



Increasing Women's Economic Empowerment

Victoria Nikitina had worked at a state baker's plant in Ukraine for 20 years when she read a newspaper announcement about business training. "Having worked at a baker's plant, I dreamed about producing healthy food, particularly bread. The idea was very exciting, but at that time I had neither means and nor business knowledge," she recalls.

To help increase women's economic opportunities and stimulate women-friendly government policies, USAID is supporting the Women's Economic Empowerment project in partnership with Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations. Offered in six Ukrainian cities, the project provides training in business and entrepreneurship, access to credit and small grants. The project also sponsored study trips to businesses in neighboring Poland to provide Ukrainian women entrepreneurs with an opportunity to share knowledge, exchange experiences and evaluate different models for developing businesses.

Victoria applied and was accepted to the project's two-month training program at the Women's Business Support Center in Donetsk. During her studies, she learned about marketing, business management and self-motivation.



Photo: Larissa Piskunova

Victoria Nikitina shows samples of fresh bread at her Ukraine bakery.

"Upon graduation, I became confident. I found a possibility to realize my plan," says Victoria.

Nearly 13,000 Ukrainian women have gotten business training through the Women's Economic Empowerment project. More than 1,000 have started or expanded their own businesses, each of which have helped create an average of three more jobs. Credit unions affiliated with the project have made 966 loans worth \$957,309 to project participants.

"To get flour you need to mill the grain. To achieve something in your life you have to give it a try and just do it," says Victoria Nikitina.

Immediately after her training, Victoria registered as an entrepreneur with the local government. Within a year, she had established Doctor Bread, a successful mini-bakery in her village with four employees. The demand for Victoria's bakery products is exceeding her current capacity, so she is planning to rent additional space, hire eight more bakers and possibly even expand to other parts of Ukraine.

"Our bakery makes 150-200 kilograms [330-440 pounds] of bread daily," she says. "Our bread production is dietary, and I am working on introducing new kinds of bread." Victoria would like to continue to expand her business's offerings by learning how to make bread for people with special dietary needs at Kyiv Food University.

"To get flour you need to mill the grain. To achieve something in your life you have to give it a try and just do it," Victoria says. "The training at the business center gave me a powerful incentive to move forward. Thanks to the center I understood that I can make my dream come true."

