finding interesting solutions, both in development and marketing, but also in self-empowerment, which is a very important factor for an entrepreneur. Family matters, such as child care were the most common obstacles for women not being able to participate. Also seasonal farm work in some cases.

After some of the tours we had entrepreneurs writing about the trips and experience to publish on the web site and we have had a lot of positive response to that, because our women got ideas and came to new conclusions from reading the stories.

Even though the main focus was not the same in all the countries, the basic structure of the environment for the entrepreneurs is similar in the different countries and they are facing similar problems, such as distance from market, smallness of their firms and decrease in population in their area etc..

We decided at some point that even though we were not always able to bring many women to the gathered meetings of all participating countries, we still tried to take them on tours to the partners in other and more convenient times for them. These trips have not been less successful and not only for us, a group of Scottish women has bonded very well to some of our Icelandic ladies and they did the same in return, prolonging a stay here to meet the women in North Iceland in August 2005.

Two very valuable courses were planned for us by Finns during two trips there about the active chemical components of common herbs and chemical components of berries. This scientific approach was very important for the groups involved, being groups of our most active entrepreneurs and the ones that have been most successful.

The strongest aspect of this activity is of course the empowerment building that occurs in all the groups in all the countries, and the weakest point that languages are a limiting factor for many women, not only in Iceland but all over the participating area.

- 6) Network of women, exchanging information through various sources and at various opportunities. Also an online information source of women entrepreneurs with contact information, their specialisation in the field and their access to various herbs (for other producers, stating which herb/s each of the women could provide).

36 women are registered as herb pickers, with necessary information about possible species etc. 9 women are ready to produce or pre-produce for other producers or distributors. 4 webs of women's firms are registered, etc.

- 7) Activities to promote the herbal rural business women of Iceland in the press and to the public.

a) By press, we have had several interviews (attachments), both directly about the project, but more importantly about the entrepreneurs involved.

The latest addition to this flora is an interview in the weekly magazine Vikan, 21th of June 2006, 4 whole pages, to one of our entrepreneurs Adalbjorg Thorsteinsdottir. The title "Magic balms" is referring to a problem of herbalists in Iceland, by legislation not being able to tell about the treatments, that herbal balms can heal. We (RBW) supported Adalbjorg in hiring a writer who wrote short rimes for her, telling in fairytale style how old witches and wizards used this and that herb for this and that treatment in the old days. This has been the most powerful base in her marketing from then on, not breaking any law, but yet telling what her products can do.

b) We organised an exhibition in the City Hall of Reykjavik with all foreign guests, our most advanced entrepreneurs and selected women entrepreneurs from the capital area. The title of it was "Gull í mó" (Wild treasures). Also we had some important institutes introducing their services to the women, Landvernd (Icelandic Environment Association), Lifandi Landbúnaður (Women's activity group of the Farmers' Association of Iceland), Tún, vottunarstofa (organic Certification agency (IOFAM certified)) and The Institute of regional Development. The exhibition was opened by the working head of Reykjavik government Arni Thor Sigurdsson. The aim was to introduce the herbal entrepreneurship of Icelandic women to our partners, to introduce our partners to our women entrepreneurs, as well as to be as visible as possible in the media. And last but not least to unite the Icelandic women working with herbs in one way or another on entrepreneurial bases in different parts of the country for one day in one place for the possible forming of future cooperation. The exhibition took place at the 9th of august. It was advertised in two of the biggest newspapers of Iceland and an interview with the project manager and one of the entrepreneurs, Aðalbjörg Þorsteinsdóttir aired on the TV's morning program (with an audience on average by tens of thousands, mostly women). The show was very successful presenting over 20 Icelandic participants and 25 of the visiting partners from Scotland, Sweden and Finland.

c) By lectures. We have introduced the project on several occasions, both inside country (NPP meeting, meeting of forestry farmers in East Iceland etc.) and in Scotland during our last visit in March 2006. This has been done by Power point presentations and in that work and in the promotion work around the City hall exhibition we have been so lucky to have Gudrun Tryggvadottir working for us, being a professional graphic designer.

Research on our target group was made throughout the project, finding out the necessary steps to take to support them, finding out what resources they have and what they are capable of as entrepreneurs. Also a small research about how to price wild harvested herbs of some 12 common species was made. This can then be used as a guide to the women, on how to price the raw material.

Herbal business SWOT analysis:

Strengths: Uniqueness due to an Arctic flora, historically traditional material is being rediscovered, strong entrepreneurs with a lot of drive, pure nature (still) very far from heavy industrial areas of the world (still), easy access to organic certification recognised world wide (IOFAM certified Icelandic firm) for fair price. Headstrong women with lots of endurance.

Weaknesses: Remote areas are hard to reach, lack of computer skills by the older generation that have the knowledge, lack of language skills of many entrepreneurs, Prospects of marketing the products seems „out of reach“ and hard to manage. Too little recognition of herbalists and alternative medicine (yet), resulting in strict regulations and hostile legislation, in some ways.

Opportunities: Interested customers, Growing interest amongst foreigners for Icelandic nature products. Growth of the “organic” market for all kinds of goods all over the world. The recognition of Icelandic “Viking investors” in the economy of the neighbouring countries. Internet marketing opportunities.

Threats: Small market, too little cooperative initiative amongst women. Hostile development of Icelandic industry (many new aluminium factories). Negative image of Iceland as a natural treasure phenomenon due to destruction of the nature, with growing power plants and chemical factories.

The project started later and slower than planned and due to this some of the budget left unspent. Also some targets could not be reached but as well some objectives were exceeded. The surprise was how bureaucratic the project administration is and how it swallows the resources from real project implementation, and the internal checks and inspections make all the actors a little bit too cautious and by that way prevent the use of common sense. All these paper works are seen in our focus groups’ eyes as a means to make the decisions makers and white collars necessary. Of course the misabuse of sparse project funding has to be prevented but anyway no-one should forget that all the money funded by EU and nations are taxpayers’ money and they should also get most from it.

The project has put most of the budget costs, besides the administrative ones, to arrange the different forms of meeting-places. As far as we can see, and based on the participants own comments and evaluations, that has been the success in our project.

Project Results

Main actions in this transnational project included all the steps which has to be taken in order to get a new business or product to the market and these stages were divided in the four groups; developing primary production, product development, marketing and female entrepreneurship.

Developing primary production had four sub-objectives:

- to improve knowledge and production management in these key areas to provide high quality products.
- to create up-dated registration system of buyers and pickers in various areas, to offer a large network for marketing
- to find new raw materials for collection and utilisation and to improve collection methods management systems, and transport logistics
- to find ways to increase yield from nature

In product development the focus was in quality

- To guide entrepreneurs in financing applications to develop processing and utilising the materials (e.g. labelling, packaging, durability, allergy etc.) and raise the values of the products and efficiency of production
- To improve and optimise production processing by testing different methods and finding new models for production.
- To create quality routes from nature to consumer
- To create new tourism programmes for women and families by utilising nature and natural products
- Nature-based handcrafts and forest textile courses, the creation and production of various programme services in nature trips, picking trips, well-being treatments based on natural products, organic food, outdoor snacks etc (Green travelling)

In order to succeed, it is necessary not only to have a good product, but also marketing skills are crucial for an entrepreneur. Market competition is increasing and marketing areas are widening all the time. Thus the development activities in marketing are:

- Improving skills aimed at increasing market volume
- Researching new market areas and potential consumer groups
- Increasing systematic marketing
- Producing marketing leaflets for products
- Developing marketing plans for entrepreneurs
- Developing co-operative marketing, networking, developing business plans in marketing
- Bringing nature to towns by markets and events
- Bringing tourists to the countryside by offering nature promoted tourism packages

In order to raise nature enterprising profitability, it is important to increase the knowledge of enterprise. The aim of female entrepreneurship was to raise knowledge concerning

- business management: different ways of enterprising, profitability, production costs, business plans, quality management and other entrepreneur issues
- clientele service and production of programme services know-how
- the creation of high quality and environmentally friendly systems for entrepreneurs
- well-being and health know-how
- the establishment of local and international networks between partners, research centres and local target groups.
- the improvement and development of skills and knowledge of the network, by advisory and education work and provide support to the establishment of local business.
- the exchange of knowledge and experiences through workshops, seminars and study tours with entrepreneurs in the participating countries.

The cultivation of willow for basketry and other constructions started about ten years ago in Finland because of great interest and good demand for cultivated willow. Towards the end of 1990s there were two projects in Finland concerning willow production. More than 250 different species, subspecies, varieties etc. called taxa were tested on trial farms in Central and Southern Finland by Mr. Pekka Ilén (ProAgria, Jyväskylä).

Willow cultivation and product development was one focus in Kainuu in Rural Business Women project. In Northern Finland willow cultivation trials had not been conducted and results were lacking, which taxa to recommend for entrepreneurs. Thus two willow trials were started at MTT (Agrifood Research Finland) Kainuu Research Station in Sotkamo in 2004. Unfortunately we couldn't start the trials in year 2003 because the project was started in midsummer 2003.

In cooperation with Mr. Ilén, 27 willow taxa were chosen for a preliminary trial to be tested for performance, winter hardiness and yield potential. In addition to willows originating from Finnish nature, four basketry willow varieties from Europe were included as well as four Swedish willow varieties bred for biomass production. The trial acted also as an exhibition of different types of willows for growers and entrepreneurs constructing willow works.

The smallest taxa produced twigs less than one meter, the most robust ones about 3 meter long rods. Also the amount of rods produced varied a lot. What length and diameter is wanted depends on the item to be constructed. The long rod producing and winter hardy taxa are suitable for living structures outdoors. In this respect the most promising were *Salix schwerinii* and Swedish variety 'Karin' (*Salix viminalis* x *S. burjatica*). Purple willows including variety 'Belgish Rood' and *Salix purpurea* x *rosmarinifolia* were best in small or medium size willows.

Based on earlier experiences from above mentioned taxa in more southern locations, 7 small to medium size taxa out of them were chosen to be tested in a trial with four replicates. The greatest emphasis was on winter hardiness. *Salix* x *mollissima*, purple willow and *Salix viminalis* produced the biggest number of saleable rods. There had been problems with cold storing of *S. pentandra* cuttings results thus being much less than expected from this taxon.

The yield results of the trials were presented in report only from the second year 2005, because the yield of the planting year was small as usual. Also the second yield is supposed to be smaller than would be the third one. The third yield will be harvested and reported although not supported by RBW project which will end before harvesting season. The results will be published by MTT and forwarded to entrepreneurs interested in willow cultivation. The willow trial and the tasks intended for MTT research centre were performed as planned.

In Sweden the activities have mainly focused on different forms of education, short and longer courses, inspirational seminars, study visits, events and fairs as well as individual business advising. The topics have concerned knowledge of products from local origins, both based on primary agricultural and forestry sector. Much effort has been put on product development, design and marketing. In business development: courses in accounting, price setting, marketing and co-operation. The individual business advising has focused on business plans, marketing and promotional material, both for women about to start a business company as

well as for existing enterprises expanding their market. The project offered many opportunities: such as meeting-places, study visits and events to market and getting in contact with future partners and/or customers. The marketing events have made the participating entrepreneurs known to a larger public. The RBW-project has been able to send some entrepreneurs to other courses as baking and food hygiene. Many of the participants in the RBW-project also joined other arrangements, for example in tourism competence development. IT-rådgivarna, a project all over the county dealing with basic computer knowledge and advising to small companies, have helped some entrepreneurs to be better on their computer and services connected to that.

Better knowledge and skills to entrepreneurs about product development, marketing and markets. Experiences are that very often other duties take the entrepreneur's time and they can't join the activities.

The objective to find new raw materials from nature did not fulfil totally. Instead the use of previously used material was enhanced and the usage of these 'old' materials was renewed. See more in Project Implementation.

The objective to use nature in an environmentally sustainable way can be said it was reached. The project has had a sustainable approach to every action and the awareness of entrepreneurs about environmental aspects was added.

Women entrepreneurs in general are very creative and have a lot of ideas, but very few of them have the possibilities of being a full time entrepreneur because of family life, lack of time and money. The project has followed some entrepreneurs to grow strong enough to concentrate more on income-generating activities.

Networking among women was one result which seems to stay alive also after the project period. Resource centres will continue to arrange assemblies, for inspiration as well as on special skills to give support and further training within new projects. We will also create opportunities to formal and informal meeting places. The whole network will have information and invitations from Saga and the other WRCs. We intend to follow the network formed from the long course on "Rural tourist development, culture heritage and local meal" especially and support them if need.

To create new working possibilities and preserve existing working places was the most challenging objective. The process is an ongoing task, Rural Business Women have offered new possibilities to give the individual courage and self trust. Examples of that is the local dairy and the pre-settlement on a production kitchen, where Birgitta Höglund is the responsible person. She is also active in the WRC Rut in Trönö. Some other entrepreneurs within the long course have developed local products and/or new niches. One entrepreneur is running a chalet and a mountain pasture Slars-Ollas Fäbod. Lena Thyren and Kristin Törnqvist, is started up a catering business, Cooking Queens. Lisa Eriksson, Elisabeth Eriksson, started a grocery store - Flitiga Lisa in Ljusdal. Lotta Persson, Lotta-Boden is now building an own production kitchen, Ulla and Kristin Nylander, Nirsgård, have established a café and a shop, along with horse activities and other things. Carin Gisslén-Schönning, Utegården, has put more effort on marketing her farm and bed and breakfast. PoL keramik, started their business and has grown with marketing, e-shop, even a little abroad, Lena Haglund, Böle gård, has matured.

New international networks for partners and target groups are created. Both the Icelandic group and a part of the Scottish group would like to continue co-operation. The participating Swedish entrepreneurs have made contacts during the study visits, as well as taking ideas back home. A group of women from Greece (a finished Interreg IIIC) were in Sweden in May 2006.

The development of new raw materials from nature and forestry, and the use of nature in an environmentally sustainable way. Some efforts have been put forward, but not enough. Some entrepreneurs – for instance wildlife catering (Cooking Queens) has looked into that objective. Also there were originally plans for Rural Business Women to focus more on foresting development but that we had to exclude with budget reductions. A course was offered in partnership with Vuxenskolan, Mellanskog (an association of forest owners) and the project on "Foresting beside timber production" but it was postponed to later. But contacts with an existing network of forest female owners in a partnership in a new application in spring 2006 maybe a new approach to this target network.

New food and tourism products and marketing opportunities. Results from the ongoing course on "Rural tourism and local food." See new working possibilities. Also from the new partner Wij Trädgårdar.

Information leaflets and www-pages. – Information has been spread via Sagas home page and in our network. Some small leaflets has been produced for different parts in the project. Overhead slides for presentations have been done, during the project.

Activities in Sweden have reached over 100 entrepreneurs being in the network and receiving invitations and information on activities (30 entrepreneurs are more directly involved). We have offered long and short courses, seminars, study trips and activation events. A local dairy production development pre-settlement was made in autumn 2004 by one entrepreneur connected to the Local Resource Centre in Trönö. The dairy is on place but the production had not yet started as they are waiting for the changing of the hygiene and sanitary rules in the beginning of 2006. They also started a pre-settlement for a production kitchen. The project has the County Administration Board of Gävleborg and the educational organization Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, SV, as main partners. Co-operation with for example Hushållningssällskapet and Wij Trädgårdar will give the entrepreneurs more input and business contacts. The project has presented to both other EU-projects in Sweden and abroad as well as regional and local meetings and seminars. So far we have recognized that the entrepreneurs are interested in marketing and basic and adequate courses. They need support and help with mentorship

The result which was reached but was not expected was the fact that Women's Resource centres have become an actor in rural development and female entrepreneurship during the project, by for example the County Administration Board and regional actors. Business Advisors from two of the communities, Bollnäs and Hudiksvall, have participated in some of the seminars. Deepening co-operation with Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, for example in the method development material in rural tourism, local heritage and food.

As an example of good practice can be presented the establishment of the local dairy and the upcoming production kitchen in Trönö, Sweden who will be a resource for many entrepreneurs in the neighbouring surroundings. The long course, which will continue to be a working material, and the strong network between the participants in the course.

The project achieved its intended results only partly, the project was too ambitious with the formulated objectives according to the budget. We reached other effects instead. All the output categories have some results; some were exceeded and some left under the targets. One reason for that was that in the project plan we did not know exactly what would be the methods most needed among the entrepreneurs. The need was let to guide the project during its implementation. Other reason was the lack of appropriate people to carry out the actions.

In the beginning of the project the first study trip was crucial to accelerate and inspire especially Scottish partners to take more powerful actions in implementing the project. The example of Finnish partners was very motivating. In Sweden the results are implemented in the region level. Saga organized an application to "Nutek", the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. On local growth development where entrepreneurship was the main topic. The application was approved in late December 2005 and is now running. Among the 17 partners in the RuTa FeM-project are the County Administration Board, The University of Gävle, County Labour Market Board, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions in Gävleborg, Local Cooperative Development Agency in Gävleborg, Local Resource Centers in Gävleborg, WRC., Wij Trädgårdar. Saga is Lead partner. There have been contacts with Leader plus programme, European Social Fund and finished projects within the Leonardo da Vinci-, Equal-, Interreg IIIC-programmes..

Women's Resource centres have become an actor in rural development and female entrepreneurship during the project, by for example the County Administration Board and regional actors. Deeper co-operation has been settled with Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, for example in the method development material in rural tourism, local heritage and food.

The results will have impacts also in the foreseeable future for example Saga together with the WRCs in the county intend to be a more adequate actor within local and regional entrepreneurship and development. For instance the new project: Ruta Fem and following application, Ruta Fem phase 2. WRCs have through the project been recognized and achieved legitimacy. The Finnish survey of willow cultivation will give a valuable information when deciding what kind of willow taxa are suitable for production and how it will be cultivated.

The quantitative outputs in Scotland are 5 focus groups, 20 training sessions held with 120 participants, establishment of RUN Network and 11 Business Health Checks. Best practice in Scotland were focus groups (in both Scottish areas) and RUN Network (in Cowal area).

In the National Park, we have used the experience of this project to support a similar group of female entrepreneurs in another region to establish a Women's Network. We are planning to hold an event in March 2007 to bring women entrepreneurs together across the National Park area.

We have made links with Women's Networks in other parts of the UK – principally in north of England. A visit recently took place to the Rural Women's Network in Cumbria and we are participating in a seminar in September.

Overall this project has been many times its worth in money. Icelandic women entrepreneurs in the fields of herbs have been made visible as real progressive businesses, worth financing, promoting and supporting. Linkages have been established to our foreign partners, ideas, inspirations and information shared and friendships born. Information has been gathered and must be kept accessible and alive.

Transnationality

The transnational co-operation started a little slow, we didn't know how it should be set up and in which forms. The transnational network wasn't a clear objective in the project application. During the project time the benefits for us as a partner have increased and we have learnt a lot from the other partners such as culture, different ways of handling the same thing, language training, EU administration and above all the joy of meeting getting to know splendid people.

In our Swedish part, we made efforts to let many of our participant entrepreneurs attend the transnational meetings. Due to our slim budget we could only afford a couple at a time to attend. But what the participants gained in own development of products as well as personal knowledge is unaccountable. And they also spread their experiences wide back home.

The project Rural Business Women with all logotypes were always visible in every activity, in letterhead and mentioned in presentations verbally.

Agricultural research centre's main task in the project was very specialized (cultivation trials + testing and planning of birch sap production). There was transnationality in the project in the sense that willow material and information was collected also from Sweden, although Swedish contacts were not project partners. Our organisation has learnt to know partner organisations in participating countries, which makes possible cooperation easier in future.

Although the project could have happened without the trans-national element, it certainly had added benefits for the partners:

- Sharing professional experience of partner staff
- Opportunity to benchmark against other partner's approaches and achievements
- Shared learning during international visits
- Relationships established with partner staff and entrepreneurs

The transnationality is vital for this kind of a project, to share ideas, to advice each other in how to handle things, in sharing concerns and problems as well. These nations have a lot of things in common and the environment in which we are working with our entrepreneurs is similar in some ways and different in others. To share best practise and warn against faults is very important in all support to the initiative of the entrepreneurs. It is visible in all our work.

Language difficulties were a minor disturbing factor, some times also different cultural patterns, but with a positive attitude we managed everything. Project participants found it difficult to arrange time away from their businesses and families to participate in the international visits. Video – conferencing is a very cumbersome method for doing business and the technical problems does not help any. The remarkably negative thing in our cooperation was that too much time had to be spent on paperwork, and sometimes in a much to complicated way, compared to the outcome.

Sweden intends to continue cooperation with, primary, the Scottish group on matters concerning network and Women's Resource centres as a function. The co-operation is made between some partners through different project.

Dissemination and Transfer of Experience

Saga RC has involved the Local Resource Centres in all activities RBW has had – such as finding participants. RBW has been a separate subject within the internal resource centre education. Saga WRC will offer a transnational writing workshop during 2006. The WRC Lovisa had a seminar in 2005 on how to create

and run transnational projects. Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, (SV) had a participant joining the Scotland Study trip in March 2006. SV has in the educational part – the study circles – explained and marketed the RBW project. Länsstyrelsen, the County Administration Board has been active in the reference/steering group meetings. It also hosted the first ISC meeting. As well as put their videostudio for the videoconferences. In the present project, Ruta Fem, is the method for growth in the region entrepreneurship, is Länsstyrelsen an active part. They are aware of the Women's Resource Centres function as a working tool within the regional development in Sweden. That has been apparent to the transnational partners.

The project had final dissemination seminar in Aviemore, Scotland in March 2006. The focus of that conference was on RBW's achievements and new project issues. All the partners had also final seminars or final conclusive and evaluative meeting with the local entrepreneurs. For example in Finland the seminar focused on the nature related tourism. At the final seminar the project results were disseminated. Willow report is available on <http://www.matkakori.net/tied04/Kainuun%20pajukoheet%202004-2005.pdf>. Willow trials were exhibited on an open house day of MTT in August 2nd for about 50 persons. There was an article about willow trials in a local newspaper next day. Growers and people who use willow in their works have visited experimental site several times and they have also tested willows in constructions in January 2006 (in willow report you can see photos of some works). Participation in this project has made it possible to gain knowledge on willows and how to run trials on them. In Sweden the County Administration Board attended and also informed on rural development actions within the coming programme period. The result of the project is also a background in Ruta Fem. In Scotland presentations have been made within the organisation, particularly on the experience of the Icelandic international visit in 2005. Information has been posted on their internal "intra-net" site. Articles have been published in the National Park magazine which is distributed to all households in the National Park area. Press releases in local newspapers to promote training and network events and presentation at the end of project Seminar in March 2006.

During the project we have linked ourselves to two groups in Iceland, "vibrant agriculture", the women's arm of the Farmers society and forestry farmers In East Iceland, which formed a specific group around the usage of the herbs that the forest brings. Also of course the links have maid to all necessary agencies for entrepreneurs in the country.

What becomes of the knowledgebase is not entirely certain. It will not be lost, because many of our women have stored it, printed and will use it. But in order to keep on working in the right direction there needs to be more. Almost all women's projects in Iceland are time limited and evaporate when they finish. Nothing has been decided about RBW experience transfer up here, we have yet to see if there is enough real interests of public funds and institutions to not start from scratch next time. But one thing is certain. The experience of us, the coaches and advisers is spread around the public fund boards in Iceland, who have shown by their financial support to herbal entrepreneurs that they realise by now that it is a real business.

Conclusions

The main outcomes on the individual level, is that the target group of RBW, the rural women, were made visible and that their enterprises is an important part within rural development and a sustainable society. But more effort has to be put into relevant education on business tools, marketing. Other species to look into is to focus on the basis of valuation as to put more priority to their individual enterprises and self-reliance. On the project level (regionally and nationally) it is vital to see that co-operation with other actors, the government, NGO:s and private enterprises is a necessity in real development. Resource Centres became an active operative part on regional level in co-operation and coordinating. Saga and WRC's have become well known on running regional, national and transitional projects and now have fully qualified in regional development.

If we have the opportunity to carry the project once again, we would like to improve it with 1) a simpler administration, 2) that all partners in the different countries accepted to set equal effort in reporting in time and 3) that the money flow could be quicker.

Rural development could not be sustainable without women's active participation. Therefore it is important to focus on conditions for entrepreneurship for women in rural areas, such as part time work, or combination of many different parts in on for instance a farm. It sets specific mind of the individual involved, to be creative, flexible, always have a possibility or a necessity to change plans, actions etc. No ordinary business education includes the irrational, unplanned events. We think it is essential that all business advising,

consider this part, directed against sparsely populated areas. It is also important to see and acknowledge that women often have a responsibility for the family as a whole.

The RUN Network itself is probably the most significant outcome and hopefully it will be a long term legacy of the Project in Cowal.

The participation for women in business meetings, economic and enterprise development and in community organizations has increased. RUN report that the project has made it easier for women to 'take part' in a range of meetings and events not just those directly organized by RUN and the Project. Examples cited include the Cowal Arts Forum, Fusion Event and Training for Registered Childminders.

There are several stories of women setting up in business or developing their businesses by getting contracts and contact from other women run enterprises in the network.

- *Penny who provides props for films managed to find a seamstress through the network*
- *Sue's first client as a Management Accountant came from the network*
- *Nikki's business is remarkably streamlined and efficient through her involvement in the network and RUN events*

RUN were able to facilitate training which enabled four women to train and become Childminders. Increasing the number of childminders in the area and by so doing increasing access to work for the women and families now using these childminders.

The Icelandic translation of the name of the project was chosen: "Fósturlandsins Freyjur" (The Motherland's Freyjas", and was a vital step to take to relate to the women of this land, to the land itself and to the Nordic goddess of fertility; Freyja.

In all aspects all the women in all the countries who took part, were their own "Motherland's Freyjas", fertile in ideas and fostering rural nature. Empowerment of this group is a step in empowering the rural areas of all the countries as a whole. Therefore a program like this is entirely necessary for the communities to sustain themselves and to develop.

The examples of successful Icelandic, Scottish, Finnish and Swedish entrepreneurs show what women are capable of and what kind of a "Wild treasure" there is in the human resources of the Northern periphery.