



Community action on climate change in Macedonia

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May 2014

Green Agenda creates ownership of citizens of measures against climate change

In eight municipalities in all the corners of Macedonia citizens are working in dialogue towards tangible measures on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Regarding the recent floods in neighboring countries a very urgent issue in the region. Monitoring expert Jerphaas Donner describes the current state of this program and the history and background of Green Agenda.

When the water turns brown

During the long hot summer of 2011 a wildfire raged through the watershed and river Pehcevska near the town of Pehchevo. The fire destroyed the vegetation upstream the filter station which supplied the drinking water for Pehchevo and three villages. As a result, drinking water supply was at risk during heavy rains which created floods. The water from the taps turned brown after these rains. Until 2014 this situation lasted and nothing was done. It may not be a scientific approach to connect this local case directly to global climate change but wild fires and floods are generally regarded as typical consequences of a changing climate. This case in Pehchevo, is just one of the adaptation challenges confronted by the Municipal climate change strategies project in Macedonia. In this program, funded by USAID and implemented by Milieukontakt Macedonia, locals from 8 communities define their own strategies for adaptation and mitigation with the help of

experts and in a process of dialogue.

Effects of climate change in Macedonia

As a small, land-locked country, with a highly variable climate and 19 percent of the population employed in agriculture, Macedonia is vulnerable to climate change. Climate trends depict increasing temperatures and declining precipitation levels, which will stress an already hot, dry climate that is prone to extreme, weather-related events such as heat waves, drought, floods, and forest fires. Agriculture in Macedonia is highly depending on rain and relatively inefficient and therefore most obviously affected by climate change. The poor, the old and the very young are likely to suffer most. When you have no money it is hard to move your household or to take adaptation measures. Old people suffer more from heat stress, bad weather conditions and are less flexible. The very young can suffer from food shortages, flooding, humidity and heat. Other

groups are the people living in the cities, farmers and other workers depending heavily on climate conditions like tourism and recreation. With nearly 36.3 percent of the rural population in Macedonia, earning less than \$5 a day, their vulnerability is clear.

Adaptation and Mitigation

There are two ways to deal with climate change: You can adapt or you can mitigate. Although some decades ago the emphasis was on mitigation, with the current effects of climate change, adaptation is not a choice but a necessity. Just recently the devastating effects of flooding are manifest in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. In Bosnia 40 percent of the country is affected by the floods, which wrecked the main agriculture industry in the northern flatlands, wiping out infrastructure, farms, buildings and homes. One quarter of the country's 4 million people have been affected by the six days of floods and 2,100 landslides. The flooding has led to at least 51 deaths: 27 in Serbia, 22 in Bosnia, and two in Croatia. It is a signal to the Western Balkan region that adaptation measures are urgently needed.

What can you do?

What can one person do to adapt or mitigate a worldwide phenomenon like a changing climate? The answer is both nothing and everything. If only one person acts it will be less than a tiny drop in the ocean, but if nobody acts nothing will happen at all. This is the old paradox known as the tragedy of the commons: if something is owned by all of us, who will feel responsible for its maintenance? (Hardin, 1968) The only way to solve the problem of climate change or to adapt to its consequences is cooperation from grass root to the global level. Or to put it in a more popular way: glocal

action. By the way, in Macedonia 80% of the energy is consumed by households and small and medium enterprises. (Tiemann 2011) More than 80% of this energy is produced by fossil fuels. If citizens would take substantial energy saving measures and start producing solar and wind energy this would be quite a contribution to a smaller carbon footprint of the country. So there is something people can do....

Glocalization

On global level governments, NGO's and business are trying to make agreements on the reduction of emissions to prevent further rising average temperatures in the world. This chain of international UN conferences on climate change, starting in Kyoto 1997, brings forth agreements but did not yet come up with solutions which help the people of Pechchevo with their drinking water. Only maybe in the amounts of money that is reserved through the Climate Change Adaptation Fund, to be spent on adaptation measures. But global negotiations take time and the changing climate does not wait. If you are confronted with brown water coming out of your tap more urgent actions are needed. Local authorities are confronted with similar cases as the one in Pehchevo on a daily basis, also in Macedonia. Therefore there is a need to act now and not wait for international results in negotiations. Thanks to USAID there are funds in Macedonia to act on local level. But there is always the question: "How to spend your money wisely".

A local farmer knows his land

One lesson learned from international cooperation is that measures taken, for which local communities do not feel ownership, often fail in the long run. Another lesson is that local

expertise is often overseen, with the same consequences. A local farmer knows his land and local doctors know the specifics of health and disease in the community. If foreign or national experts do not take this expertise into account they will ignore local specifics and create local resistance at the same time. And finally, the most optimal solution is not always the best one. The best solutions are the ones with broad support from the local community, not the ones which are technically most effective.

Involving citizens

One of the paradoxes of aid programmes is how to create ownership for something that is given, or even enforced upon the beneficiaries. Everybody knows that when you earn something after patience and hard work it feels different than when you get it for free. The effort to achieve something creates value. One way to overcome this paradox is to have the beneficiaries at least choose the measures and instruments that will support them in overcoming their problems. Secondly it is important that the beneficiaries contribute to the solution, either financial or with social capital. With the 'Green Agenda' methodology Milieukontakt developed a process that incorporates both. Based on mutually defined values citizens define an agenda for the future of their community. The journey from the values towards the adoption of the agenda by the local council goes through 14 steps in 5 phases. Citizens involvement is ensured by participatory work methods and the sense of ownership develops during the process. In Pehchevo and 7 other communities the Green Agenda methodology is applied by the citizens

to define local measures for adaptation and mitigation in climate change.

Green Agenda

At the end of the 20th century Milieukontakt International from The Netherlands supported Romanian civil society organizations working in urban areas that developed a project called "Green Agenda". In this project, civil society organizations actively involved citizens in prioritizing environmental issues in their cities. It was not common in Romania at that time for civil society organizations to adopt a cooperative and constructive strategy, taking the initiative to involve citizens and start a dialogue with authorities. After working for three years in urban areas, the focus of the organizations shifted to rural areas and Green Agenda became a methodology for civil society organizations working on community development from the perspective of sustainability. In the cooperative program between Focus Eco Centre and Milieukontakt International, Green Agenda was applied for the first time in eight communities in four micro regions. In this phase the municipal Green Agenda was already developed with working groups from communities working through several steps of identifying areas of interest and analysis of the current situation. Inspired by the Local Agenda 21, 12 steps were identified in the development of a vision for the community resulting in a local action plan. The strength and innovativeness of the program was perfectly described by working group member Sorin Abrudan from Huedin: "People in the micro-region have begun to understand that they do not have to wait for solutions from outside their community or from local authorities. They can get personally involved in finding solutions for

their problems.” This was a genuine breakthrough in Romania that had been for so many years under the government of centralist dictator Ceausescu.

While working on the development of the program, Milieucontact got in touch with Jan Joost Kessler from Aid Environment. He had developed the Strategic Environmental Analysis (SEAN) methodology working through a set of detailed steps towards a green plan for the community. This strategy was incorporated in the Green Agenda approach and practiced in the participating Romanian micro regions. The combination of Green Agenda, Agenda 21 and SEAN developed into a methodology for community development, initiated by civil society with an emphasis on sustainable development and citizens’ participation. During the Annual meeting of the Milieucontact International Network in 2000, Zoltan Hajdu from Focus Eco Centre presented the concept of Green Agenda developed in Romania. Since then Green Agenda has been an item on the agendas of many more international meetings. After Romania Green Agenda programs were initiated in Russia, Croatia, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, bringing the total number of communities to 24 municipalities in 5 countries.

In 2007, Milieucontact International began the most ambitious Green Agenda program ever: “Joining forces for a sustainable future in the Western Balkans”. When the project was finished at least 16 Green Agenda documents were adopted in Albania (3), Kosovo (2), Macedonia (3), Montenegro (3), and Serbia (5) and 7 more developed, Bosnia Herzegovina (3) Macedonia (3), Kosovo (1). The program was supported by a capacity building program with

local trainers who themselves were trained by international trainers from the Milieucontact International Trainers team. In the last year of the program another new element was added: participatory video making. Participants from Green Agenda communities were trained to make short films on their Green Agenda activities to show the outside world the values they were able to preserve and develop. This project, managed by Kocka from Macedonia and implemented by Insight Share from the United Kingdom, resulted in 18 short films, providing an excellent picture of the results achieved in the Western Balkans in the period 2007-2010. Now, almost 17 years after the first Green Agenda project was launched in Romania, 8 communities in Macedonia are going through the process. And yet another element was added: Urgent Actions.

Urgent actions

A Green Agenda process requires lots of dialogue and meetings. During this 14 months of talking people can lose faith in the tangible results that will come out of it. In a process with many meetings, working groups, stakeholders and discussions participants sometimes lose sight of the point in the horizon they were heading to. To develop trust and support from the local citizens visible actions are essential. For this reason Milieucontact Macedonia included so called ‘urgent actions’ into the program. Urgent actions had to be related to climate change, benefit the local community and obviously needed direct action. Each community could come up with a proposal. Pehchevo wanted a new filterstation and this was realized in February 2014. The number of likes and comments on the Pehchevo website show the support this urgent action has in the

community. That the urgent actions fulfilled the above mentioned purpose, was apparent during the interviews held on a monitoring mission April 2014. Participants from the communities literally expressed their happiness with the urgent actions because it strengthened their motivation in the process. One lady from Bogdanci said: " *I was so happy to see a proposal from my working group being implemented. It really felt like a dream. Now my children can go to a kindergarten that is comfortable and warm during winter.*" The urgent actions show that participants do all the talking to achieve tangible results and the urgent actions taken are the proof. Already within a year Pehcevo has its filterstation, Bogdanci insulated the roof of the kindergarten, Krivogastani reconstructed roof and windows of the municipal building and Tearce replaced old street lights with efficient

lights, saving 287 937 kw/h a year and 54% in budget. Imagine you live in Tearce and see the streetlights at night, remembering of the fact that you decided on them together with your fellow citizens.

Climate Change Agenda's

While the urgent actions were implemented the Green Agenda process continued in the Macedonian communities. Values were defined, working groups of local citizens established and proposals for the local Strategy on Climate Change developed. In the coming month pilot projects will be implemented to fight climate change both ways. And the sense of urgency will be strengthened by the images coming from Bosnia and Serbia of floods, bringing death and destruction to so many households and farms.

Literature

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