

Let's talk about women in rural communities with Cristina Victoria Chert

My name is Cristina Victoria Chert and I'm the executive director for Foundation The Open Network for Community Development from Romania. This is a Romanian foundation based on a collaboration of more than 30 years. Based on the collaboration between villages. So it was called Jumulage.

One village from Belgium was adopting a village from Romania exactly after the communist time and they make and they tried elaborate projects help each other. So this is what I'm doing now. I'm the executive for this foundation.

On the base I'm a professional actor and after eight years of working in professional theater, I decided to jump into the project management. So from 2000 I start to work based on projects and help in developing the civil society in Romania.

How do you combine art, education, and project management? And can you tell me more about it?

I think um each form of art helps a lot in developing the individual.

And I think through art, you can raise the awareness on different topics. And I think if you use art, you can develop the civil society.

Romania after the communism was going down in 1990 uh was a country that need a lot of development and even today we need a lot of project to develop our civil society and our country.

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And I think through arts you can find the exact way not to teach somebody but to help to mediate in an individual development and a community development. So because of that I'm using arts in many projects that we are doing in our foundation.

How do you work with women in the communities and in the villages in your project?

We have in our foundation more than 24 organization of women. All of them they are spread all around Romania. They are not official organization, but they are very strong local informal groups of women. We have each spring um, regional trainings in which each group decide which type of trainings they want and uh for what they need uh education uh in their development and we provide this uh training.

We find trainers, we find resources for these local trainings or regional trainings. We have uh each year in the summer a national uh educational event which brings all together all our groups from Romania. And also we have in autumn educational event only for trainers because we have also a network of national trainers.

This is the part of non-formal education and we are doing many projects and activities that involve non-formal education in developing our women groups.

In many of our projects, we are using Arts or civil society different forms of empowerment because the most important thing it's the empowerment of these groups the empowerment of leaders of trainers and if we do this empowerment of individuals and the local groups we can have empowerment communities.

What are the most important changes that you see working with these women?

We can see that many from our local groups starts to develop and they want first they want to be local groups, they want to be active uh they start to have their own activities.

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So, they are active not only under our umbrella, but they are doing their activities in in their community.

And some of them they decided to go and to be um judicial structures. So, women association with their own logo, with their own judicial statute, and uh constitutive papers. And they start to do activities by themselves. um, being very active at local level, at national level, and some of them at international level.

So, this we we think that it's a result of our work, and we really uh encourage our groups to grow and to become uh self association into their communities. I think that it's very uh I think that before about empowerment. So, when people feel recognized, they have the power to to change.

How is the situation in Romania for women and are there difference between cities and villages?

Even if we start this work of empowerment ladies, um through the civil society activities project exactly after the 1989 after the revolution. Even now in Romania we have many many problems especially with the domestic violence.

So even yesterday I heard a new on the television that only this year we have already the 50 lady that was killed by her partner or by her spouse or by her husband.

And our legislation starts to change because we saw that even if we have legislation, the legislation is not respected by the one that they have to respect it and to put it in practice.

So, because of that um our legislative forums, they start to make this laws of protection most well after woman have a restriction order for her her husband and she make many complaints for the police nobody nobody to do something and to have her killed in the middle of the street by her ex-husband.

So because the legislation is we have legislation we have a wonderful legislation. But not all the times respected. This is the problem. And when the legislation is not respected, maybe we have to do a strong laws to protect our women.

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Why are you so passionate about this theme?

We have under our umbrella many local groups of women and they ask for help and they need help and we have the knowledge we have the resources so I think if we can give more education into the rural areas into the small communities. If we empower our ladies, um the community will be stronger.

The women will be stronger and the their families will be stronger. So when we have stronger communities and stronger women at the local level, we have a better future. Because a women it's the the the first resource in a family, I think. Is one who who keep family together is the one who take care of the house. Is the one that is uh totally involved in growing the new generation.

What is the biggest challenge facing feminist today?

I think the biggest challenge is to make more women to to take the leadership and to come into the policy level, to fight for women rights, to fight for equality, to fight for a better legislation.

Because if you look around, even if we like it or not, we have to recognize that we even today live in a man world. If you look at the policy level and you count how many men and how many ladies are there you can see that the ladies are not more than 20%.

So, if it will be really equal representativity into the legislation forums, I think the legislation will be better, the laws will be better, and the women can fight for the women's rights. But I think at least in Romania, our ladies They don't want to be involved so much at the policy level.

They do things at the local level. They take care of their families. They take care of their project activities in the community, but more than this, it's hard to to make them to understand that it's a real need.

And in ten years?

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I think it will be the same. I don't think that in 10 years we will have a equal representative at the legislation level. So, I think uh it will be at least for the next 30 years a fight for. I think we have to have more ladies involved in uh politics. at policies level in changing legislation at local level, national level and also at European level.

Three names of women who in your opinion have made feminist history.

Because I'm coming from Romania, I will say and I will talk about three lady from Romania. All of them they were very they are not now active but they were very active in putting the first stones on developing the feminism in Romania. And I will talk only two three words about a lady that was called Sofia Nădejde.

Sofia is the god of intelligence and the Nădejde is hope. So her name I think it was totally destined for being a lady to fight for the ladies rights in Romania. She was very active between the worst between the second first and the second war and she was a writer, a journalist and then very strong activist.

Another one it was Alexandra Cantacuzino, a lady that was very well educated in the west countries in the developed countries of Europe, that she come back in Romania because she was part of the Cantacuzino family, a very known family between the world. And she was the one that was developing the first council of women in Romania. This was also in 40s. So the first council in Romania it was developed by her.

And another one it was Ella Negruzzi, also a lady coming from from a very famous family And she was a lawyer and she was fighting through the legislation to change the laws in Romania.

Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't asked you about?

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I think it's I think it's very important to help the ladies and the women from rural area in their development. Because in the big towns, we have a lot of education. We have forms of education. We have institutions that take care.

The prejudices are not so strong so a lady can go and learn a lot of not, she can go to different courses, she can learn, she can be graduated, she can find a good job. But in the rural area where the poverty is so big, at least in Romania, but I think everywhere in Romania in rural area it's a little bit a big difference.

Um, we have to make uh more projects uh for uh the ladies to help them in their development because they don't have access to education or easy access education. They don't have a easy access access the educational institution. They cannot have resources to be more educated or to find a better job.

And I think everywhere the ladies from rural area are still today under the prejudice of the rural communities.

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