

## Project REReP 2.3 NGO Electronic networking in B&H

# *Third and Fourth Phase Report and Final Narrative Report*

### Introduction

EkoMrezaBiH project implementation started in December 2002 upon initiative taken by the members of the environmental nongovernmental organization the Young Researchers of Banja Luka and out of obvious need of improving communication between environmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in both Republic of Srpska and Federation of B&H) and providing modern electronic tools in order to achieve this goal.

Upon approval of the project concept by REReP 2.3 project coordinator Mr. Gabor Heves from REC Head Office the contract was signed on 15. 11. 2002 between the Implementing Team (lead by the members of the Young researchers of Banja Luka) Coordinator Mr. Viktor Bjelic and REC CO BiH Director Mr. Nesad Seremet for the period of one full year with anticipated conclusion of project activities in December 2003.

### Project phases

According with the applied work plan dynamics the project was to be implemented in four phases with different activities aimed towards successful establishment of the network and its normal functioning in order to finally achieve expected project results:

“The most important result of this project will be the consolidation of the B&H environmental community. This network will not only pose as an ordinary internet information site, it will be a form of headquarters for environmental NGOs in B&H in providing them the ultimate tool to reach the government officials, domestic public, international partners and other NGOs, all in one place.

Other, not less important, results include:

- *Enhanced awareness of the benefits of electronic communication and the Internet among members of environmental NGOs.*
- *Enhanced technical knowledge of Internet use in achieving NGOs goals or more successful promotion of projects and project results.*
- *Enhanced awareness of environmental issues by the general public.*
- *Promoting the work of environmental NGOs operating in B&H and the importance of the environmental issues.*

- *Increasing the level of the NGO activist competency is the only way to achieve the desirable level of information exchange and communications in the environmental sector using the Internet technologies. “*

Since no previous electronic communication existed the first two project phases were aimed at establishment of the basic framework of EkoMrezaBiH. This included training for trainers of the Implementing team members in order to master the needed operation systems, software and gather experience from the existing networks, as well as basic design and initial upload of material to the site itself. Second and partially the third phase was oriented towards promotion of capabilities, tools and information of EkoMrezaBiH to the environmental NGO community in Bosnia and Herzegovina through trainings and donation of computer equipment. Detailed description the activities from the first two and partially the third phase have been available upon their completion during project implementation and are attached to this report:

**Annex 1: First phase report and second phase progress report;**

**Annex 2: Second phase report and computer donation tender announcement;**

### Third and fourth phase progress

After completion of tender and donation of three computers to various environmental NGO's (as described in the annex this procedure was enhanced by applying "old for new" system where organization that received new equipment were to donate their used computer to organizations which had none, so number of organization receiving equipment from this project doubled) third phase of the project was devoted to period of normal functioning of EkoMrezaBiH with primary focus on promotion of topics, encouraging organization to share content and post news as well as upload of new material. During the third phase EkoMrezaBiH was also improved by upgraded redesign of the portal, which came as a consequence of network growth, gained experience and requests for further improvement. In this period, 17 new members joined EkoMrezaBiH network, with ever-growing interest of new environmental organizations applying for membership, while number of posted news grew constantly reaching levels easily visible in the news archive of [www.ekomrezabih.net](http://www.ekomrezabih.net)

Fourth and final phase of the EkoMrezaBiH project, although perhaps over ambitiously anticipated for international cooperating and networking at the regional level, also showed certain results in sense of sharing English language based content with the other organizations in the region through SEE Environment Info regional content sharing platform, network run by Bluelink, Bulgaria at the regional level. Being oriented at establishing its own population of users and their topics EkoMrezaBiH was, at this point, able to provide modest contribution to the regional level portal but nevertheless it proved to be valuable experience for further work on improvement of electronic networking of environmental NGO's in the SEE region.

In this respect EkoMrezaBiH grew enough to be able to focus on specific issues and offer its services in sense of emphasize certain environmental issues within its possibilities. Good example for this is establishment of Aarhus Convention dedicated web site directly linked with EkoMreza. Aarhus Convention in Bosnia and Herzegovina web site was created within the project REReP 2.2 "Support developing strategies for implementation of the Aarhus Convention in SE Europe", and directly linked with EkoMrezaBiH enabling users to access Aarhus dedicated content such as the text of the Convention and other material directly from

EkoMreza using same easy-to-use software tools to post their own news and content related with access to information, public participation and other Aarhus related issues. Aarhus web site is located at [www.ekomrezabih.net/aarhus](http://www.ekomrezabih.net/aarhus)

Last but not least, for the estimated successful implementation of the EkoMrezaBiH project, Mr. Gabor Heves, REReP 2.3 project coordinator informed the members of the Implementing Team that environmental NGO's in Bosnia and Herzegovina will receive further donation of 10 completely new computer configurations which will be distributed by the EkoMrezaBIH in the same fashion as it was a case earlier in the project. Such decision of the project manager goes enough to show and approve the hard work that the EkoMrezaBiH Implementing Team members have invested in this project in their effort to further advance Bosnia and Herzegovina NGO community and its environment in general.

In the closing stages of the project EkoMrezaBiH Implementing Team was also asked to put together a short overview of its impact on NGO community and further prospects of network development. This paper is included as a whole in this report as a closing remark and general conclusion coming out of this project.

**EkoMrezaBIH Implementing Team (YRBL) and its partners (Ekoteam, Youth Center Livno) wishes to thank the Regional Environmental Center, namely Mr. Gabor Heves as a project manager and dedicated staff from REC office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Inka Sehovic and Mrs. Enisa Pulic for their valuable contributions in form of advices and other support without which this project would not have been implemented in such positive and successful manner as it was.**

**EkoMrezaBiH Implementing team:**

**Project Coordinator: Mr. Viktor Bjelic**  
**Content manager: Mr. OzrenRunic**

**Environmental NGO networking in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the and further prospects of EkoMrezaBIH electronic network**

Upon signing the contract the Implementing Team (further IT) received the first financial tranche for implementation of the first project phase according with the project plan and budget. Having received the necessary funds IT members started the project activities including obtaining 50 MB of web space, domain name [ekomrezabih.net](http://ekomrezabih.net) and use of the SQL database as first set of activities. At the same time IT started with realization of establishing and modifying Action Applications software and connecting it with the database as well as preparing the preliminary design of the EkoMrezaBiH portal.

NGO's as basic elements of the B&H civil society, have only became to exist after the tragic events of war and total transition from different political system (1995). Since middle nineties environmental NGO evolution made enormous, but of course not nearly sufficient according to modern standard of western democracy states and their civil society establishments.

Present status of environmental NGO sector shows clear lack of strategy and capacity development models as well as lack of adequate and dedicated personnel. One of the basic issues is lack of adequate coordination and mutual cooperation in joint fields of activities according with environmental NGO stated missions. However, some efforts exist, and they mainly reflect through a number of meetings, trainings and seminars aimed towards improvement of cooperation amongst NGO's themselves and closer contact with representatives of national and international institutions. Unfortunately B&H NGO's are not in position to appropriately fulfill their role in the process of civil society strengthening because they still encounter some basic existential issues such as:

- Problems with funding
- Inadequate structure inside NGO's themselves
- Lack of appropriate personnel
- Access to information
- Inadequate cooperation with all government levels on partnership basis

### *Networking*

Apart from these obvious problems with which NGO's encounter daily there are positive examples of attempts to tackle these issues. One of these attempts is represented by environmental NGO electronic networking project named EkoMrezaBiH. This project is aimed to connect and introduce NGO's and their members as well as wider interested public with numerous environmental issues, environmental domestic and international legislature and fresh, updated news from various environmental fields. Members and public also have an opportunity to post news and articles themselves on this portal (following appropriate procedure).

Since its inception the members of EkoMrezaBiH implementing team have also performed two trainings for NGO activists incorporating network promotion, development of skills needed to add and share content as well as basics of writing for Internet. Within the scope of the project EkoMrezaBiH successfully conducted a tender for donation of computer equipment managing to double the number of NGO's benefiting from the donation applying "old for new" concept (NGO's awarded with new equipment gave their used equipment to the organizations which had none). Towards the final stages of the project the EkoMrezaBiH portal was totally redesigned according with needs that appeared during implementation and recommendations of its members.

Although a significant step forward EkoMrezaBiH, however, is a pioneer attempt that still needs support and growth in order to become a serious communication and cooperation tool, which has to be accounted for in all environmental policy considerations in B&H. Although some level of communication was reached, the network was rarely used as a tool for joint projects, actions, and campaigns in domestic as well as regional or international context. Number of NGO members that regularly post news on the portal is still unsatisfactory due to lack of skills (only two trainings), lack of capacities (personnel), equipment or ideas which news could be posted and shared. Some significant areas of B&H with active NGO's were not covered with information of the network capabilities at all.

Achieved results and pointed obstacles draw inevitable conclusion that EkoMrezaBiH has created a momentum which would be a great loss to abandon at a point of upscale line. Unfortunately, in terms of sustainability (applies generally for B&H environmental NGOs) it is far too early to speak about any successful model since budget funding is not available for

NGO's (Law on ECO-fund is not enforceable). EkoMrezaBiH is not yet able to charge any of its services or introduce membership fees at the moment when body of members is being established. Environmental commercial marketing is only a distant future option which needs careful examination of feasibility and models of involving a non-profit network in such activities.

Such situation leaves no other option but fundraising from other sources which have been in practice so far and which mostly rely on donations and sponsorship. Accordingly, members of EkoMrezaBiH implementing team have already created models and recommendations for follow-up of this project which were offered to some domestic and foreign donors and sponsors with yet undisclosed results.

EkoMrezaBiH Implementing team:  
Viktor Bjelic  
Ozren Runic

## **ANNEX 1 : First Phase Report and Second Phase Progress Report**

EkoMrezaBiH project implementation started upon approval of the REReP 2.3. project coordinator Mr. Gabor Heves. The contract was signed on 15. 11. 2002. between the Implementing Team (lead by the members of the Young researchers of Banja Luka) Coordinator Mr. Viktor Bjelic and REC CO BiH Director Mr. Nesad Seremet.

Upon signing the contract the Implementing Team (further IT) received the first financial tranche for implementation of the first project phase according with the project plan and budget.

Having received the necessary funds IT members started the project activities including obtaining 50 MB of web space, domain name ekomrezabih.net and use of the SQL database as first set of activities. At the same time IT started with realization of establishing and modifying Action Applications software and connecting it with the database as well as preparing the preliminary design of the EkoMrezaBiH portal.

At this point further instructions and knowledge was needed in order to successfully manipulate the Action Apps. According with the activity plan three members of the IT (Viktor Bjelic coordinator, Ozren Runic content manager, Zoran Bruic tech support) traveled to Prague to receive Action Apps "Training for trainers" hosted by the Czech NGO electronic network ECONNECT from 31.01. till 02.02.2003. This travel and training requested a lot of additional activities including planning and coordination regarding training content and agenda as well as additional roundtrip to Bosnia and Herzegovina capital Sarajevo for visa obtaining. Upon training completion, members of the IT conducted final design modifications and content upload in order to bring the preliminary site online and finish the first phase. Preparations were also made for BiH NGO's training planned in the second phase.

Second phase of the "EkoMrezaBiH" project began after receiving planned amount of funds after completion of the first phase. IT members prepared the training material for second phase main set of activities named Capacity building and training for electronic content

sharing for BiH environmental NGO's representatives. The training has been prepared and realized from 28-30.03.2003. in cooperation with partner organization Youth Center Livno. Invitation for the training was sent to large number of environmental NGO's through the [ekomrezabih@yahoo.com](mailto:ekomrezabih@yahoo.com) mailing list out of which 9 applications were accepted. The training agenda covered these issues:

- Introduction to electronic databases;
- Information content suitable and being exchanged/published through EkoMrezaBiH portal;
- How to write online news;
- Benefits and advantages of Action Apps;
- Access (Action Apps login);
- Item manager (Adding news);
- Content pooling, content sharing;

The participants graded the training with high remarks and improved the content with constructive participation, active discussion and questions. Because of obvious training success, with ultimate goal to introduce EkoMrezaBiH to as many NGO's as possible and having some funds leftover out of NGO training budget line, members of the IT agreed to ask for organization of additional training with same concept in the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At this point project description also predicts donation of three Internet capable PC's to selected BiH NGO's who did not have Internet access so far. In order to make use of this line as efficiently as possible as well, EkoMrezaBiH representatives agreed with the project PM to donate new computers to EkoMrezaBiH's project partners (EkoTeam and Youth Center Livno) who already significantly participated in the development of the network. In return, the partners will donate two of their used computers (for each of the new ones) to environmental NGO's who have just started to familiarize themselves with the Internet and EkoMrezaBiH content sharing concept. These will be selected by joint consensus of the EkoMrezaBiH team and partners and upon fulfilling the criteria announced in an open tender. Further progress and latest developments in the EkoMrezaBiH project will be reported accordingly.

EkoMrezaBiH Implementing Team:  
Viktor Bjelic, Project Coordinator;  
Ozren Runic, Project Assistant;  
Zoran Bruic, Technical Support; databases  
Bojan Jovic, Technical Support; designer

## **ANNEX 2: Second phase report and computer donation tender announcement;**

Capacity building and second training for electronic content sharing, for representatives of environmental NGO in Bosnia and Herzegovina

23/24.05.2003, Jablanica

In line with the EkoMrezaBiH work plan dynamics, and upon completing Phase I of the project, EkoMrezaBiH team continued planned activities by organizing capacity building workshop for 10 representatives of environmental B&H NGOs in southwest Bosnian city of Livno. However, the financial resources planned for this event were not completely used up, so the Implementing team of the EkoMrezaBiH decided to turn to REC's project manager Mr. Gabor Heves and ask for relocation of this funds in order to organize one more workshop for a same number of NGO reps. who did not have a chance to participate in the first one held in Livno. The second workshop was organized in Herzegovina's southern town of Jablanica, for 10 more NGO representatives. These workshops were designed in order to give participants a chance to learn about content sharing using online Action Applications software but they were also trained in publishing their own articles and news. In that respect a lot of attention was given to specifics of writing articles for the Internet, which differs greatly from usual newspaper writing. Upon completing evaluation process the participants gave highest remarks for organization, quality and constructiveness of the workshop, as well as for trainers. A lot of them concluded that there is great need for organizing such events in the future as well. After these workshops, the Implementing team and project partners held an open meeting evaluating the progress of the network but mainly focusing on these three topics:

- ? Structure of the network and new members,
- ? Roles of partners and lead NGO,
- ? Tender for computer equipment.

It was commonly agreed that new members of network will have a chance to attend future meetings of the Steering Committee in role of observers and that they should improve their status in the network.

The lead NGO (Young Researchers of Banja Luka) would stay in that position in order to ensure continuity of the activities and successfully implement the remaining phases of the project. Partner organizations will gain more significant role in the coming phases and lead the new activities of the network such as volunteerism exchange and environmental journalism. Finally they constructed the form for competition for technical equipment donation based on similar examples from other existing networks in region. Selection of organizations who will get the equipment will be conducted on consensus of the partners' bases and REC CO B&H suggestions.

Call for applications process has been completed and 10 applications from different NGOs have been received. Above mentioned consultations are in progress and winners will be announced on EkoMrezaBiH portal as soon as the evaluation process is completed.

EkoMrezaBiH IT  
Viktor Bjelic  
Ozren Runic