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FEM (Female Entrepreneurs' Meetings) is a Baltic Sea Region Interreg IIIB project. The aim of FEM is to strengthen the structures which support the entrepreneurship of women through co-operation, exchange of knowledge and experiences as well as best practises. FEM started in August 2004 and will run to August 2007. The participating countries are Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

This is the second FEM newsletter. You will find more information about FEM activities and participants in www.feminfo.net . Overall co-ordination of the FEM: laura.perheentupa@intermin.fi, leena.heiskala@palvelupartio.inet.fi

FEM project congratulates Nobel Prize winner Mr. Yunus



When Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus came to Norway to receive his prize, Annika Saanio, who is part of the FEM project together with five other ladies were sharing this big moment with him. Mr Yunus, an economist, founded the Grameen bank, which is one of the pioneers of micro-credit lending schemes for the poor, especially women, in Bangladesh. The Grameen model has inspired similar efforts throughout the world, including Norway.

In the FEM project, Norway is in charge of the network credit groups and other financial solutions for female entrepreneurs in all of the FEM countries. This includes helping the FEM countries to develop groups and give loans to help women to create their own businesses.

Everyone participating in the FEM project is very proud that Mohammed Yunus and Grameen Bank got the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006!

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Group consulting creates ideas, solutions and possibilities



In September, a group of FEM-consultants gathered for a new kind of pilot group consulting summit in Lahti. The aim of the summit was to examine and analyse different import and export possibilities for a handicraft entrepreneur Sirkku Lahtonen.

The consulting meetings, led by TE-Centre's Ritva Lehtelä, concentrated on defining the target groups and finding the right delivery channels for Sirkku Lahtonen's company LaSiTe, which manufactures decorative glass figures.

Lahtonen wanted to examine different export possibilities and strategies for her products, and to see what kind of actions are needed in order to make the products known in international forums.

The solid expertise of the consultants covered various different aspects and therefore a whole new range of ideas and solutions were created in the process of finding the right delivery channels.

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Woman Resource Centre in action

In Debno, Poland, the local Woman Resource Centre has been working actively towards women's entrepreneurship and women's active participation. Since the centre opened in October 2004, it has been organising support groups, courses and meetings for the local women. The centre also cooperates with local entrepreneurship centres to exchange information.



The centre's hard work has been highly productive, and during last year, the centre managed to grab also media's attention when Szczecin Television made a report about centre's business plan workshop, which is supporting women who want to do something but don't necessarily know how.

On April, the Szczecin Television also made a story about a member of Debnó WRC who had started her own business. The story showed an excellent example how WRC is strengthening encouraging the role of women as entrepreneurs.

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Mentoring group that changed my life



Pärnu mentoring group, which started in a meeting of 11 women, soon became a life changing experience to all of them.

Although majority of the members are dealing with rural enterprises, their fields of activity vary from raising cattle to tourism. According to the women, one of the reasons why a group of Pärnu County women are travelling tens of kilometers to come to the group meetings is the exchange of information. One of the members notes that the group gatherings are an important discussion forum: "Farmers are essentially isolated, however, in this mentoring group we

can exchange substantial amounts of valuable information."

The group meetings are encouraging women to analyse their ambitions and motivations, and encourage them to do things that they would not have dared to do earlier.

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FEM-project introduced in Woman's World fair



Last November, over 100 companies participated into "Woman's World", organized in Kaunas. During the three day fair our role as representatives of Kaunas Women Information Centre was to introduce and present a mentoring program in one of the seminars. A presentation, made by Jurate Puidiene highlighted and introduced Kaunas Women Information Centre's role in the FEM project. Later, the people who were part of the FEM-project introduced and told about their work in practice. Overall, everyone were highly satisfied with the responses and the presentation was a success, and it managed to attract wide interest and curiosity among the participants.

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Sweden showing the "best practice" in establishing business contacts



Since the FEM-project started in August 2004 we have tried in different ways to establish business contacts between women entrepreneurs in Sweden and other BSR-countries. Biggest obstacles seem to be cultural differences and the way people see the market economy. We are still working hard to solve these questions.

From Sweden we can show a "best practise" in establishing such business contacts. An example of this is Anna Difort-Dura, who has introduced jewellery designed by a Pole Mirella Parmi in Sweden. The exhibitions have

attracted wide attention among Swedish buyers and we have now built a network of Swedish woman entrepreneurs, who are interested in selling this jewellery to shops. The aim is to have an integrated marketing plan and spread the selling to other cities and areas.

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