

Creating a Public Participation Strategy for Kolonja Commune

Implemented by NGO Institute for Justice and Home Affairs

Implementation period: Dec 2005-Oct 2006



Project background

The Commune of Kolonja will be the target of a road development plan. While the project could bring potential benefits for the commune, and supported by the municipal and central government, it has neither been assessed for its potential impact on the local community, nor has the public been consulted. The overall objective of this project is to raise awareness of the commune leaders and staff of the importance and need of public information and participation in the environmental or general decision-making, and also ensure community involvement in the road development process via a public participation regulation that has been drafted with the involvement of the local community.

Activities implemented in the project

- Mobilization of the locals and organization of the preliminary meetings with the commune and REC Local office, setting up the working group.
- Project team drafted the text of questionnaire, distributed to the commune members and processed the results which showed among others:
 - Inhabitants perceive their participation bringing benefits on the long term and they think that regulations needs reinforcement
 - That participation is important especially for infrastructure and development issues
 - That local authorities should improve on their transparency with regard to local decision making
- Outline of the local participation regulation was drafted and working group gave input.
- Capacity building was held for a group of 20 locals representing different interest groups in order to improve understanding of participatory process. On this occasion the outline of the draft regulation was debated, along with the identification of best available methods for disseminating/collection input on the draft local participation regulation within the community.
- With the improved content of the local regulation regarding public involvement the working group went forward and have collected inputs in each villages, altogether in 3 public hearings where further ideas on how to make the process of decision making more open and available for the public was discussed and ideas incorporated.

- As a first time occasion an open Commune Council meeting was organized during which the locals could tackle local decision issues and contribute to the finalization of the regulation on public involvement.
- One culminating moment showing the strength of public understanding of the role in decision making took place when during the continuation of the road construction protest was organized and the draft local regulation was used as tool to redesign the scheme so that it would avoid the area where the channels for supplying irrigation water , event that was covered by national level media.
- The finalized strategy was widely disseminated in forms of flyers that was summarizing the main elements of the local regulation on public involvement in decision making.
- Regulation was adopted in October during another Commune Council meeting and its full version was distributed among locals.

Final results and outcomes

The pilot project activities brought significant improvement in the relation of the local authority and the local public not only in connection to the decision making process but also by building cooperative attitude in diverse problem solving.

Different stakeholder groups: farmers, local intellectuals, students identified ways of working together and representing their interest using commonly accepted rules making use of the draft local regulation already at its incipient phase.

The local authority gain better acceptance for its decisions while the common protest and the yet draft public participation regulation gave legal background to intervene and modify the road construction in accordance to the interest of the local community.

Media coverage that followed the protest and the solution identified by the locals, Commune Council, the Ministry of Public Works demonstrates that public being aware of a process and having at hand a legal instrument can be a partner in the decision making. The added value of such processes is that brings win-win solutions from which also other communities can learn.