



Awareness of Kosovar Stakeholders and Citizens in the Context of Accessing Safe Drinkable Water for All

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Abstract

One of the most concerning problems of the 21st century is the scarcity of safe drinkable water. This problem stems from the enormous growth of the population, the development of the industry, a uniform distribution of water in our planet and inadequate management of water resources. Raising the awareness of the population and stakeholders to offer access to safe drinkable water to every citizen as the basic human right is crucial [1]. To advocate the stakeholders in this regard a project named “Villagers must have drinking water” was developed [2]. The target was three villages in Kosovo in different regions, namely: Tushilë, Gadime and Dedaj. The data were collected and a short documentary was filmed, which was distributed to decision makers and the general public with the aim of raising awareness and education in the aspect of access to safe drinkable water for all the citizens.

Keywords: Water; awareness; stakeholders; villagers.

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1. Introduction

The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution acknowledging the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation as “the right to an adequate standard of living and is inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity” [3]. According to the 2004 UNDP Human Development Report, 60% of the Kosovar population lives in villages [4].

Only 9% of those have access to piped water from water supply systems, water that is controlled and drinkable. The remainder of Kosovo`s rural population receives its water supply from independent systems and from private wells of varying standards. This water is often not tested and treated, so most of the time it is not clean and of a drinkable standard [5].

1.1 Case Studies

A low income often means that people cannot afford to pay for clean and safe drinking water. Those who do not have safe drinking water are more in danger from diseases, which in turn affect their ability to work. When they are sick more often, there is a lack of income which fuels their cycle of poverty. In turn, this also hinders education and disempowers people from attaining their human rights. Nowadays, even though there is ongoing debate in Kosovo about human rights which are assured by convention and international laws, as well as laws are passed in line with European norms; the rural population still faces extreme poverty as a result of not having access of safe drinking water.

1.2 Tushilë

The common example is Suzana`s case from a village of the Skenderaj municipality. “Yes, it is very hard during the summer, yet getting water can be easier than in winter. We take water from the well 3-4 times a day for washing clothes, but in winter we have to break the ice first. For drinking, we take water from the school well. Cleaning everything is very difficult. I must spend 4 or 5 hours a day fetching water from the school well. We are a very big family. We need water nonstop for cleaning everything and for washing clothes”. In Suzana`s case, the time that she spent to collect water and to do all the housework were the main factors why she interrupted her education. She was not even able to finish elementary school.

“I left school because I had to help my mother, she cannot do everything by herself. I know I cannot do a lot because I am having health issues on my shoulder. I cannot even carry 10 kilos on my shoulders; it is very difficult. My biggest wish is to have water at home, from the tap”, Suzana said [2].

1.3 Gadime

The same problem also afflict other non-Albanian communities living in Kosovo. In a village called Gadime of the Lipjan minicipality, Shukrie`s Ashkali family has insufficient drinkable water during the summer season. The water that they used caused their son`s illness.

“I am Shukrie Komorani from the Gadime village. We are 6 members in our family. We complain about water. In winter we have enough water, but it is much polluted. In summer it sometimes happens that we have nowhere to fetch water from because all the wells in Gadime dry up. Because of this, my son is sick with kidney stones. The sewer goes down here. I just take the water from the well but I cannot do it anymore. My daughter is ill and she cannot do it either. It is not my time to take water from well, but what can I do? I have to, because who else will? We collect water, regardless of whether it is polluted or not. We drink this water” [2].



Figure 1: Suzana washing clothes during wintertime on the river



Figure 2: Shukrie fetching water from the polluted house well

1.4 Dedaj

Similarly, the village of Dedaj in southwestern Kosovo has 600 inhabitants, but insufficient drinkable water to satisfy the needs of all. Mark, a 57 year old resident, has collected water from a river for his household needs for the last 50 years. For drinking water, he uses a similar source that is near to his home.

“I am Mark Prekdedaj, from the Dedaj village, and I am 57 years old. As I remember, I have collected water here for the last 50 years. Not only me, but the whole village of 600 inhabitants has collected water here. The upper and lower parts fetch water 700 meters from their homes. We fetch water here for livestock, washing and cleaning, and for drinking we take ours 15 meters up from here. They have the same distance. The entire village is suffering from the lack of water. One Italian organization laid a water piper from Radoniq to connect our 600 inhabitants and 55 houses in the village, but we have not had water for three years and nobody is interested in this. I come here 2-3 times a day by tractor. It is not only hard work for me, but also for whole village: 50-60 households are waiting for water from the state. We take water from the sources which are not tested and we do not know if it is healthy or not. It is very hard to live in a village without water. When water freezes, you have to go out in the snow and rain to collect water, so inside the house it is better” [2].



Figure 3: Mark collecting water for his livestock

2. Conclusion

Sufficient and safe water for drinking and household usage is known as a fundamental human right. Without this, any other inalienable right, such as the right to life and health, cannot be realized. This basic right has been restated by the UN OHCHR's, Committee on Social and Cultural Rights in 2002 [6].

The committee decided that, although not explicitly expressed in the International covenant on Economy, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the right to water was implicit in Articles 11 and 12. The committee makes it clear

that the right to drinkable water is combined with entitlements. Because it recognizes that drinkable water is a precious resource, the committee states that people are also entitled to have managed water systems.

Even though Kosovo aims to enrich the European Union with democratic values and principles that respect international covenants on human rights, it is not able to deliver on the most basic human rights to its citizens, namely the access to safe drinkable water.

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