

Public Participation in the Planning Process for New Mining Areas in Obliq Municipality

Ekoklina, Kosovo (Territory under Interim UN Administration), Obiliq Municipality

Project Background

For the last three decades, the Kosovo Electro Energy Company (KEEC) has polluted the air, water, and soil in Kosovo through the operation of two coal-powered energy plants. While the environmental impact extends across all of Kosovo, the Municipality of Obliq is hardest hit as coal mining takes place near residents' homes. While Obliq residents' environment, land use, and social sustainability is already affected by the mines, these impacts are set to increase as KEEC prepares to expand power generation to keep pace with growing electricity needs. In practice, this means that the lands used for coal mining will be expanded – likely in the southern part of Obliq near Sibofc village. While KEEC's expansion seems relatively unstoppable because it is supported by "Kosovo's Strategy for Energy" – a draft document produced by the Ministry of Mining and Energy and due to be adopted by parliament in about six months – the Ministry's document itself calls for public feedback on the draft document. While no participation of significant merit has yet taken place, Ekoklina would like to take the Ministry up on its offer, facilitating comprehensive public feedback on the document through consultations with the municipality most affected by energy expansion – Obliq. With possibilities existing to review, analyze, and possibly amend certain articles of the document, Ekoklina would like to engage in public participation mechanism in accordance with the Aarhus Convention in order to qualify the introduction of new mining areas with public input.

Goals and Overall Objectives

- **Raising Public Awareness of Obiliq Residents' Right to Access Information and Participate in Decision-Making**
Both local law and the Aarhus Convention contain provisions for public participation in decision-making. Ekoklina will emphasize these rights throughout the project to encourage their institutionalization.
- **Initiate Dialogue between Keec, Municipal Authorities, and The Public**
Through workshops and public debates, stakeholders will be able to assess each others plans and concerns.
- **Ensure that Environmental Considerations are Taken into Consideration in Planned Mining Developments**
While Ekoklina cannot bind authorities to addressing public concerns, the existence of a consultative mechanism in the National Strategy document, and the principles of the Aarhus Convention can and will be used to encourage authorities and planners to take public concerns, and environmental concerns, into consideration.

- **Establishing a Permanent Mode of Public Participation**

While it is only hoped that authorities will respect the intent of the project and the values underlying it, Ekoklina will – in the end – have a model developed to facilitate public participation that can be used in the future regarding other projects and plans that affect both the public and environment in the energy sector, as well as other sectors.

How to Get There – Specific Activities

- **Raising Public Awareness/Media Campaign of the National Strategy, Mining Developments, and Aarhus**

Given that Obiliq residents are not adequately informed about the national energy strategy, copies will be supplied to local people. Ekoklina will also canvass public opinion in order to estimate public awareness of both the document and the possibility of future mining developments. Leaflets will be prepared to inform the public of the project, the opportunity to engage in public participation, and the basic tenants of the Aarhus Convention. The media will be regularly informed of the project and issues at stake.

- **Holding Workshops**

Ekoklina will organize workshops with all stakeholders to outline the principles of the Aarhus Convention, opportunities for public participation in Kosovo's legal system, and identify the public's major concerns. Stakeholders will include local NGOs, municipal authorities, KEEC representatives, representatives of all 18 villages in Obiliq, and the media. Local experts will facilitate.

- **Facilitating the Creation of a Working Group**

From the workshops, a working group will be identified to draft proposed amendments to the current Strategy. Proposed changes will be qualified through additional public input in below activities.

- **Organizing Public Debate**

In order to facilitate further public input, Ekoklina will organize an open debate in which the Ministry, Obiliq Municipality, and KEEC will present plans for the development of new mining areas, as well as the National Strategy. Public input will be collected and incorporated into Proposed Amendments.

- **Analyzing Input conclusions of Activities result of the Project, nd Presenting Proposed Amendments of the Strategy For Energy to Authorities**

Ekoklina will facilitate the creation of a final document with proposed amendments to the Strategy, summing up public concerns for the new mining area and distributing it to the Ministry of Mining and Energy and Obiliq authorities. It is hoped that planners of the new mining area will harmonize their plans in accordance with these environmental concerns. The document will also be made available to the public through the internet.

Outcomes

Through Ekoklina's project, Obiliq's residents will become aware of the importance of public participation, authorities will be encouraged to respond to public concerns, and the project will serve as a good model for public participation in future processes in energy developments and other projects that affect the environment.