


NGO Guide on Structural Funds

How to Prepare the NGO Project Financed from EU Structural Funds

GUIDELINES

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1. Introduction

This report is aimed to give a brief outline on how to prepare the project financed from Structural Funds (SF). SF can help in changing the energy path from fossils to renewables what is urgently needed from the perspective of climate change and future problems with the lack of cheap fuels (oil peak). As the most of the experiences gathered by the author are from Slovakia and some other CEE countries this guide is supposed to be used mostly by the subjects from new EU member states. It is targeted on the NGOs who can play an important role in public awareness raising and even in developing of project if they are eligible for funding from EU SF.

EU Structural Funds

EU structural funds are by far the biggest means of distributing EU funding - one third (347.4 billion EU) of the whole EU budget is allocated for Structural Funds. These funds are also supposed to be the major financial tool towards development of renewables and energy efficiency in the new EU member states. The allocation of funds for member states is partly based on population and need. Around 150 billion EUR of SF is allocated for the new EU member states (CEE countries). The member states distribute the funding to eligible projects through a government department, ministries or committees at national and local level, usually a mixture of the above. Despite its huge potential the experience so far (the end of 2010) shows no big success from the point of view of funding of sustainable energy projects.

Distribution of funds is usually done through the Operating Programs (OP). Due to the fact that national or regional authorities are responsible for the details of programs there is a lot of differences between new EU member states policies in terms of who is eligible and how the funds can be used. For example in Slovakia the support was given preferably to the investment in the industrial sector whereas in Czech republic, Poland or Lithuania the support was oriented on small and medium enterprises, communal and public sector. It is a pity that NGOs from new EU member states do not play the role in utilisation of these funds and that most of them are flowing into the projects which do not support sustainable development.

Barriers of utilisation of SF for sustainable energy development

Transparency in managing SF seems to be the biggest problem in most of the new EU member states. In order to achieve higher transparency in distribution of EU funds some important changes in the legislation and procedures for the whole process of EU funds management (the supervision of tenders and criteria, the selection of projects, the responsibilities of implementing agencies, etc.) are needed. Efficient, transparent and environmentally sustainable use of the funds is of great interest both to people in the recipient countries and to European taxpayers in the donor countries. Many countries occurred that the development of online application procedures and databases of projects supported has been very slow. Description of the projects received funding still missing most of the cases.

NGO involvement

According to the EU vision, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could play an important role in monitoring of the proper use of EU funds. The partnership principle is mentioned in EU regulation ("the member state shall ensure broad and effective involvement" of regional, local and other public authorities, economic and social partners and "any other relevant competent bodies"). Actually, this is very vague formulation, and it usually leaves NGO participation up to the goodwill of national authorities. Experience so far shows that the role of NGOs was practically negligible in all new EU MS with almost no influence (except of Poland) on selection or criteria setting for projects. Even if NGOs were invited into partnership structures, they often encountered other problems, such as:

- the appointment of NGO representatives by the authorities instead of allowing NGOs to elect their own representatives;
- problems with access to information;
- unclear and changing rules;
- non-transparent project selection process.

Public Awareness

In order to push sustainable energy projects which have mainly decentralized character (small scale biomass, solar, hydro projects) more emphasis should be given to the awareness raising on community level. Subjects (decision-makers at community level) eligible for funding in rural areas are usually not skilled enough to prepare quality projects. As the result of this large private companies are benefiting from this situation and pushing their mostly unsustainable projects. The NGOs with their skills and knowledge can play larger role in the whole process of project preparation and awareness raising.

Need for the change of energy path

The need for stronger development of renewables is huge. The development in new EU MS is behind the EU average due to the historical development which was based on cheap fossil fuels from Soviet Union, the lack of public awareness and willingness to change the energy path. The new EU directive on renewable energies, agreed in December 2008, requires huge development in each member state to increase its share of renewable energies. The share of renewables should increase from 8,5% in 2009 to 20% by 2020. Especially for CEE countries with their own problems and historically low profile of renewables the fulfillment of this goal seems to be a great challenge. Nevertheless there is a chance to close the gap if the resources available from EU SF will be utilised in the right way.

EU renewable energy utilisation and targets

Member State	Share of renewables in 2005	Share required by 2020
Austria	23.3%	34%
Belgium	2.2%	13%
Bulgaria	9.4%	16%
Cyprus	2.9%	13%
Czech Republic	6.1%	13%
Denmark	17%	30%
Estonia	18%	25%
Finland	28.5%	38%
France	10.3%	23%
Germany	5.8%	18%
Greece	6.9%	18%
Hungary	4.3%	13%
Ireland	3.1%	16%
Italy	5.2%	17%
Latvia	32.6%	40%
Lithuania	15%	23%
Luxembourg	0.9%	11%
Malta	0%	10%
The Netherlands	2.4%	14%
Poland	7.2%	15%
Portugal	20.5%	31%
Romania	17.8%	24%
Slovak Republic	6.7%	14%
Slovenia	16%	25%
Spain	8.7%	20%
Sweden	39.8%	49%
United Kingdom	1.3%	15%

The role of NGOs

Governmental agencies and private sector are still not strong enough to push for RE development. The public attitude is weak towards sustainable energy and awareness is needed. The NGOs can serve as:

- educational source and even
- as the project developer (if they are eligible according to the SF National policies)

2. How to develop the project?

The information in this guide is based on the successful project realised by the Slovak NGO CEPA. Project is called Region Bystricko and its details are described in section 3. The scope of the project covers several villages in the region of 50 km diameter.

2.1. Before the Start

Development of community oriented project - The questions to be answered before the NGO decides to go for the project

Before the NGO decision to go and apply for the EU SF to realise their project it is important to be aware of the difficulties related to practical and theoretical issues. EU SF application, realisation and reporting procedures are complex and before start of any activity the NGO should consider following aspects in order to continue with their activity:

Eligibility and competence question:

- Is our region eligible for EU funding from SF?
- Are the NGOs eligible for receiving EU SF?
- Does our NGO has the capacity to do the job?
- Will we need an external help (cooperation) ?
- Can we realise the project alone?
- Is there a willingness to cooperate on the project among community responsible persons (mayor, population)?

Energy issue - Questions to be answered :

If the project is oriented on energy there are some specific questions needed to be answered before the project starts:

- What kind of energy sources are used in our region/community now?
- What is the most important sector for energy change in our region/community - heating, electricity or transportation? Which one creates most "headaches" for people living in the region/community?
- Is there a potential for RE deployment?
- What is the most competitive RE source in terms of price and availability?

2.2. Questions to be answered

2.2.1. Eligibility, capacity and competence question:

- **Is our region eligible for EU funding from SF?**

There are some regions in new EU Member states where GDP per person is higher than EU average (e.g. Prague, Bratislava) which are thus not eligible for receiving of EU SF or better saying majority of SF. There are some possibilities to use European Social Funds in these regions. The NGO should first look for this information which is described in basic national document called *National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007-2013*. The document provides a reference tool to organisation of the whole process of managing SF on national level. It sets out the national priorities to be co-financed from the Structural Funds during the 2007 – 2013 programming period which is in line with the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion.

- **Are the NGOs eligible for receiving EU SF?**

Operating programs (OP) - specify the measures and goals described in *National Strategic Reference Framework*. There are several OPs managed by different governmental agencies where answers to most of the above mentioned questions can be found. It is not the rule that the NGOs are eligible as the recipient of these funds. Sometimes they can be eligible for specific type of projects like education but not for the investment oriented ones. Operating programs are basic national documents. They can be downloaded from governmental web sites. Important is that there are calls for applications during the programming period. The call can be just once in this period so it is important to follow them by the NGO.

- **Does our NGO has the capacity to do the job?**

The question of manpower or staff is the key one and should be answered with the view of future development in the NGO because preparation and realisation of the project can last several years.

- **Will we need an external help (cooperation) will be needed? Can we realise the project alone?**

Sometimes the NGO can get into the cooperation with other organisation profit or non-profit in order to overcome the preparatory and realisation part of the project. Stability of such cooperation means a lot. In case of the failure of the project there are financial losses to the NGO so the selection of a partner organisation should be thoroughly considered.

- **Is there a willingness to cooperate on the project among community responsible persons (mayor, population)?**

Usually the project needs to have some support of the community where it is going to be implemented. Sometimes even the community is directly involved like in RE energy application on local level. The involvement of the representatives of the community is thus

crucial. The village or town will have the benefit from the project so at the preparatory phase of the project there is usually high interest of community representatives or people living there. With the realisation of the project (preparatory phase) and with the first problems arising there can be the situation when community would like to make the changes, substitute some people or even drop the project. It is strongly recommended that the project which needs the community involvement will be organised only in the communities where strong involvement is guaranteed through the whole period of project preparation and realisation.

- **Do we have enough funds to finance the preparatory phase of the project?**

Question on financing the project is important one. Despite the fact that the money (majority) will come from EU SF there is a time when everything has to be financed from NGO own pocket. This is true for the preparatory phase - writing of the application, organising the partners etc. This part can be costly, time consuming and will require some people involved.

- **Is there a governmental financial mechanism to overcome the lack of funds in preparatory phase? Will we need to take a bank loan for the project?**

In some countries the governmental or regional institutions have some supportive mechanisms for NGOs or communities and they can provide funds for the preparation of the project. If not than the last resort is to take the bank loan which can be difficult to obtain for some small NGOs.

2.2.2. Energy oriented questions

- **What kind of energy sources are used in our region/community now?**

If the NGO is thinking about the energy oriented project the key task will be to gather all the relevant data about the types of fuels which are used and how they are used in their region/community. This task is usually not easy to understand and comprehend without a technical knowledge so the NGO should involve the person with such a skills.

- **What is the most important sector for energy change in our region/community - heating, electricity or transportation? Which one creates most "headaches" for people living in the region/community?**

There are different kinds of energy used in our life (electricity, heat, fuels in transportation etc). The NGO should take a closer look into the question what is really needed to change from the perspective of sustainable development. In many regions the electricity or transportation pathway are hard to change. It is much more easier to substitute e.g. obsolete coal or heavy oil heating systems with the biomass than to substitute power produced in central power plants by the renewable energy sources or change transport system based on oil for the system based on renewables. Nevertheless even here are some possibilities to demonstrate viability of renewable energy systems on local level. The key question should be: where are the biggest problems for the people living in our region? How much are they paying for energy (heat and electricity)? Are they really willing to change the fuel base? What they would like to change first. Will they support the project oriented on renewables?

- **Is there a potential for RE deployment?**

Having the sustainable development on mind means that the utilisation of renewables should have the priority in our thinking. Of course energy efficiency measures should be considered as well. If the NGO goes for the renewable energy oriented project the potential of RE should be thoroughly evaluated. According to the experience in Central Europe the most cost effective sources+ are biomass for heat purposes and solar collectors for warm water preparation. Of course photovoltaics, small hydro or wind can be considered as well. When biomass is selected the key question is which kind of biomass? Wood, straw, sludge from animals or water treatment facilities? In general the most cost effective solutions are those which utilise the waste biomass (sludge, wood chips, saw dust, straw etc.). Utilisation of these sources can be beneficial also from the point of view of the problems arising when their environmentally friendly disposal is required.

- **What is the most competitive RE source in terms of price and availability?**

To do the financial analysis of competitiveness of different renewable energy sources is difficult. The knowledge on costs (recent and future outlook) and the amount of available material have to be considered. As it is hard to know what will happen in future with the costs of fossil fuels and renewables it is possible to assume that the costs of fossil fuels will rise faster than those renewables which have to be obtained (buy) like waste biomass. When the project of utilisation of biomass is being selected the crucial thing is to know how much of this biomass will be available not only recently but in the future as well. Waste wood always depends on wood industry in the region which can changed in future. The amount of waste sludge used for biogas production can change due to the decline of animals e.g. cows. Building the project on the assumption that the biomass resources will be always here in the amount which is needed for our installation can lead to unpleasant surprises in the future. It is not always possible to reduce the capacity of the installation like heating plant without extra costs. Importing the biomass resources from other region in the future can be also costly and make the whole installation not competitive on the market.

2.3. Making the decision and writing the project documentation

Note: As there are many potential projects oriented on RE deployment in the region which can be realised by the NGOs and which are different in terms of project preparation and realisation. Project oriented on establishing the RE educational center is completely different to the investment project oriented on technical substitution of fossil fuels by RE in the region. Thus following parts of this guideline is oriented only on community oriented biomass heating plants as realised in Slovakia (substitution of coal for wood chips in 8 community owned heating plants).

If the answers to eligibility, capacity and competence questions can be answered with yes or we can be sure that the potential problems can be overcome and the right RE source was selected we could start with the project preparation.

2.2.1. Formal part of the documentation

It is not only the project application which is needed to be prepared but also a whole set of related documentation. Before the NGO will prepare the project application for the EU SF all legal documents (contracts) with other stakeholders must be in place. They are needed as the attachments to the project application. All contracts have to be prepared in that way that in the case that one subject will cancel its participation in the project the alternative solution will be on hand or that this will not lead to the cancellation of the whole project, future financial penalties or any other damage for the NGO. The role of lawyer is more than needed in this phase of project preparation.

Project application preparation

Writing the project which has the chance to be funded from EU SF is a difficult job with no guarantee for the success at the end. The application can always be declined (not approved, put into the pipeline) by the competent authority and the whole work (time and money) will be wasted. The project manager always has to have this on mind.

Writing the project

There are two possibilities who can write the project application:

- NGO staff themselves or
- External organisation

Advantages and disadvantages of both options are obvious. NGO people are usually not skill enough to deal with all bureaucracy related to EU SF and the chance that they will do some formal mistakes (which is the reason for declining the application) is great. Going for the external company is usually very costly and once again they do not guarantee the success of the application. In some countries other NGOs which are specializing on EU SF can offer some help with writing the project application which can be much cheaper. In case of external company a lot of time has to be spent on clarification and explanation of technical details of the project to the people who are not the experts on e.g. energy issues.

If the NGO staff will decide to write the application it will be probably cheaper and even more flexible but the responsible persons will need to learn and spent a lot of time on this. The Slovakian Biomass-Bystricko project was done this way built the whole preparation lasted 3 years. The delays were also caused by the change of the governmental rules on application procedure. Anyway at least one person has to be fully devoted to the preparation of project application.

2.2.2. Technical and financial documentation

The formal part of the documentation is just one part of the application. The key part is the technical and financial documentation.

Technical part related to the technology which is planned to be used has to be prepared by the technician who is an expert in developing the technical documentation of energy systems. This part of the documentation can be prepared by the private company who will deliver the technology for the project or by some projecting company. It is important to know that all technical details have to be clarified in advance. In case of biomass heating the size of the boiler/s, eventual need for its reconstruction, building or reconstruction of pipelines, availability of fuel source, construction of fuel processing facility and other issues have to be considered. Solving technical problems opens the way for analysing the financial needs of the project.

In case of Biomass-Bystricko project (described in section bellow) the following items had to be considered in the part of estimation of investment costs (machinery and construction):

- Reserve for construction works ,
- Construction and technical supervision,
- Management of the project. promotion,
- Public procurement,
- Preparation of project for building permission,
- Preparation of realisation project
- Technology costs at 15 facilities in 8 villages (boilers, wood chip machine etc.),
- Logistic costs related to fuel transportation and storage (4 storage facilities), truck, containers and other equipment.

Financial part of the project also included:

- Insurance costs
- Salaries
- Revisions and other legal costs
- Maintenance,
- Truck fuel costs

Analysis of impacts and comparison of situation before and after the realisation of the project included estimation of:

- the amount (tons), costs and emissions of fossil fuels used in 15 facilities before
- biomass fuel (tons, costs, emissions) which will substitute the fossil fuels
- energy, emission and cost savings after the realisation of the project.
- cash-flow of the project.

2.4. Realisation of the project

If the project was approved by the competent national authority and the contracts has been signed between the NGO and the government and between NGO and other stakeholders the realisation of the project should start according to the plan. Coordination of all works including construction works and purchase of technology according to public procurement rules usually needs at least one person from NGO who will overview the whole process. Technical problems should be solved in cooperation with the company delivering the technology and the recipient of technology (community).

2.5. Reporting

Reporting of the project has to be done according to the national SF rules and usually requires one skilled person of NGO who is also able to give competent answers to the questions from the governmental authority during and also after the realisation of the project. It is important to take this part as very important as every failure to meet the obligations can lead to the financial penalties for the project holder (NGO).

3. Good practice - Example of successful project financed from EU SF

Slovak NGO CEPA (Friends of the Earth Slovakia) based in Ponicka Huta (Central Slovakia) successfully implemented technical project on substitution of old coal heating facilities with the 21 biomass (waste wood) boilers in 8 villages of Banska Bystrica region. The project was financed from EU structural funds and the operation (heating) of facilities started in October 2010. The implementation of the project was done in co-operation with the local municipalities which are the main beneficiaries of the project.

3.1. Development of the project

CEPA decided to develop the project with their own resources (staff and funding). Preparation started in the year 2003, the final approval by the governmental agency responsible for EU structural funds (SF) was signed in 2009 and the operation of facilities started in 2010. The EU SF covered 95% of the 7 mill EUR project costs and the rest came from own resources of municipalities or bank loans. There were more than 6 years of struggling to overcome the technical, administrative and legal problems related to this project. During this time the EU SF rules and subsequently national rules for SF utilisation have been changed. It was necessary to rewrite the project according to the new guidelines (in 2007) despite the fact that the project was approved in previous programming period but no funding was allocated for it.

Milestones of the project development or six years of struggling:

Preparation phase of the project

- 2003: Idea + initial project outline
Developing contacts (municipalities, technical assist.)
- 2004: Outline of technical design and preliminary analyses.
Building regional partnership.
Identifying financial scheme.
- 2005: Establishing of a new legal entity (non-profit, public) called Bioenergia Bystricko consisting of NGO CEPA and 8 municipalities.
Searching funds for project implementation.
- 2006: Project preparation and application for EU SF funding.
Project approved, but no money assigned. Project was put into "pipeline" by the Ministry of Environment.
- 2007: New rules of EU SF for the period 2007-2013, new application needed.
Rewriting of the project proposal.

2008: Slovak Operation Plan approved by the European Commission. New round of EU SF was opened.

2009: Waiting for the „Call for Application“.

Sending application and final approval of the project by the governmental authority.
Signing the contract and starting the realisation of the project.

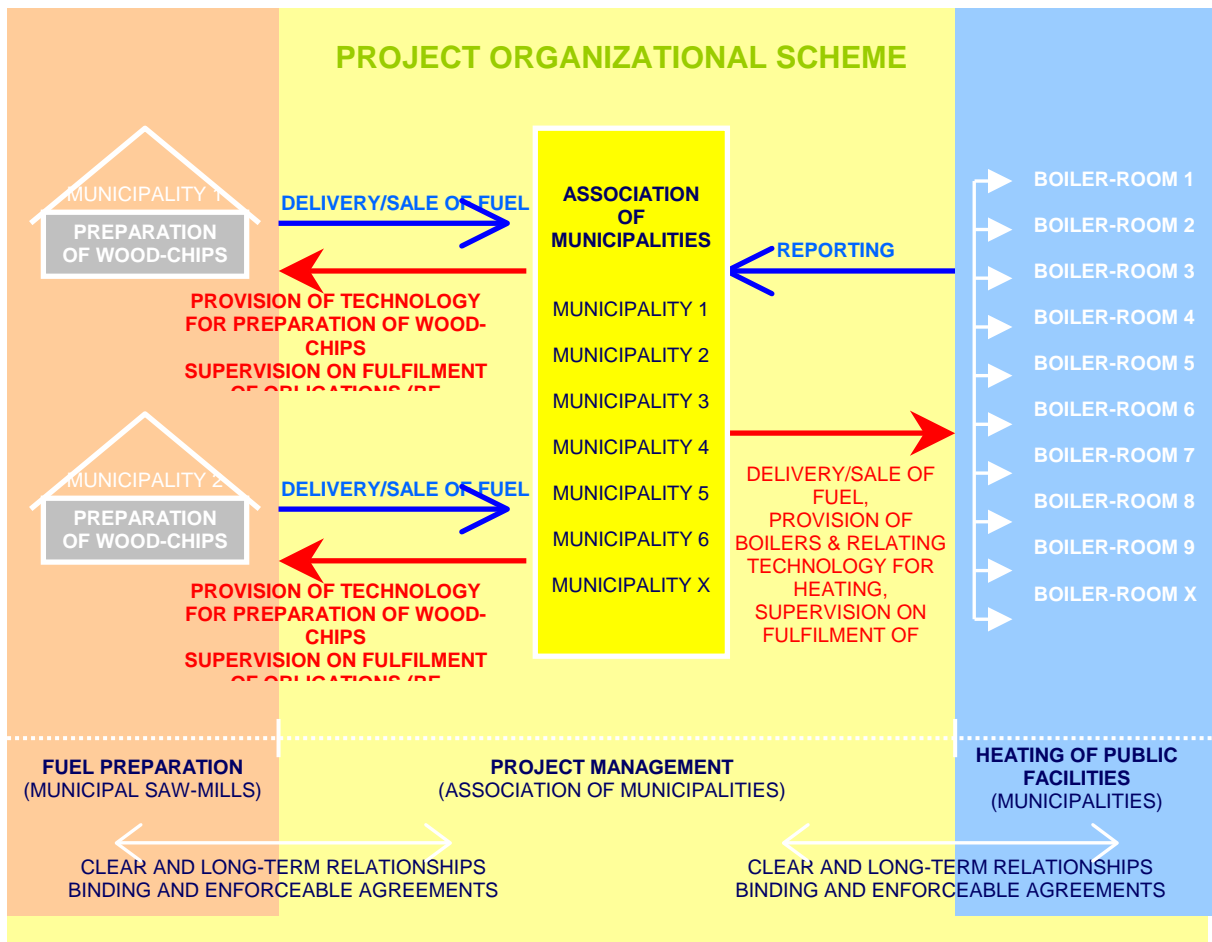
2009: First investment costs used for preparation of realisation project documentation.
Construction of fuel storage facilities.

2010: All facilities were constructed. Biomass heating started in winter (October) 2010.

The aim of the project

- **To replace** old and obsolete heating systems in 32 public buildings in 8 rural villages (Kordiky, Kraliky, Riecka, Tajov ,Lubietova, Hiadel,Poniky, Molca, Cierny Balog) in Central Slovakia with modern woodchips-based systems.
Total population in the region: 10 300.
- **To encourage** other rural regions with similar renewable energy potential to use their local resources.





Expected impacts

- **Sustainability:** the project was aimed to enhance economic self-sufficiency of rural areas through the use of local biomass potential for local energy needs.
- **Savings:** municipal expenses for heating of public buildings will decrease and savings will become available for municipal (regional) development.
- **Emissions:** the total CO₂ emissions will be reduced by approximately 8.5 thousand tons in 10 years.
- **Modernization:** Public buildings will be equipped with efficient heating systems. Most of the current boilers and heat distribution systems require serious reconstruction anyway.
- **Follow-up:** the project will test opportunities for its broader introduction to other regions.

3.2. Technical specification of heated facilities

The technical details of installed technologies are described in the following table.

Municipality and place of the boiler	Boiler output in kW (units)	Heated facilities
Hiadel' , Municipality	85 (1x35 + 1x50)	Municipality
Hiadel' , Primary school	70 (2x35)	School
Králiky , School	180 (1x180)	School, Municipality
Kordíky , Municipality	200	Municipal buildings
Lubietová , Post	400 (2x200)	Post, Municipal buildings
Poniky , School	250 (1x250)	School
Poniky , Kindergarten	250 (1x250)	Kindergarten, Municipal buildings, Nursery
Poniky , Municipal building	70 (2x35)	Municipal building
Riečka School	150 (1x150)	School, Shop, Municipality
Tajov , Fire station	180 (1x180)	Fire station, Library, Municipality
Čierny Balog , Health care center	250 (1x250)	Health care center, Municipality
Čierny Balog , Cultural center	150	Cultural center, restaurant, library
Čierny Balog , Municipal building	35 (1x35)	Municipal building
Čierny Balog , School	800 (2x400)	School
Čierny Balog , Kindergarten	100 (2x50)	Kindergarten
TOTAL	3,17 MW (21 boilers)	

Annual fuel consumption

Total biomass consumption per year is estimated at 2113 tons.

Wood chips	1980 ton
Waste fuel wood	143 ton
Total	2113 ton

Annual heat production in all heating facilities: 19 817 GJ.

Price of the wood fuel was estimated at 17,91 EUR per ton.

Situation before the project realisation

Annual fossil fuel consumption in all facilities

		Unit	Heat value GJ/unit	Heat consumption GJ
Brown coal	1 346,12	ton	15,5	20 865
Hard coal	171,18	ton	28,0	4 793
Coke	66,33	ton	27,0	1 791
Electricity	858,060	MWh	3,6	3 089
Total				30 537

Difference between energy consumption before and after the realisation of project - 10720 GJ/year represents energy savings of 35,1% which resulted from the new and reconstructed technologies.

Beside new boilers the infrastructure of heat transfer and fuel storage and deliveries were also reconstructed or newly built. Better isolation and new pipelines (1 546 meters) were laid down, 4 new storage facilities for wood chips and fuel wood and several temporary storage facilities near the heating plants were build in the framework of this project. One truck, few containers and other devices were also bought.

Outcomes of the project

The project is designed in that way that the heating properties (boilers and infrastructure) are owned by the organisation Bioenergia Bystricko. Heat produced will be consumed by the communities itself. They take the heat according to the contracts on heat delivery. Because Bioenergia Bystricko is non-profit organisation the heat (GJ) will not be charged to the consumers. The total production costs will be divided between communities and charged accordingly.

Total costs of the project: 7 051 966 EUR. EU SF requires the co-funding. In this project - 5% of total costs were provided by the communities from their budgets or bank loans.

3.3. Expected savings

Fuel costs before and after the realisation of the project

	Costs in EUR
Fuel costs before (hard coal, brown coal, coke and electricity)	328 863,41
Fuel costs after (wood chips, waste fuel wood)	106 397,22
Savings	222 466,19

Annual savings of fuel costs for each community will be up to 67,65%. Higher costs for insurance will be compensated by lower costs for repairs and maintenance of the infrastructure.

It is important to note that the costs of savings or price of kWh produced from biomass (when taking into account the total costs of the project) is higher than usual. This is caused by the fact that the project costs include also building infrastructure (pipelines) and other equipment including large vehicles.

Emission reduction

Annual total emission reduction of gaseous effluents will be 51,9 tons of contaminants and 2643,4 tons of greenhouse gases per year for all facilities.



Lubietova: Municipal office + Post office. Installed output of biomass boiler: 200 kW



Lubietova: Primary school. Installed output of biomass boiler: 200 kW

4. Conclusion

The Biomass Bystricko project realised in Central Slovakia showed that it is possible to utilise EU Structural funds in environmentally friendly and energy sustainable way by the local NGO. The NGO involvement in utilisation of EU SF in such a broad range is not usual in Slovakia. Nevertheless the experience shows that similar projects can be organised in similar way in many regions of new EU member states. There is a real need for changing energy infrastructure towards more sustainable or renewable energy pathway which is still not

the case in Central and Eastern Europe. The development of RE projects in new EU MS is far from satisfactory and new ideas or ways of funding are urgently needed. It is a pity that the goals set in EU legislation like RE targets will not be met by many new EU MS and all this despite of availability of huge EU funds which can be used this way, but the opportunity is missed, yet.

The ultimate objective of this guide was to encourage the NGOs especially in new EU MS to think about the possibility and go for EU SF and thus contribute to the change towards sustainable energy development, which we believe is urgently needed.