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From a self-taught artisan to a potential exporter – the story of Dragana Stojinić, the only artisan making wooden tool handles in BiH

“Fond za podršku u razvoju biznisa marginaliziranim grupama žena”



Project title: Fond za podršku u razvoju biznisa marginaliziranih grupa žena

Project duration: 1. 10. 2016. - 28. 10. 2017.

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Project implemented in: Zvornik, Livno, Kalinovik, Visoko, Rudo, Tešanj, Teslić, Konjic i Prijedor

Project summary: Cooperation between USAID/PPMG and its partners – local self-government units – fosters an environment conducive to establishing and improving institutional mechanisms for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women.

Have you ever held an axe, a hoe or a shovel and wondered who makes them? Have you ever thought that maybe the handle you are gripping was made by a woman with dark curly hair and red nail polish on her nails?

Have you ever heard of Dragana, the tool handle artisan? Dragana doesn't live in the center of any city. She doesn't live near malls, and her children walk miles to get to school.

She lives in a little village near Prijedor, and if you want to get to her house you have to walk for miles or drive down an unpaved country road. But, this is hardly unusual. Dragana Stojinić isn't the only woman living in the countryside, but she is the only woman who makes wooden tool handles. She started making handles when she lost everything. She and her husband were unemployed, with two children to raise.

“I didn't want to give up. I used to grow raspberries and cucumbers but that fell through, I wasn't paid for my work, I was left with loans and my family had no income. We had to come up with something new. Wood was the only thing left, and we took a chance on it.” - says Dragana. It was hard. They didn't have all the tools and machinery they needed, production was slow, but they never gave up. They worked day and night to meet deadlines. Everybody works. Her son processes wood, her daughter helps with packing and Dragana and her husband do the most arduous tasks. When exhaustion made her faint, she would get up and continue working.

Why is a woman making tool handles? Dragana is often asked why she does this type of work, to which she says that no type of work is too hard for her. All she wants is to provide her family with a more dignified and safer life, especially since her husband suffered a serious injury when getting wood from the forest because they didn't have the proper tools.

She was looking for a chance to turn her family business into an actual business, and applied to receive funds from USAID's Fund for supporting businesses owned by marginalized women and the City of Prijedor. She received funds to buy tools that make her work safer and her life better.

They registered a business, furnished a workshop and increased their production, because better tools provides for a better business. This year, Dragana made more than 7000 handles for hoes, shovels, axes, picks, and she soon might start exporting. She wants to buy a truck and start working for foreign markets.

“We still work a lot, but it's much easier. Production takes less time, and the quality is much better. I think our efforts will be worth it and that we will develop a business that our son will eventually be able to take over.” - says Dragana.

There is a demand for their products, and now they don't have to fear injuries and ruined handles. Dragana now has an income she is pleased with, and she hopes to keep improving it.

Dragana is one of a hundred women who was supported by the USAID's Marginalized Populations Support Activity and nine local administration in launching and developing their own business that provides them with a livelihood, independence and restores their faith in the future.

