



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN KOSOVO
A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Sustainable Development in Kosovo: A Local Perspective

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Balkan Green Foundation (BGF) is a regional initiative established to advocate and promote sustainable development in the Western Balkans, specifically concentrating on a number of key topics such as sustainable economic development, environmental protection, energy development, and climate change. BGF works to advance sustainable development practices as ways to ensure and maximize opportunities for everybody through policy advocacy and project development in Kosovo and the region.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGF - Balkan Green Foundation

CSO - Civil Society Organization

EE - Energy Efficiency

EU - European Union

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KEK - Kosovo Energy Corporation

KEPA - Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency

KFA - Kosovo Forestry Agency

KOSID - Kosovo Civil Society Consortium for Sustainable Development

LGA - Local Government Authority

MESP - Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning

MW - Megawatt

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

TPP - Thermoelectric Power Plant

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to account for how local governments and citizens perceive sustainable development in Kosovo and explore bottlenecks and opportunities they face in this regard.

A combination of document analysis and information gained through public debates shows that local governments are in a favorable position to respond to and address today's local development challenges in Kosovo. Our findings indicate that local governments can play a vital role in educating, mobilizing, and responding to citizens to promote overall sustainable development in the longer term, albeit a relatively new concept in Kosovo.

In terms of challenges and opportunities, we identified the most pressing issues that have been divided into common themes with the corresponding opportunities and possible solutions. The importance of public debates lies in that they offer the opportunity for citizens and interested stakeholders to express their concerns and open societal discussions on topics that are rarely mentioned. The practicality of this process combined with the power of the media act as reinforcing mechanism to contribute and influence local and central level decision-making to address and consider issues citizens are most affected by.

This democratic process is something Balkan Green Foundation stands for to enable sustainable development from the community level by providing constructive pressure as a civil society organization. The public debates organized throughout nine municipalities in Kosovo defined the most pressing issues and gave insights on solutions that are put together in this report. Recommendations derived from the direct interaction with citizens, officials and CSOs who participated in public debates. Moving from the local level up to the central level is key to ensure a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process. Raising awareness about important topics, particularly environment and energy, which are not considered of high priority at the central level, is very important in ensuring ownership to the communities and creating sustainability in the process.

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges of the representative democracy in Kosovo remains the existing gap between the representatives and the represented. Both parties are to blame for the situation: first, institutions do not take sufficient measures to include citizens in decision-making; second, citizens do not express interest to partake in decisions that directly impact their lives. The approach of the institutions and the behavior of citizens are not mutually exclusive and therefore affect one another. If institutions ignore citizens' suggestions, they disincentivize citizens from participating in decision-making; likewise, citizens insisting to debate and contribute to decision-making influence the institutions to alter their approach and become more responsible.¹

Energy production in Kosovo is predominantly based on fossil fuel, specifically in burning brown coal, considered the lowest rank of coal due to its relatively low heat content. Production of renewable energy in the country takes up a really insignificant portion of the total energy production because of either lack of infrastructure investments or other political reasons that do not prioritize green energy. In such a case, Kosovo is struggling with high rates of pollution that impact public health severely. Kosovo, as an aspiring country to join the EU family, will need to meet standards of clean energy production set forward by EU member states, which call for action on initiatives for sustainable energy production. That being said, the general public, different groups of social society and decision-makers should be informed about the urgent need on green energy investments and the longer-term benefits of alternative energy uses in economic, social and environmental well-being of the country and society.

Balkan Green Foundation organized public debates on energy issues with the aim of contributing to increasing awareness of the advantages, disadvantages, and impact of current energy policies. People of different economic and social backgrounds were informed about the importance of sustainable development and their role in encouraging activities in this direction. These public debates were organized within a joint project of Balkan Green Foundation and Heinrich Böll Foundation - gathering citizens, activists, experts, representatives of national and municipal assembly and representatives of the private sector.

Considering that the developments within the environment, energy, and economic sectors have a direct impact on the overall well-being of the country's citizens and the Kosovo budget, Balkan Green Foundation considers that focusing in these sectors in a public discourse remains of special importance. The discussions aimed at providing opportunities to exchange ideas and expertise in the aforementioned sectors, by examining and raising awareness of pressing issues. A better informed and educated general public on renewable energy and energy efficiency measures will be able to effectively monitor and influence decision making on policies and strategies for sustainable growth. Information will reach this targeted group through participation on discussions as representatives of their community or as part of the audience, in which case they will be a crucial part of the project implementation. Otherwise, dissemination of findings from the report - tailored to be distributed through social media - is considered an effective means to reach the target group as well.

¹GAP Institute, *The gap between the institutions and citizens in the Municipality of Kamenica* (Pristina: 2018).

THE ENERGY SECTOR IN KOSOVO

Kosovo's energy production is based on brown coal, more than 97% of the electricity in the country is produced by two outdated and unreliable polluting power plants – Kosovo A and Kosovo B. The energy sector lacks the reliability, security and the diversification it needs, affecting overall sustainable economic development². The installed capacity of renewable sources amounts to only 3% of the total electricity generated (out of the 25% target by 2020 to meet the standards of the European Union), albeit this year was declared as the “Year of Green Energy” by the Ministry of Economic Development³.

The focus of the Government remains the investment in the very contradictory “Kosova e Re” (New Kosovo) power plant project, incorporated as the most important power development in the Energy Strategy of Kosovo 2017-2026⁴. This project will lock Kosovo for decades in an energy capacity that is expensive economically, raise the rates of electricity, pollute the environment and damage the integration of renewables in the country's energy mix by making them uncompetitive.

The construction of the New Kosovo power plant will also politically damage the country's integration into the European Union, as expressed by the worries of the Energy Community⁵ – which Kosovo is a member of, due to the contract being too favorable for the operating company – ContourGlobal, while going against several laws of the Energy Community, particularly on State Aid for which Kosovo can be penalized because it can lead to market distortion of the entire Energy Community market. The Government of Kosovo needs to abruptly change its course of action.

Though the aim of these public debates is to raise awareness on issues of the energy sector in the country – such as the overall energy situation and trends in the country, matters of energy efficiency, renewables and green development shifted away to other topics such as environment, waste and deforestation for which the citizens seemed to have more knowledge about. Citizens used this opportunity to seek additional information from institutional representatives on matters affecting their daily preoccupations while energy seemed like a more technical and specialized field.

² World Bank, *Energy in Kosovo* (Pristina: 2018).

³ Ministry of Economic Development, *Lluka: 2018, the year of green energy* (Pristina: 2018).

⁴ Ministry of Economic Development, *Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2017-2025* (Pristina: 2017).

⁵ Energy Community, *The contractual framework pertaining to the Kosova e Re project – the Secretariat's preliminary concerns* (Energy Community: 2018).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS & BGF



METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This research report seeks to identify common themes derived from discussions held during nine municipal-level public debates in the context of challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in Kosovo. The methodology used for this report is the collection of qualitative research, through the collection and recollection of qualitative information retrieved from the public debates held in the most important municipalities in Kosovo.

Public debates were welcomed as a unique opportunity for many citizens and organizations across Kosovo. They were seen as a good form of interaction between citizens and institutional officials which provided the opportunity to network with each other, present their work, engage in issues related to sustainability, and most importantly, become well-informed about energy issues in Kosovo as well. The qualitative research method is harder to quantify due to the absence of numerical values and differences in responses, hence why commonalities were derived and challenges and opportunities analyzed.

As a report/paper with the aim of having an impact that ensures sustainability, this resembles a policy paper. The first part includes a short situational/problem analysis while the second concentrates on the opportunities and concrete recommendations that were seen as the most important and pressing issues that citizens agreed are essential to be addressed and directed towards policy-makers and decision-makers so they can have an impact and improve the situation at hand. The list of municipalities in which public debates were held is as follows:

1. Ferizaj/Uroševac
2. Gjakovë/Đjakovica
3. Gjilan/Gnjilane
4. Graçanicë/Gračanica
5. Mitrovicë/Mitrovica
6. Pejë/Peć
7. Prishtina/Pristina
8. Prizren
9. Shtërpcë/Štrpce

The reporting methodology makes use of qualitative data techniques consisting of words from written documents, reports and publications, but also interview transcripts which we analyzed into themes. In reporting the data we gathered, it is generally important to convey not only the themes but also some of the most striking opinions of the citizens and other stakeholders in relation to the major issues and situations mentioned.

COMMON THEMES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The main challenges mentioned during the public debates consist of environmental problems such as waste and illegal landfills, illegal logging of trees, lack of infrastructure, inter-institutional cooperation problems and conflicts of interest between different stakeholders, especially in the construction of new generation capacities. These were seen as very challenging because failure to resolve affects the process of sustainable development and addressing them is quite problematic and requires a lot of time, cooperation, capacity, energy, and resources, which most municipalities have in a limited capacity. Most of the challenges mentioned require intervention at the central level, which is difficult or only in a very limited amount possible due to a different energy agenda and the environment posing no real priority.

“Sustainable development is not considered a priority in Kosovo. We act when something happens, we do not take the necessary measures to prevent something from happening.” – Zivojin Cirkovic from NGO GIOR

In terms of opportunities, there is tremendous development potential still unused, particularly in energy efficiency, renewables, tourism, agriculture and the implementation of best practices, all of which can have a multiplier effect in other municipalities in Kosovo. There was general agreement on issues

related to renewable energy - every stakeholder recognizes the long-term benefits of renewable energy regardless of the initial high set-up costs. Certain municipalities have cooperated with international donors on projects promoting energy efficiency (especially public lighting), however, most see more room for funding in district heating systems, infrastructure improvement, biomass, recycling, wind farms, and solar parks.

ILLEGAL LANDFILLS

Pollution poses a problem on a global scale. Today, production of waste is a constant phenomenon of human existence, because human beings are in fact the biggest producer of waste. The waste management system in Kosovo is at an unsatisfactory level, which presents a major problem for Kosovo. Approximately, the population covered with waste collection services is around 50%⁶. A large amount of waste is burned either nearby rivers or in inappropriate places such as illegal landfills. This is the result of the fact that the significant amount of garbage goes to illegal dumping sites. The amount of waste produced in Kosovo is approximately 580,000 tons (0.9 kg/day, per capita), with 1572 illegal dumps identified in 2017 of which 46% are construction and demolition waste dumps, posing a serious threat to the environment⁷.

This is a problem that persists in all municipalities, particularly in rural areas. On the fields and in the nearby forests you can come across broken computers, phones, TV sets, refrigerators, worn out mattresses and many others items. Storing waste in landfill sites is the oldest and the most popular way aimed at the disposal of solid waste. Proceeding according to appropriate technological procedures

⁶ Ilir Ramadan Morina et al., *Illegal Landfills in sixteen Municipalities of Kosovo* (International Journal of Environmental Science and Technology: 2017).

⁷ Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, *Municipal Waste Management in Kosovo* (Pristina: 2018).

allows safe disposal of industrial waste and municipal solid waste. Current sanitary and environmental protection regulations (such as the Law No. 04/L-060 on Waste) require the construction and the use of landfills in such a way that the emission of pollution is reduced to a minimum.⁸ The Law on Waste obliges municipalities to issue a register of illegal landfills in their territory within a period of one year. Reporting on waste management activities is only partially realized by licensed operators and waste owners, the Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency claims municipalities do not report to them on an annual basis as required by law. In general, there is a lack of standardized reporting from all actors.

In terms of **challenges**, local communities do seem to think illegal landfills are a multifaceted problem that persists and poses a threat to the environment and human beings. There is a sense that the inefficiency of municipally-contracted waste management companies, the insufficient number of containers and low awareness among citizens are contributing to the phenomenon of illegal landfills. The local communities are very clear in stating that this is not a one-time phenomenon but a recurring one. While it is difficult to assess the exact type of waste located in landfills, biodegradable waste and plastic products seem to be very common. The issue here is the fact that plastic waste is a type of material that takes a considerable amount of time to decompose, and releases toxins into the environment, particularly dioxins.

In terms of **opportunities**, both local communities and institutional representatives spoke with a unified voice concerning opportunities that can be utilized for the betterment of the environment and well-being. Some opportunities mentioned were as follows:

- Drafting regulations permitting smaller municipalities to create and manage public enterprises that deal with waste management;
- Raising awareness among citizens (involving the family in a child's education and educational activities) so that they become cautious about their actions and the impact they can have on the environment;
- Enforcing fines for illegal dumpers to send a message and increase awareness;
- Investing in transfer stations to reduce the cost of transporting waste to distant dumps and landfills by serving as convenient hubs that manage the community's waste.

SEE IT, REPORT IT, GET REWARDED!

One institutional representative referred to an interesting initiative enforced in Brooklyn, New York. The City of Brooklyn is offering financial rewards to people who help catch illegal dumpers. Offering a reward sends a message to would-be dumpers that there will be many more eyes on them and to the public that reporting what they see can pay off.

⁸ Assembly of Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 04/L-060 - Law on Waste* (Kosovo: 2012).

ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION NO. 6/2018

Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, Fatmir Matoshi, signed Administrative Instruction No. 6/2018 which foresees penalties with mandatory fines for natural and legal persons who throw garbage outside designated places. Matoshi indicated that the value of the mandatory fine, depending on the punitive action, will be from 20 to 100 Euros, and called on citizens and media to report on those who violate the provisions of this instruction.⁹

DEFORESTATION

Forests play many important ecological roles. From helping mitigate climate change; providing homes for many species of plants and animals; providing food, medicine, and livelihoods for people around the globe; to the intrinsic values of forests, these essential ecological powerhouses are irreplaceable and at risk. Forests cover 31% of our planet, yet, despite everything forests do for the planet, they are being cut down at an alarming rate¹⁰. Every year 46-58 thousand square miles of forest are lost to deforestation, which is equal to an astounding 48 football fields of forest disappearing every minute.

Deforestation is another major hindrance on ensuring the sustainable development of local communities and overall development in Kosovo, particularly as it degrades the environment, damages the soil structure and causes entire swaths of land to lose fertility, causes groundwater to disappear and has a tremendous negative impact on the biodiversity of entire habitats. In terms of **challenges**, local communities do seem to think the phenomenon of illegal logging stems from the need to use firewood for heating, which is in high demand in Kosovo. Biomass use in terms of wood pellet is increasing as well and there are fears that a lot of logging (legal and illegal) happens because of wood pellet production where forests are being degraded so businesses can profit and grow from these operations while local communities are the ones who suffer the most.

A majority of municipalities agreed that forest degradation is one of the major issues they are facing, particularly smaller municipalities that are more reliant on forests and tourism due to geographical features. Another **major challenge** on the municipal-level is the lack of coordination between the central and local level; there seems to be discord between the central government agencies responsible for the management of the forests and the local government. The issue here is the local government not being able to be in control of their own resources, therefore, being alienated from them, and as such, not having any means of protecting due to the lack of control. There are municipalities whose forestry territories fall under the legal status of a National Park for which there is a conflicting ownership and management of the forests, divided between them and the National Park Authority, who together with the Kosovo Forestry Agency (KFA) responsible for the logging process have control over the wood source, leaving the municipalities left out entirely and without the chance to even fulfill its own demands for either firewood or timber.

⁹ Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, *Ministri Matoshi nënshkruan udhëzim administrativ të gjobave për hedhje të mbeturinave* (Pristina: 2018).

¹⁰ Lauren Bennett, *Deforestation and Climate Change* (District of Columbia: Climate Institute: 2017).

CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The growing demand for wood fuel to be used in wood-burning stoves is a challenge which creates an opportunity for public officials to engage in illegal activities such as bribing or extortion. Two cases in the Municipality of Shterpce were reported: one involving a shooting between illegal lumberjacks and forest guards; and two, where forest guards were fired because they accepted bribes. During the autumn season, illegal forest felling in the National Parks intensifies. Just recently (October 2018), two additional cases were reported in Kacanik and Suhareka where forest guards were physically attacked by organized groups and received bodily injuries, including gunfire in their direction.

FOREST THEFT CASES

Forest theft is one of the most prescribed criminal offences in years. A monitoring report produced by Çohu! covering the prescription of cases from 2001 to 2014 shows that the most prescribed criminal offence is forest theft, Article 358/285, with a total of 1783 prescribed cases. Based on the findings, during 2013 and 2014, the state lost the right to impose criminal sanctions for 1603 cases of forest theft. Out of 6610 cases of forest theft in 2014, in all basic courts and their branches throughout Kosovo, 604 cases were prescribed, or 9.14 % of the total number of cases in process.¹¹

In terms of **opportunities**, both local communities and institutional representatives spoke with a unified voice concerning opportunities that can be utilized to combat deforestation. Some opportunities mentioned were as follows:

- Designing biomass district heating systems to take advantage of the agricultural, forest, and manure residues and in extent, urban and industrial wastes, which under controlled burning conditions, can generate heat and electricity, with limited environmental impacts;
- Restoring forests by planting trees to regenerate while encouraging tree thinning techniques as opposed to clear-cut logging;
- Investing in fast-growing trees such as Paulownia, a popular investment hardwood tree because of its high growth rate and the quality of the timber;
- Collecting wood residue which provides a cheap form of energy by minimizing wastage and therefore reducing the impact of the forestry industry on the environment.

PAULOWNIA TREES

Paulownia is a popular investment hardwood tree because of its high growth rate and the quality of the timber. Different variants can be grown for timber, ethanol or biomass. Paulownia's timber is high quality as it has one of the best strength ratios and it is used in planes, ships, musical instruments, surfboard, and caravans. Because of these characteristics, it's called the "Aluminum of the timbers".¹²

¹¹ Preportr, *Destruction of forests in Kosovo*, (Preportr: 2017).

¹² InvestItIn, *Investing in Fast Growing Trees: Paulownia Elongata* (InvestItIn: 2016).

TOURISM

Tourism was mentioned as an important issue regarding the sustainable development of many municipalities in Kosovo. Prizren, Peja, Pristina, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Shterpce, and Gracanica are places where tourism was mentioned and discussed as an activity that would boost economic development as well as reflect in other spheres of life, such as culture, art, gastronomy and business. Besides the benefits of tourism, potential, feasibility studies carried out, plans for the future, also] main challenges were discussed.

In terms of **challenges**, infrastructure remains one of the most limiting factors with regards to promoting tourism across municipalities. Particularly municipalities whose terrains feature national parks and ski resorts, such as in Shterpce and Prizren, road conditions were mentioned as a limiting factor in promoting tourism. Besides the absence of hotels to provide proper accommodation, the lack of basic infrastructure such as lighting, water, sewerage system and in many cases the lack of proper waste collection are factors negatively impacting the potential of tourism in the aforementioned municipalities. The Brezovica Ski Resort has enormous potential to attract international tourists, however, its potential is being diminished due to outdated ski lift infrastructure, underdeveloped ski paths, poor customer service, and outmoded hotels.

Apart from infrastructure, several other **challenges** hindering tourism potential are the lack of proper development strategies, the concentration on too many priorities and ending up with projects that remain on paper. There are problems of coordination between different agencies and institutions, and sometimes, a limiting factor can be the issue of property rights or the government having a different view over a project while the municipality has another.

In terms of **opportunities**, local communities and institutional representatives spoke with a unified voice concerning opportunities that can be utilized to promote tourism. Some opportunities mentioned were as follows:

- Encouraging budget planning with the input of multiple departments and review sources instead of focusing on ad hoc budgets passed-on from previous projects and administrations;
- Creating business support centers with a focus on sustainable development issues, namely, starting-up businesses in the renewable energy and energy efficient materials industry;
- Designing grant schemes for young entrepreneurs with ideas on promoting tourism, similar to DokuFest.

PRIZREN AND TOURISM

DokuFest is an International Documentary and Short Film Festival held in Prizren. It is an annual festival held in August, founded in 2002 by a group of friends. It has since grown into a cultural event that attracts international and regional artists and audiences. Films are screened throughout the eight-day festival and accompanied by programs, activities, and workshops.

In 2015, this festival increased the economic activity (GDP) in the amount of over 2.4 million Euros with the main indirect beneficiaries of the festival being local businesses in Prizren: hotels, renters, restaurants, coffee-bars, street vendors, but also nation-wide businesses, such as air companies, banks, and telecommunication companies.¹³

The Municipality of Prizren gave 25 grants to young entrepreneurs who had innovative ideas and is supporting existing business organizations on developing and expanding their business activities. While Prizren has focused investments on the central and historical part of the city, the municipality stated their plans to expand and invest in hiking and skiing tourism in the Zupa Valley which will greatly benefit Bosniaks, the second largest ethnic minority group in Kosovo.

HYDROPOWER

Regarded as another sector that has minor potential which bears high consequences on the sustainable development of the country, especially so when it is developed inadequately in terms of planning and feasibility. Though hydropower is considered to be a renewable source, it can damage the environment as a result of water diversion, erosion, destruction of natural habitats, particularly when hydropower plants are built in national parks, as is the case in Kosovo. Local communities have defined this as another major **challenge** impacting and harming the environment, tourism, and livelihoods.

Most hydropower plants are being built without any consultation, consideration or regard for the needs of local communities. In general, hydropower plants are designed and built in such a way that maximizes profit and uses water quantity to the maximum extent possible, usually on long steel pipes that degrade the environment and ecosystem. This issue has been presented in Gjakova, Peja, Shterpce, and Prizren, as a problem that needs urgent consideration. Local communities and municipal officials voiced their opinion and expressed their regard that these projects were mainly profit-driven rather than having any impact on the local economy, or that they might ease in unemployment, or provide for any real development causes.

Some **challenges** brought about by hydropower plants are the disappearance of rivers into tubes, river pollution, the destruction of natural beauty, habitats, the destruction of irrigation capabilities for agricultural communities, devastating impact on tourism, the mutation of natural scenery beyond recognition (as was the case in Decan) due to hydro-projects failing completely to adhere to principles of sustainable development. The municipality of Prizren, Peja and that of Shterpce are having a harder time combating hydropower projects as the majority of planned projects fall within their municipalities. Issues with hydropower are also derived from central level planning, as mentioned in Shterpce and Prizren, when the Ministry of Economic Development set targets for energy production from renewables which was far attached from the real potential on the ground.

¹³ GAP Institute, *The Economic Impact of DokuFest 2015* (Prishtina: 2016).

Many companies were also enticed by the feed-in tariffs and saw these as good opportunities for business, even though they had little regard for the “betonizing” (as per the term used in reference to these projects) of nature. Even though there was a decision an attempted moratorium from the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning to enter in force by early summer 2018, effectively putting on hold all these hydropower projects until the situation becomes clear on which projects cannot continue due to the non-adherence to any standards, this idea has already been scrapped due to pressure on the former minister Reshitaj.¹⁴ The municipalities most affected by the hydropower projects consider these pointless and ineffectual. They considered the central level authorities to be closely linked to the construction companies of these projects, but also the reality on the ground confirmed these projects are ongoing despite the official on-hold status.

In terms of **opportunities**, local communities and institutional representatives alluded to wind power as an option to generate renewable energy at a lesser environmental cost. Despite the high set-up costs, both parties called for wind power feasibility studies. The Municipality of Shterpce had investors express interest in investing, however, this is an ongoing process as wind turbine project risk is assessed and evaluated.

WIND FARM IN KAMENICA

High on the Kitka mountain plateau in Kamenica workers installed Kosovo’s first operational wind farm, as the country tries to ease its reliance on coal and end power outages. Kosovo aims to generate a quarter of its energy from renewable sources by 2020 to meet the standards of the European Union, which it aspires to join. But to achieve that goal, it needs to attract more investment to shift away from coal. At Kosovo’s first wind farm, a total of nine 110 meter General Electric turbines began whirring in October 2018 and are expected to cover 3% of its demand. Turkish energy developer Güriş, which is behind the 32.4 megawatt (MW) wind farm, hopes it will kick-start clean energy in a country in dire need of cutting pollution.¹⁵

SOLAR PARK IN GJAKOVA

This extraordinary project was built in Gjakova as a step of increasing the production of renewable energy towards sustainable and accountable development. Peja Beer became one of the first domestic companies to eco-invest in renewable energy, taking on the responsibility of showing Kosovo the vital importance of supporting a clean and healthy environment. The innovative technology used in this park comes with a 6 megawatt (MW) installed capacity, thus becoming a very important pillar of promoting the energy mix and decreasing the demand for fossil fuels.¹⁶

¹⁴ Eve-anne Travers, *The fight for Kosovo’s vanishing rivers* (Pristina Insight: 2018).

¹⁵ Fatos Bytyci, *Coal-reliant Kosovo gears up for wind shift to hit EU target* (Reuters: 2018).

¹⁶ Indeksonline, *Birra Peja e bën Kosovën me parkun më të madh solar në rajon* (Pristina: 2018).

POWER PLANTS

The very contradictory “New Kosovo” power plant project has been mentioned as a major issue in the public debate in Pristina, posing an economic and environmental **challenge** together with the existing power plants, mainly due to the presence of Minister for Economic Development, Valdrin Lluka in our roundtable.

The capital of Kosovo is infamous for its extreme air pollution during the winter time which achieves extreme levels on a global scale, particularly between the months of December, January, and February, when it competes with major industrial cities of Asia. The participants of the public debates were afraid that the situation is going to get worse as there is going to be a new power plant that continues to use brown coal as its fuel, with which Kosovo is endowed with the world’s 5th largest reserves. Brown coal is among the dirtiest type of coal, and as such, the environmental and health impact would continue to be a problem for 40 more years, particularly so if the technology that is going to be used by the new power plant is not going to feature state of the art technology as was promised.

Besides the environmental factor, the economic cost of the New Kosovo Power Plant seems a big concern. The Government of Kosovo signed the contract for the construction of the new power plant with the operator ContourGlobal and according to civil society organizations the contract for the new power plant is the most damaging contract for Kosovo because it creates a twenty-year financial gap for the country, isolates Kosovo from the integration and liberalization of the electricity market, and extinguishes the hopes for an energy system based on clean and environmentally-friendly sources of energy and a healthy population¹⁷. Moreover, a concern for participants of the public debate is the price of electricity which is going to become much more expensive than previously thought.

Instead of investing so heavily on a new power plant that is going to increase the price of electricity, as was mentioned in municipalities such as Gjilan, Gjakova, Gracanica and mostly in Pristina, alternative options of energy production were presented by participants. In Pristina, as a possible **solution** was offered a huge solar power park at the ash disposal site of Kosovo A, at a capacity of 150 megawatt (MW). In Gjakova, biomass was considered an option together with wind power and energy efficiency, the same for Gjilan as well. An interesting idea came from Mitrovica in regards to saving electricity and other sources of energy for heating by using the geothermal capabilities of the Trepca mining complex to heat water and distribute it to Mitrovica to ensure an alternative form of district heating.

INDUSTRIAL WASTE

Serious environmental and health problems were inherited from industrial leftovers in terms of industrial hazardous waste in many municipalities in Kosovo. The two major industrial polluters that came up during the public debates were the Trepca mining and smelting complex, as well as Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK). As a conglomerate, Trepca had many smaller mines located across the country, such as the one in Kishnica (close to Gracanica) where there is massive industrial waste

¹⁷ KOSID, *Kontrata për Ndërtimin e Termocentralit “Kosova e Re”: Tetë marrëveshje, tre impakte të mëdha* (Pristina: 2018).

deposited - a result of direct mining activity from the processing of lead and zinc ore that is partly still active. During our debates, the three most affected municipalities that feel most impacted by industrial waste were: Gracanica, Mitrovica (South and North), Gjilan through Novo Brdo and Pristina through KEK.

All of the abovementioned municipalities expressed the following worries and main **challenges**: land contamination, air pollution, water pollution, and groundwater contamination (mostly with heavy metals such as lead). This was the case for Mitrovica, especially in the northern part where environmental lead contamination seems to be highest. Also, water and groundwater pollution were mentioned as an important issue. In Gracanica, similarly due to dangerous heaps of industrial waste particularly during windy days, extreme pollution often occurs that can travel up to Pristina. This toxic waste contaminates the air, land, surface and groundwaters of the Municipality of Gracanica and is causing serious problems for the citizens of this municipality. KEK remains the major issue in Pristina, particularly pollution from the existing aging power plants and the ash disposal sites that are contaminating the groundwater nearby. A possible **solution** is shutting down the polluters and remove the waste, cover it and turn it into green spaces or other environmentally-friendly solutions.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In all of the municipalities that we implemented public debates with citizens, infrastructure was mentioned as an important **challenge**. Problems with the quality of the roads were a frequent topic, the outdated power grid or the lack of investment in it, the lack of a proper sewerage treatment system, the lack of infrastructure for the collection of waste, and the lack of proper landfills and transport options as well. Particularly so in Shterpce where infrastructure remained an issue even though it improved, challenges to its sustainable development, particularly in tourism, are the damaged road to Brezovica Ski Resort, the lack of proper hotels, the lack of sewage treatment plants and the lack of proper waste collection.

The very same issue was mentioned in Gracanica where the lack of proper garbage disposal, the lack of an independent waste collection company and the lack of a local landfill were considered as a vast hindrance. Also, business needed a proper sewerage system, especially for rainwater as it can cause floods and damage their business activities. In Gjakova, infrastructure was also discussed as a key aspect that enables proper development, such as proper construction of river embankments and the installation of cameras to prevent illegal dumping of waste into rivers or other places. In Mitrovica, besides the common themes of infrastructure, public lighting and irrigation were mentioned as an issue, and various options were mentioned as solutions, such as the use of the Trepca industrial water for irrigation purposes. In Peja and Prizren the need for better infrastructure as to attract more tourists was mentioned, such as better accommodation options, better hotels, better roads, more recreational areas were mentioned, as well as better tourist information offices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the direct collection of the opinions gathered through these public debates, and after analyzing the main issues, together with the input provided by citizens, activists, experts, representatives of national and municipal assembly and representatives of the private sector, BGF derived the following recommendations:

- The Government should prioritize environmental protection and increase the budget allocated to the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, currently at 2.64% of the total budget¹⁸;
- Economic development in Kosovo should not be based on the uncontrolled use of underground resources;
- Kosovo should produce electricity without affecting the health of the population, without contaminating air, water and soil. This future implies policies that promote energy production from its renewable resources. In parallel with the stimulation of building new capacities from renewable sources, Kosovo should work towards regional and European integration as instruments for increasing security of supply and affordability of prices;
- Kosovo must gradually replace energy from non-fossil sources with clean energy. As such, apart from identifying resource-efficient energy sources, Kosovo should provide investors with ease in the procedures. A one-stop-shop for investment in extensive energy resources is indispensable. However, the model we propose is such that responsible institutions prepare all documentation and investors compete for that particular source without having to deal with additional documents;
- The Government needs a new approach to manage natural resources for the development of rural areas – ex: community-based resource management. The concept of resource management from the community itself is very important also for the management of energy resources. For example, it is necessary that based on the new Law on Thermal Energy to support closed heating supply systems in rural and urban areas. These systems would greatly enhance energy efficiency, contribute to forest conservation and sustainable use, and enhance the quality of service and citizen awareness.
- The Government should address the low capacity issue by increasing funds to ensure there is enough capacity in regards to environmental protection – increase the numbers of inspectors, police officers, forest guards, and more civil servants oriented towards environmental issues.
- The Government should ensure better inter-institutional coordination between the central and local level, particularly in forestry and illegal logging and waste management, through the improvement of the legal framework;
- The Government should ensure the national and local level institutional framework is in full harmonization and coordination on both ends;

¹⁸ Ministry of Finance. *Law No. 06/L-020 on the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for Year 2018* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo: 2018)

- The Government should incentivize Kosovar Serbs to respond to the upcoming census so as to accurately count every resident in Kosovo in order to reflect the real number of residents which will then account for a more realistic municipal budget allocation;
- The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning should propose to amend the law on local governance in order to decentralize waste collection and permit smaller municipalities to create and manage public enterprises that deal with waste management;
- Municipalities should draft action plans needed to address problems of the municipalities on issues of sustainable development;
- Municipalities should revise Municipal Development Plans (MDPs) and encourage the inclusion of citizens;
- Municipalities should consider the idea of creating an Office for Strategic Planning that is politically independent and guarantees continuity regardless of the administrations;
- Courts should reduce case backlog and delays concerning fines forwarded by law enforcement authorities;
- There is a need for media campaigns about the importance of sustainability, energy efficiency and behavior change that is needed to promote a healthier environment, as such civil society organizations should cooperate with municipalities on organizing clean-up activities and increasing awareness through festivals, conferences, discussions, family education and school education;

CONCLUSION

Kosovo is at a crossroads: the protracted democratic transition has deprived Kosovo's citizens of sustainable economic and social development. BGF considers that the best way to design the economic and social development of the Republic of Kosovo is by following the principles of sustainable development. For us, the road for Kosovo in the next four years is clear: it must be paved towards sustainable economic and social development.

Kosovo faces a polluted environment and endangered environmental future. These public debates made it even clearer that Kosovo more than ever needs a balanced socio-economic development that will consider both human and environmental factors. Particularly through an inclusive and open process that invited citizens and officials to speak about their own thoughts and experiences in regards to these issues, ideas have been derived on how to improve the situation in a democratic and cooperative way, which also was the aim of this project through these public debates.

The main identified problems, such as illegal landfills, air pollution, illegal and legal logging in a destructive and unsustainable way of forests, erosion, surface river pollution and the contamination of groundwater, lack of sewage systems, industrial leftovers that are polluting huge swaths of land, air and water, were among the common problems we found as having the most negative impact on the life of the local communities. Directly linked to the aspect of energy and economic development, positive aspects were mentioned like particularly energy efficiency projects that were implemented in each municipality, but also the negative ones that pollute and degrade the environment, and have negative impact on the people and communities such as hydropower and thermoelectric power plants. Positive aspects and developments have also been mentioned, such as increased awareness about the environment, positive results on environmental local projects from the civil sector side, but also from the municipal - institutional side, however despite these achievements the situation in the ground remains critical and in need of urgent improvement.

Through this engagement besides the aforementioned results we also created the opportunity for local NGOs to speak up, present their work, express their worries, explain the situation at hand, talk face to face with local politicians and officials. Importantly, these public debates served also as a good ground and basis for networking operations with same minded organizations and people and therefore ensure the continuation of projects towards environmental sustainability and dialogue.

ANNEX

Table. 1. Common Themes: Challenges

| Municipality ¹⁹ | Illegal Landfills | Deforestation | Tourism | Hydropower | Power Plant | Industrial Waste | Infrastructure |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Ferizaj Uroševac | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Gjakovë Đjakovica | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | National Park | TPP New Kosovo | | Sewerage Embankment |
| Gjilan Gnjilane | ✓ | ✓ | | | TPP New Kosovo | | |
| Graçanicë Gračanica | ✓ | | ✓ | | TPP New Kosovo | Trepça | Sewerage |
| Mitrovicë Mitrovica | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | Trepça | Embankment Irrigation |
| Pejë Peć | ✓ | National Park | ✓ | National Park | | | Sewerage |
| Prishtina Pristina | ✓ | | ✓ | | TPP New Kosovo | KEK | KEK Electro Filters |
| Prizren | ✓ | Sharr National Park | ✓ | National Park | | | |
| Shtërpçë Štrpce | ✓ | Sharr National Park | ✓ | National Park | | | |

¹⁹ Ndreqe.com is an online platform that collects citizen complaints for municipal public services and portrays it on an interactive map. The platform enables citizens to easily and quickly report complaints, while municipal institutions can channel requests through an easily accessible place.

Table 2. Common Themes: Opportunities

| Municipality | Tourism | Energy Efficiency | Agro-Business | Renewable Sources | Central and Local-Level Coordination |
|------------------------|---------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ferizaj Uroševac | | ✓ | ✓ | Solar | |
| Gjakovë Đjakovica | ✓ | ✓ | | Solar/Biomass | ✓ |
| Gjilan Gnjilane | ✓ | ✓ | | Energy Efficiency | |
| Graçanicë Graçanica | ✓ | | ✓ | Solar | ✓ |
| Mitrovicë Mitrovica | ✓ | ✓ | | Geothermal | |
| Pejë/Peć | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Hydro/Wind | |
| Prishtina Pristina | ✓ | | | Solar | ✓ |
| Prizren | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Solar/ Energy Efficiency | |
| Shtërpcë Štrpce | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Wind | ✓ |