WATER RELATED CONFLICTS LINKED WITH DEVELOPMENT OF HYDRO POWER PLANTS IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to assess the water-related conflict cases linked with hydro-power development in the country. The assessment is based on data gathered using the Environmental Justice Organization, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT) framework assessment model. The findings presented here are intended to provide supporting information for the detailed planning of the project activities such as the interactive conflict map as well as to support the local environmental organizations, local communities, engaged citizens, scientists, farmers and energy companies to improve the management of conflict cases regarding hydro-power projects in the country. The assessment study mapped 18 certain cases of hydro-power conflicts reported in Albania during the period 2012-2016. Overall, out of these conflicts 34 people have been detained and/or arrested among which 6 were women and 1 minor and 6 casualties have been registered in connection with hydro-power projects (*4 work accidents and 1 conflict borne from HPP construction+ 1 murder attempt*). The study found that the small hydro-power plants are the most conflict-ridden projects. The respondents made several recommendations for a deep analysis of the environmental impact and also local benefit to develop hydro-power projects and also stressed the need to strengthen the enforcement of the monitoring of the water use by the energy companies.

Keywords: Conflicts, water, hydropower, public participation, environment.

INTRODUCTION

Albania is hydroelectricity depended and currently is producing only 40-50% of its domestic production depending on the precipitation year. The rest is imported from the region thus making the country a net importer of electricity in the region. On the other side Albania has hydro potential and is exploiting only 45% of its capacity. (AKBN, 2016)[1]

In this situation, Albania has moved very fast in the last decade to license hydro-power projects through concessionary agreements. At the time of research there have been identified 183 concessionary agreements signed by the Albanian government to construct 524 Hydro Power Plants (HPPs). The vast majority are small hydro-power plants and they have been issued during the timeframe 2002-2016. Out of these numbers, 177 HPPS are in operation and commissioned by Energy Regulatory Entity (ERE); 43 HPPs are

[1] National Agency for Natural Resources 2016; www.akbn.gov.al

under construction and 364 HPPs are planned which have not started yet the construction.[2] As shown in Table 2, the number of concessions issued in 2009 and 2013 has skyrocketed and it corresponds with parliamentary elections.

Table 1 Overview of Hydro Power Plants in Albania by category and status

Year of concession	# of concessions	# of HPPs	Operational HPPs	Under construction	Planned *	Contested HPPs
1997	1	1	1	0	0	0
2002	2	23	23	0	0	0
2003	8	8	8	0	0	0
2004	1	1	1	0	0	0
2005	1	2	2	0	0	0
2006	0	0	0	0	0	0
2007	3	4	3	0	0	0
2008	27	43	23	14	0	0
2009	55	177	13	15	0	0
2010	6	18	0	5	0	0
2011	14	52	6	5	0	1
2012	11	42	57	0	0	1
2013	46	130	12	0	0	1
Subtotal 1	175	501	149	39	0	3
2014	1	1	13	0	0	6
2015	2	8	15	0	0	4
2016	6	14	0	4	0	5
Subtotal 2	9	23	28	4	0	15
Grand total	184	524	177	43	364	18
The author could not retrieve trusted disaggregated data by year.						
Source: AKBN, MEI, EITI, ERE, KKU, MoE, 2016						

[2] Albania has a central public online register of hydropower plants managed by the National Agency of Natural Resources. However, the information in the database is not complete and fully up-to-date. In order to access the hydro project data, one needs to look into information scattered over the annual reports of the National Energy Regulator Entity (ERE), decisions and government rulings. Although a few additional official materials containing overviews of concessionaires and electricity production and trading licence holders have been published, the information is not provided in its entirety. It is often very difficult to identify elementary details about the plants such as the location, name of the plants or names of all the parties holding the concession. The figures provided refer to the National Agency for Natural Resources database which was accessed on 7 October 2016.

Much of the unexploited hydroelectric energy sites are located in environmentally and socially sensitive areas, many on natural protected areas and in land inhabited by local rural people. The negative social and environmental consequences have caused debate, contestation, conflicts, protests and lawsuits in Albania regarding the hydro-power plants. The main reason rests with the fact that no sacred place, park or river has been left untouched of this outbreak of concessions.

This research tries to investigate to the extent possible the contested projects, the cause of the contestation, the impact they create and the outcome of the conflict.

In this report we adopt Ashton's definition of water conflict:
"[in] its simplest and broadest sense, the term 'water conflict' has been used to describe any disagreements contestation and dispute over or about water, where social, economic, legal, political or police intervention has been needed, or will be required, to resolve the problem". (Ashton, 2000, p. 69-70)[3]

Evidence shows that local people bear disproportionate costs of many of these projects, which are often conducted without their consultation, depriving them of the possibility to influence outcomes, or without any compensation. The weak interactions of many local populations with state authorities increases the risk of local peoples being left out of these negotiations.

To advance knowledge of these issues, a mapping exercise was conducted to determine the characteristics of conflicts over water resources related to hydroelectricity that emerge between governments, private industrial users, and local peoples. Report of devastating consequences of energy companies on water ecosystems in sensitive environmental areas and those inhabited by local people throughout the country suggest that hydro-power development projects have become of the greatest challenges to the exercise of people rights on consultation, influence outcome or receive compensation.

The dependence on water and occasionally the "distinctive cultural" relationship with water, losing access to this resources has multiple impacts on local people. In a significant number of cases, tensions over local people's water issues triggers conflicts, this escalates to very destructive stages, including loss of human lives.[4] These conflicts can also have costs for the industry, in terms of reputation, costs to financing, constructing operations, breakdown of company's social license to operate, and can lead to delays, renegotiations, and even cancellations of projects.

[3] According to Ashton (2000)[3] water is a "common good" because it flows naturally from one place to another which makes it difficult to establish "ownership" over it. The best management of this "common good" then is achieved through collaborative efforts among the various water users. However, an increase in competition over water due to population increase and/or human activities can result in tensions and disputes among water users or stakeholders, who From Ashton's (2000) discussion and others (UNESCO and Green Cross International, and Swart, 1996), instability, tension and disputes among water users are the key conditions for "water conflicts."

[4] The case of HPP Gojan that was blown through use of explosives or HPP in Vinjoll.

This study allows visualizing the national trends of competing claims over water use, the type and geography of conflict, the effects and results that these conflicts have on local people, government and industry.

Research limitation

The research does not pretend to provide a complete picture of all contested and conflictual hydro-power projects in the country, but to the best of the expert's knowledge it provides a first publicly available resource which attempts to bring together data from several sources regarding water-related conflicts on hydro power development in Albania.

The author had a limited days of work and faced lot of gaps due to lack of official data, inaccurate and contradictory data, duplications of projects names, different names for the same projects, contradictory information about whether hydro-power plants are in protected areas. Nevertheless, the author tried to capture the situation as accurately as possible, and believes that the database and Project factsheets give a picture of the main conflicts trends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review on water related conflicts benefited from a previous work such as the "Environmental alternatives of small hydro-power projects in Albania", developed by a group of experts, including the author.[5] The literature review was undertaken with the view to understand what institutional learnings the stakeholders in water conflicts (*farmers, CSO, private industries, government*) can draw on, that could lead to changes to address the issues raised. At the same time, the literature review intended to identify whether there were any links between the causes of conflicts, and new ideas for adaptation for the conflicts similar in other situations in other localities. Therefore, the expert established broad information that helped to develop the conceptual framework of the study.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology framework

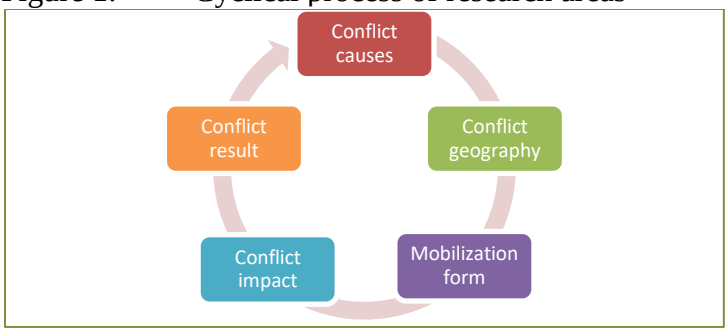
The research methodology was guided by the Environmental Justice Organization, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT) model, prepared by a group of 23 universities, established in the frame of an Seventh Framework Programme supported by European Commission that ran from 2011-2015.[6] The EJOLT approach is based on the principle of underlying

[5] Qendro, E., M.S.c, Shumka, S., Prof, Leskoviku, A., Mazreku, V., Cela, E., & Buzi, B. (n.d.)., 2015 – Environmental alternative of small hydro-power in Albania, Regional Environmental Centre (REC) Albania, Tirana, September 2015

[6] EJOLT supports the work of Environmental Justice Organisations, uniting scientists, activist organisations, think-tanks, policy-makers from the fields of environmental law, environmental health, political ecology, ecological economics, to talk about issues related to Ecological Distribution. Central concepts are Ecological Debts (or Environmental Liabilities) and Ecologically Unequal Exchange; http://www.ejolt.org/project/

the causes of increasing ecological distribution conflicts at different scales and how to turn such conflicts for environmental sustainability.[7] It follows a cyclical process with 5 stages or phases as shown in Figure 1.

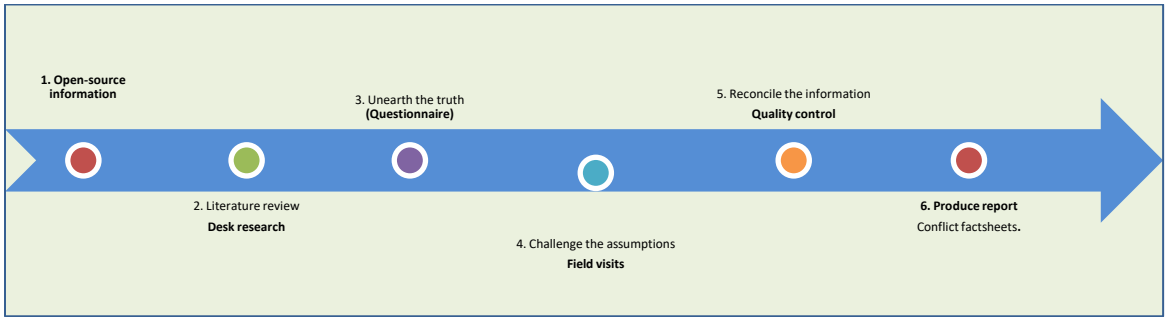
Figure 1: Cyclical process of research areas



The process begins with the understanding the cause of the conflict, its triggers and reasons, the engaged stakeholders and the supporters. Then it progresses with the geography of conflict to understand the proper location of the conflict, nature of communities involved, origin of investor or shareholders and the river basin. The approach then follows with the form of mobilization in the conflict to understand the triggers, groups involved, supporters and their reaction to conflict. The outcome or the impact phase is associated with the economic damage, environmental impact and social and health effects. The process is closed with the conflict result which is focused on the status and consequences of the conflict history.

Overall, the research methodology aims at establishing a feedback loop among the a) open –source information collection on all water-related conflict cases, b) the desk research work to establish the research questions of the study, c) questionnaire preparation, delivery and filling of the questionnaire from environmental civil society groups, d) interview guide to interview key informants on the cases selected, e) quality control to reconcile all the information collected, f) producing the report and respective conflict cases factsheets.
The scheme below illustrates those methodological steps.

Figure 2 Methodological steps for the study and evaluation of water conflicts



[7] ibid

RESULTS

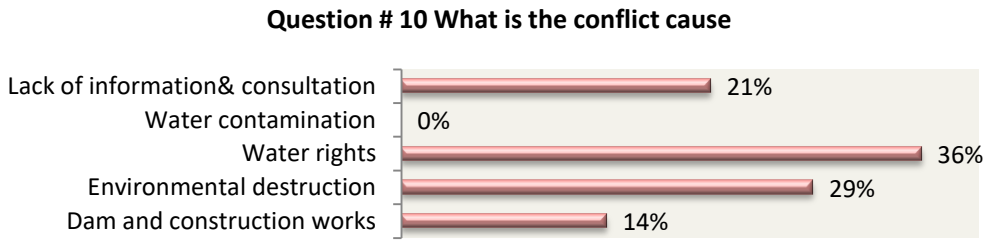
This section of the report presents the findings of the 42 questionnaires collected by the respondents and the field work observations carried out by the expert in the frame of the project. The questionnaire was carried out by the expert with a view to identify the contested cases related to hydro-power development in the country and the reasons which stand behind these contestations. The questionnaire which was conducted on-line and through direct fillings and field interviews was carried out from 18th June to 30th of September and 2nd of December to 28th of December. In total 42 individuals and ECSOs were interviewed. Of the total sample, 16 respondents were civil society organizations, 18 local citizens, 5 researcher and 3 hydropower business operators.

Conflict causes

This section of the study "conflict cause" focuses in more detail on the source of the water related conflicts, affected communities, the main supporters and the dynamic of the conflict.

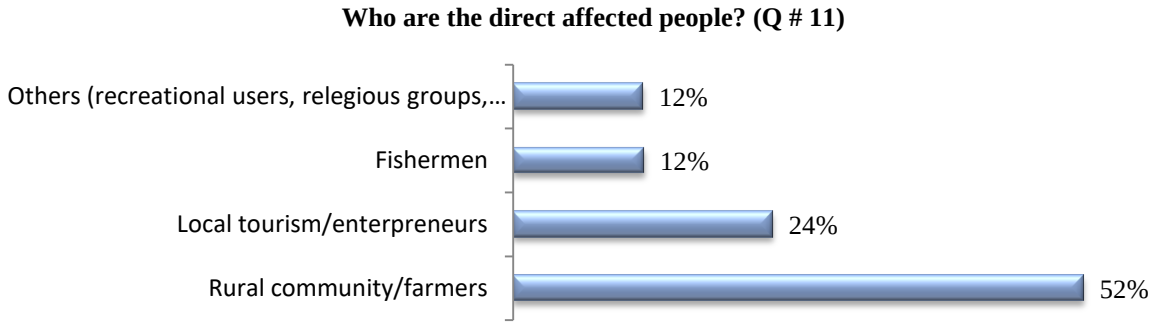
In the figure 4, the respondents were asked to identify the main triggers of the conflict and water rights stays as the main cause of water-related conflicts in 36% of the cases, linked with hydro-power plants. Indeed, during the field visits and ground work conducted by the expert, water sharing specifically linked with *irrigation and agriculture crops* was on the top of the reasons for hydropower contestations in the respective localities. Following, environmental destruction and lack of information and consultation remain as the main causes with 29% and 21% of the responses.

Figure 3: The conflict cause



In a follow up question, (*Figure 4)* to identify the actors and their interest/position in the conflict, almost half of the respondents 52% stated that rural communities are the ones which suffer the most. The local tourism was identified as a major affected stakeholder group due to hydropower development which occupied 24% of the responses.

Figure 4: The affected people



The local organizations are the main supporters for the rural communities in the conflict as identified by 33% of the respondents. This could be connected with the proximity of the local organizations to the conflict generation centres such as the ones in Polis village in Librazhd area, or in Bença village, and in Dragobi of Tropoja.

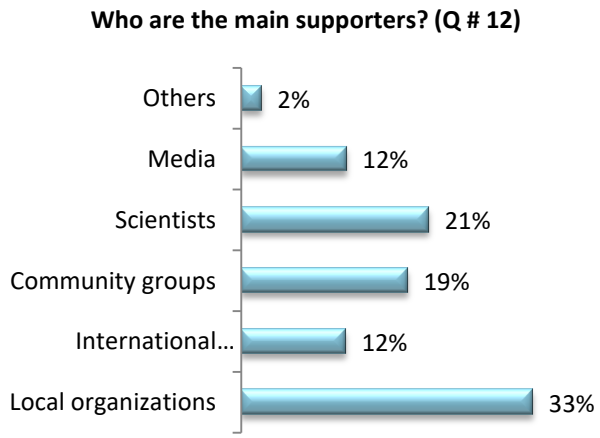


Figure 5: The main supporters in conflict cases.

However, the **community groups** and the scientists occupy a considerable part as the supports of the contested cases. 19% of the cases have been raised by local communities such as the case in Klos municipality against the development of Mat 1 HPP with an 8-9 KM of derivation tunnel which will dry up the river bed in Klos municipality as stated by the local mayor. (*See factsheet # 15).* An important supporter group are the scientists/professors/researchers who have taken a lead in the discussion against various hydropower development in the country through op-eds and articles.

Conflict geography

This section of the report "conflict geography" focuses in more detail on the locations of the conflict cases, the origin of the developers who are constructing the projects, the population involved and the stretch of the conflict.

The F*igure 6*, shows the distribution of the conflict across the country which is in symmetry with the distribution of the hydropower licenses. Despite the fact that the conflict is generated at rural areas where the water rights are threatened, the conflict location has been manifested in numerous urban areas where the institutions are located. Quite often, Tirana has been the epicentre of various anti-hydropower protests from civic groups. In regard to the origin of the companies which are involved in the conflict, most of the respondents had no information of the

companies. However, the rural communities were connecting various hydropower projects with the names of high-level politicians, state officials which were seen on site during the conflict cases.[8] From the desk-research phase related with the ownership of the hydro-power plants, the expert has noted that there are no "*good or bad*" companies based on origin. In all the conflict cases the developers vary from Italy, Austria, Turkey and domestic companies. The only difference is linked with the magnitude of the conflict when local domestic companies are involved thus trying to "forcefully" solve the conflict through intimidation, community division, and influential individual bribing.[9]

Overall, the companies have avoided good practices in doing business and in many cases their own corporative business codes have not been respected even though the investment has been ensured through various international bank loans and/or equities such as European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IFC, Austrian Development Bank, KfW, and Green for Growth Fund. [10]

Conflict mobilisation

In the category of "conflict mobilisation", it will be analysed the linkage of conflict triggers as regards timing, groups and form of mobilisation. The author identified 3 main questions under this category in order to understand when the mobilisation started, the groups which were mobilised in the conflict and what the mobilisation reaction was.

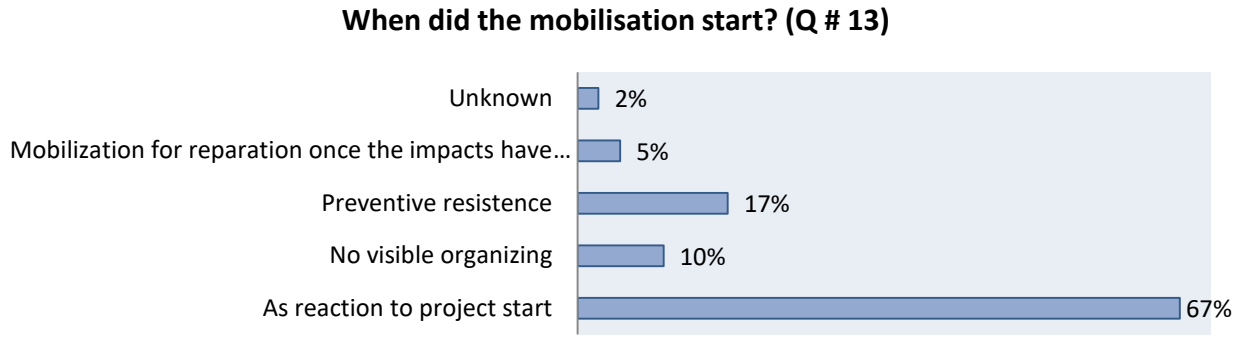
Under the question related to the start of the mobilisation *Figure 7*, the respondents generally replied in 67% of the cases that the mobilisation started as reaction to project start when they saw the machineries digging the place. However, in 10% of the cases the respondents have reacted as preventive resistance when they first learned for the project being planned. Indeed, these were the cases of hydropower plants in Valbona Valley, hydropower plants in Mati River from Mat Hydropower and Poçem hydropower plant.

[8] During the groundwork the expert met with local farmers from Polis, Gurshpate, Bençe, Nivice, Gusmar, Vinjoll, Bulqize, Valikardhe villages who mentioned various politicians, Members of Parliament connected with the hydropower projects. The expert checked and analysed the claimed HPPs in the Business Registration Centre (QKR) but did not find any such names. However, this does not dismiss the fact that the registered companies could be cover-ups.

[9] The local inhabitants have reported many cases where company people have been engaged in corruptive practices by paying influential community leaders to ease tension. This has led in many cases in community division, or internal community conflicts such as in Vinjoll village, Kurbin district.

[10] Sikorova, K., Gallop, P., (2015), "Financing for Hydropower in protected areas in SEE", CEE Bankwatch Network for Euro Natur and River Watch
For December 2015

Figure 6: The start of mobilisations



Regrettably, almost all the cases of mobilisation have occurred after the approval the hydropower project and in only one case the mobilisation occurred as a preventive measure toward the planning authority when issuing the concession (HPP Poçem).

The main stakeholder groups which were mobilized (Q#14) during the contested cases of hydropower plants are the local organizations, scientists, community groups, farmers, media and local government. As shown in *Figure 8*, the local organizations are the main group which has engaged in conflict mobilisation in 31% of the cases. The reason could be the proximity with the conflict generation centre and the better connection to the community groups. This could reasonably argue the counter-fact whether the mobilisation is led by local organizations or from the real need of the people.

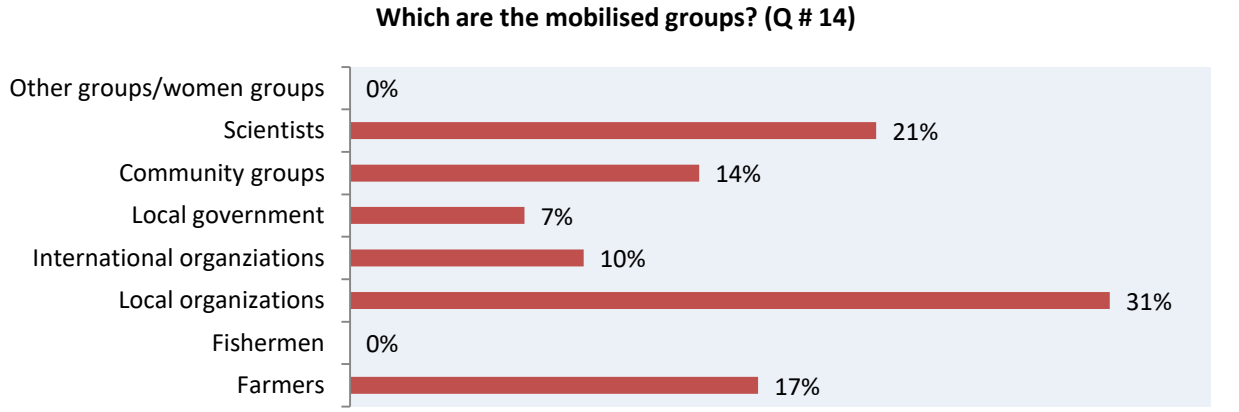


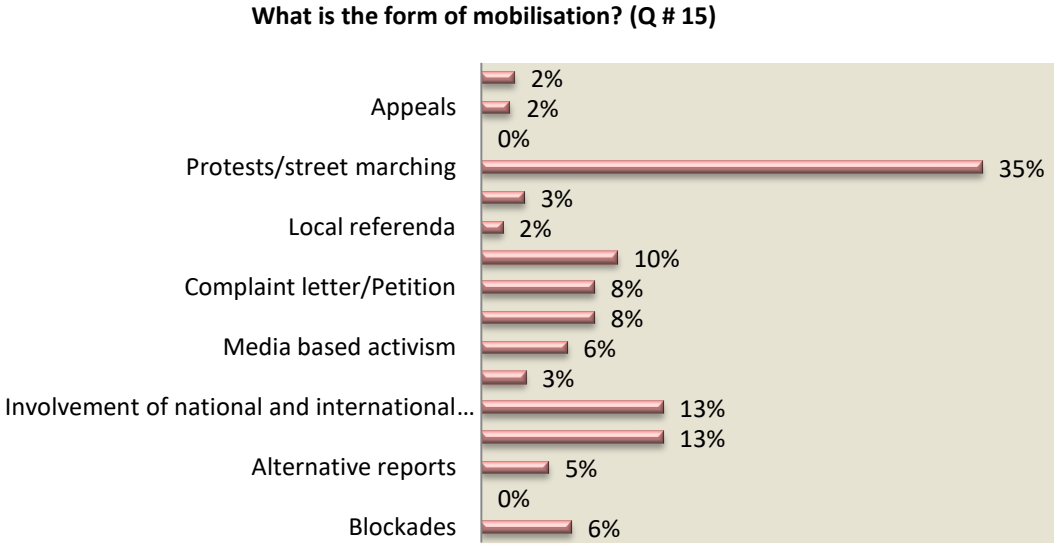
Figure 7: The mobilised groups

In 14% of the cases the community groups has been the one to be mobilised directly in the conflictual cases, whereas the farmers which are directly impacted due to lack of irrigation water or the fear to lose it, have occupied 17% of the cases. The cases of *Polis*, *Gurshpate*, *Vinjoll*, *Valikardhe*, *Gojan* are directly connected with the water sharing rights as described in sections above. However, a positive role plays the scientists community (*professors*, *researchers*) who have been identified as the main mobilizers in 21% of the cases. It must be noted that the international organizations such as River Watch, Euro Nature, World Wild Fund, and Bank watch, have played a considerable role in the mobilizations of various international and national campaigns.

When asked about the form of mobilisation, as it is shown in *Figure 9*, street protests have been the main manifestation of mobilisations occupying 35% of the responses. The reason is closely connected with the argument examined in Q#13, with the timing of information and reaction after the project had already started. In addition, involvement of national and international organizations has been an important form of mobilisation with 13% followed by public campaigns with 10%.

Regrettably, lawsuits and appeals remain very low as legitimate means of mobilisations with only 2-3% of the cases. The reasons are both lack of trust in the judicial process and at the same time lack of knowledge and experience in litigation.[11] However, the respondents have considered petitions and objections to EIA as another influential instrument which occupy 8% of the cases.

Figure 8: The form of community mobilisation



Conflict impact

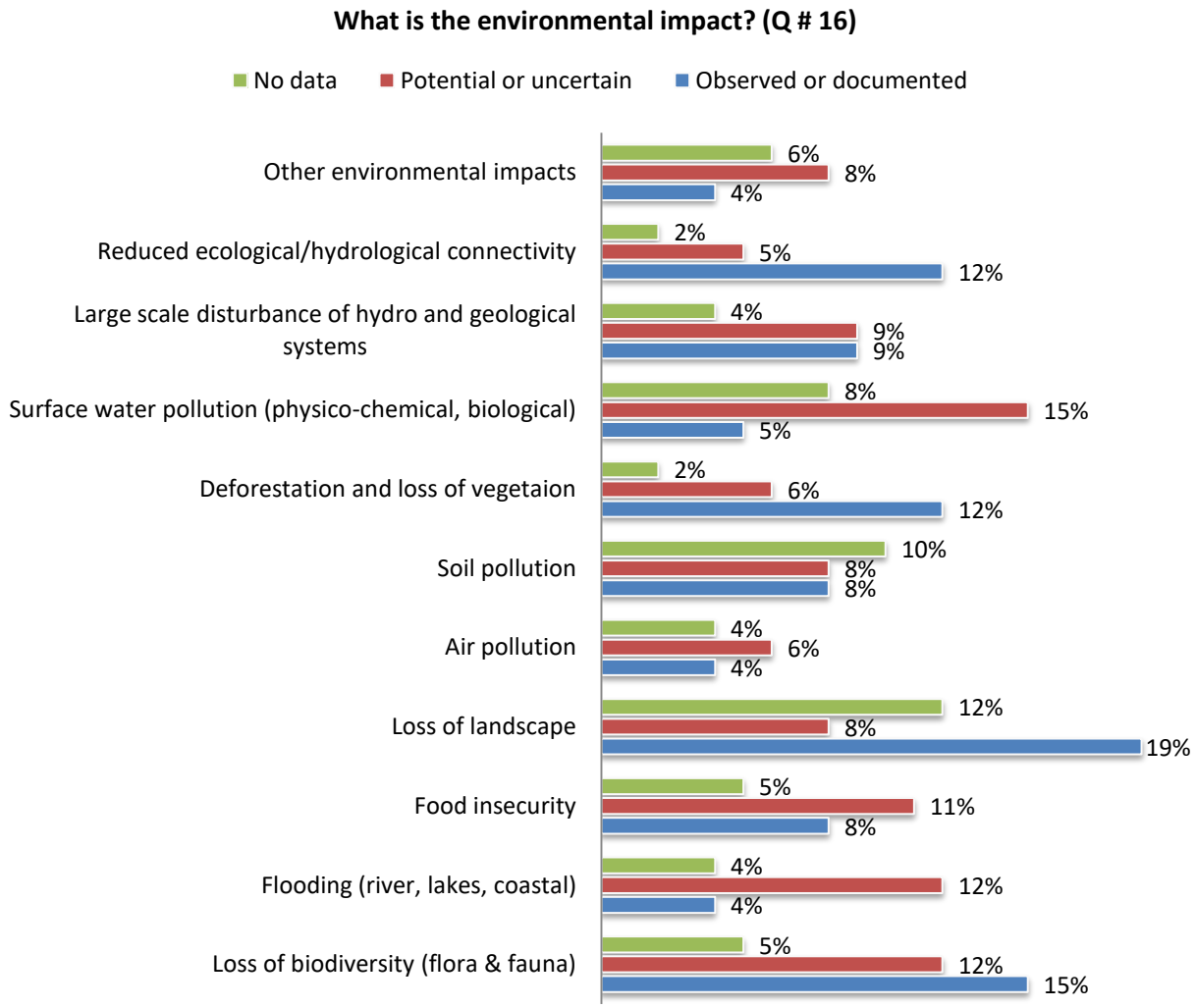
Under the category of "conflict impact" the author developed 3 main areas to check the environmental impact of conflictual cases, the health consequences and socio-economic impact. The respondents had the option to select three (3) alternatives developed regarding the impact of the conflict: documented or observed one, potential or uncertain and no data option.

Under the question (Q#16) related to the environmental impact, the respondents identified in 19% of the cases as documented impact the loss of landscape, followed by loss of biodiversity 15% and then deforestation and reduced ecological/hydrological connectivity with 12% of the cases. When it comes to potential or uncertain impact, the respondents chose surface water pollution with 15%, food insecurity with 11%, flooding with 12% and loss of biodiversity with 12%. In addition, the respondents chose no data alternative in many of the environmental impacts related to hydropower conflictual cases. The respondents were not feeling very sure in

[11] During the delivery of 3 training workshops organized in the frame of HELP-CSO project the local participants had lack of understanding in judicial or litigation experiences as shown by the Skill Gap Analyses prepared in the frame of the project.

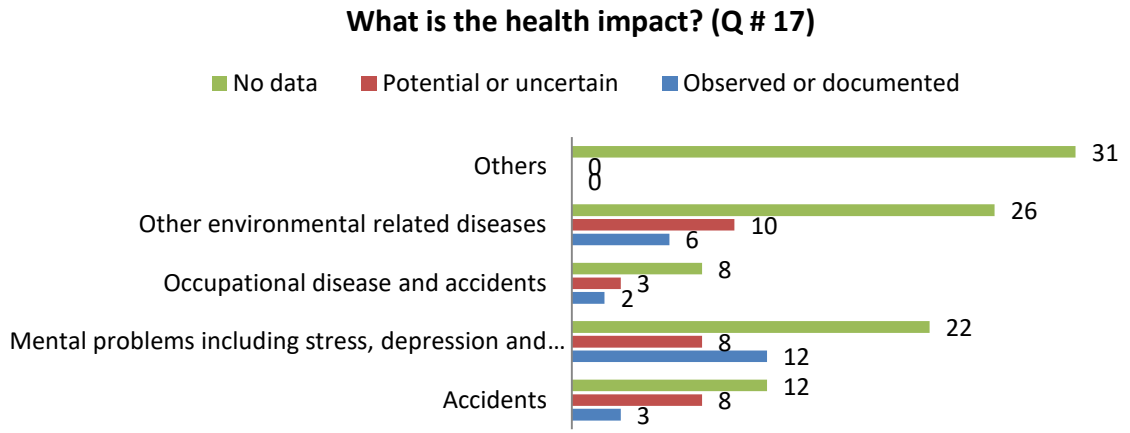
identifying the conflict environmental impact apart from the aesthetic and visible one linked with landscape and deforestation.

Figure 9: Environmental impact of the conflict.



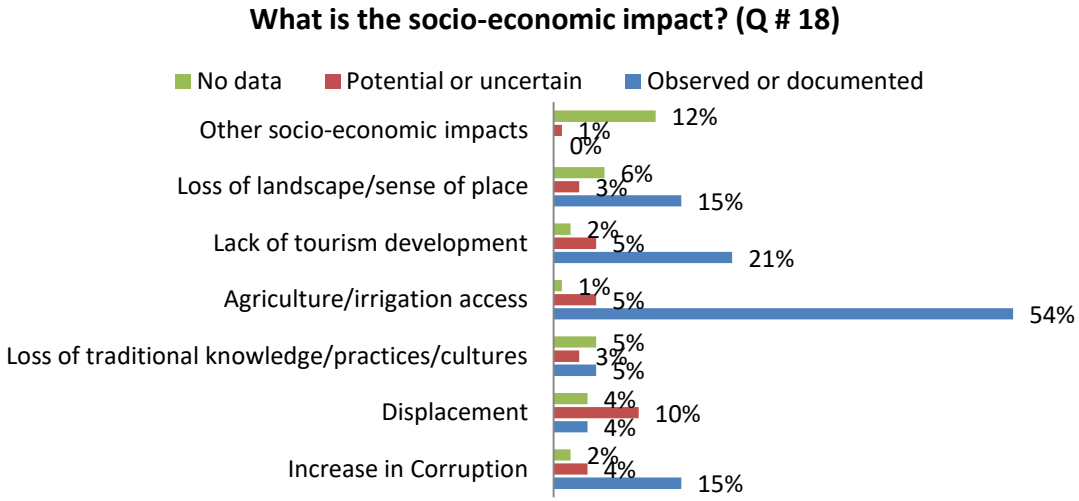
Whereas, on the health consequences/impact of conflict cases related to hydropower plants, the respondents were asked regarding accidents, mental and stress problems, occupational diseases and accidents or other environmental problems (Figure 11). Only 12 responses of documented/observed cases were reported as such; and 6 other environmental related cases. The majority of respondents had no data on the health impact as result of conflict cases linked with hydropower. Apart from 2 work-related accidents in HPP Gojan, HEC Gjegjan (see Annex) the rest of the health impact cases is linked with arrested inhabitants due to street protests specifically in Polis, Vinjoll, Valikardhe, Cernaleve. Again, the respondents have no data what could be the health impact due to the hydropower related conflicts.

Figure 10: Health impact



Regarding the question on socio-economic impact (Q#18), more than half of the respondents 54% have identified as observed or documented the impact on agriculture and irrigation water. It is of interest too that the other observed impact is tourism development with 21% of the responses, which demonstrates the strong economic impact link with the tourism potential. Another interesting and important impact is increase in corruption which is assessed with 15% of the cases and equals with loss of landscape/sense of place. The author was able to identify that in three (3) contested hydropower plants the elders of the village where the hydropower was built were employed by the concessionary companies (Vinjolle, Gurshpate, and Bença). It is of interest the fact that in 10% of the cases the respondents selected displacement as a potential socio-economic impact. This is closely linked and a derivative of the agriculture impact if no irrigation water will be left alone. On 17 December, the inhabitants of Klos municipality turned a supposed hearing session of Mati Hydropower into a large community protest arguing that the construction of hydropower plants would leave them with no water, thus causing a compulsory displacement. Indeed, the author witnessed the same fear of displacement in many places where hydropower was built without the social license of the people.

Figure 11: Socio-economic impact of water related conflicts



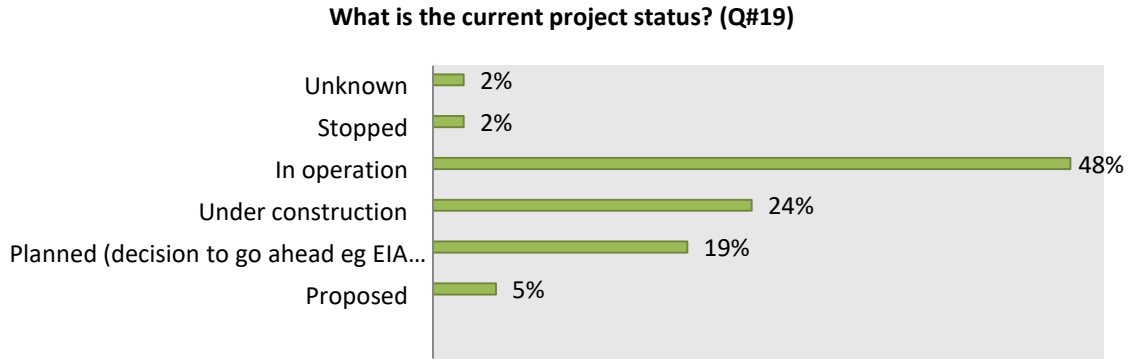
The conflict impact is been understood and manifested differently from different groups of stakeholders. While the environmental impact of hydro-power development in sensitive areas is more based on expert judgments which is a domain for local organizations and scientists, the local communities, farmers and fishermen ties it with direct economic impact on irrigation, agriculture, sense of place as traditional water users.

Conflict result

Under the category of "conflict result", the author developed 5 main questions (Q#19-23), with the aim to understand the project status, the conflict results and whether it has been a successful or unsuccessful conflict case.

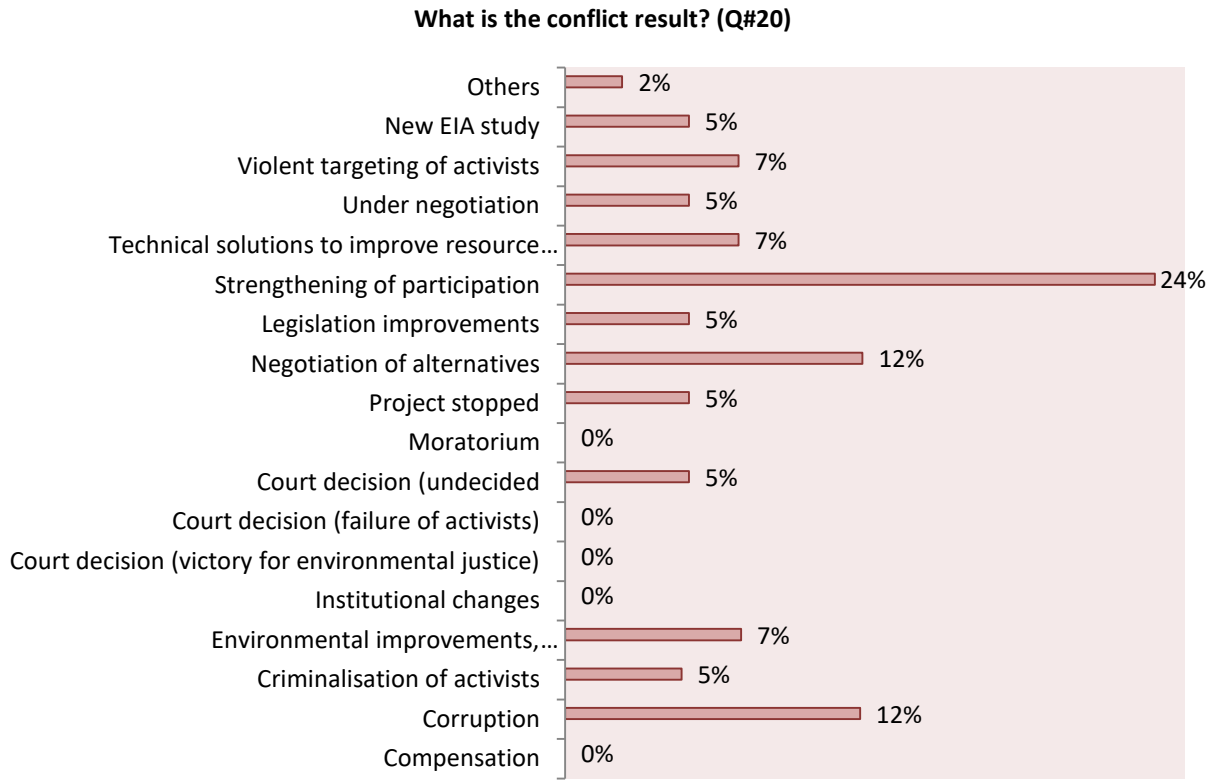
On the question of current project status *Figure 13*, 48% of the respondents indicated the project is under operation and producing energy. Following, the respondents revealed that 24% of the conflict cases are under construction and 19% in the planning phase to receive the respective licenses. Regrettably, only in 2% of the cases which correspondents to only 2 conflict case in Bença and Kalivaç, the project was stopped. However, from the author investigations the local community revealed that the real reason was due to lack of company funds rather than outcome of their protests.

Figure 12: The current project status



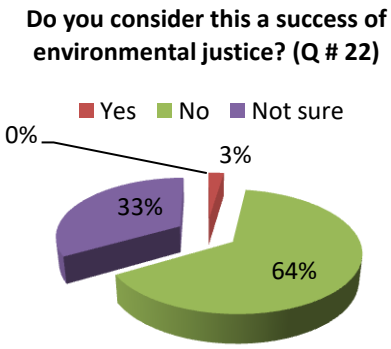
Regarding the question of the conflict result Figure 14, the respondents said in 24% of the cases the conflict result was strengthening of participation of local communities, or general public on the issue. Interestingly 12% of the respondents said that the result was corruptive practices of people and authorities involved. However, 12% of the respondents said that result was negotiation of alternatives. Indeed, from the investigation of the author during the ground work it was revealed that the local communities in Klos, Poçem, and Bença have demanded project alternatives during the street protests. The author did not find any positive compensation case that could be counted due to conflict result.

Figure 13: The conflict status



Regrettably, only one (1) case has ended up in the court (Poçem HPP) which is considered a result of the conflict raised by local authorities and communities.

Figure 14: The success of environmental justice



The respondents stated that 64% of the conflict cases have been unsuccessful ones. Still 33% think they are not sure of the impact of the conflict. This might be explained with the fact that many of the cases are ongoing or are in the planning phase which could be turned either positively or not.

Unfortunately, the local organizations and local communities consider a success case only the cancellation of the project and all their energies are invested towards that direction. The failure and disappointment in achieving that explains the lack of interest in improving the project, asking for compensations or requesting further EIA studies.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In the guidance note for using the Environmental Justice Organization, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT) model, the authors acknowledge that the whole concept is to track all environmental justice cases, however the information and progress of cases is fraught with difficulties and possibilities for distortion. Bearing this in mind, the analysis presented in this section focuses mostly on the five elements of the EJOLT conflict *cause*, conflict *geography*, conflict *mobilisation*, conflict *impact* and *result*.

Causes

"Causes" is the first element in the EJOLT framework that provides the context and the roots in which the conflict was generated. In the questionnaire form this element was presented with 3 main questions. In their comments, the respondents selected that water rights was the main cause of the conflict in 36% of the cases and 52% of the affected stakeholders were local farmers/communities. The main supporters in the conflict were local organizations with 33% of the cases followed by local communities and scientists. However, the expert noted that political investment was a main supporter in 3 of the cases. The expert also noted that in the conflicts identified, mostly reflect conflict of losing control and /or rights of access and use of water resources when there is perception by the community of exposure to change of their system of production (agriculture products, hay for animal breeding, sense of place).

Geography

"Geography" was the second element of the framework, which had most of the questions aiming to identify the main actors involved, conflict start and end, companies and investors. Regrettably, the "geography" element was the most unanswered due to lack of data from the respondents, including the local organizations, communities, citizens and authorities. No companies from all origins did make an exception and all were involved in a conflict such as Turkish, Austrian, Italian, and Albanian ones. The expert however noted the magnitude of the conflict when Albanian companies were involved was harsher, setting petty corruptive practices within the community representatives which established the premises for future conflicts.

Mobilisation

"Mobilisation" is the third element represented with 3 main questions with an interest on timing, groups and form of mobilisations. In 67% of the cases the respondents said that the conflict started as a reaction to project start. The statistics explain a strong correlation to the reaction form, which is mostly manifested with street protests in 35% of the cases. Hardly do the stakeholders consider judicial and appeal procedure as the most productive form of mobilisation. At the moment of report writing, there is only one case brought to court by Eco Albania NGO regarding Poçem HPP. The expert, has noted though that the local environmental groups have increased their mobilisations related to EIA appeals, officials request and complaints. However, the local communities, farmers and most affected people do not consider these forms adequate. During a meeting in Polis village on 3 December 2016, Beqir Shato stated that "*We tried all forms of petitions and requests with the elder of the village, Mayor and Member of Parliament…but none was heard and protest was our only solution*".

Impact

"Impact" is the fourth element of the EJOLT framework assessment which consists of 3 main questions to measure environmental, health and socio-economic impact of the conflict. The

respondents identified in 19% of the cases as documented impact of the conflict cases the loss of landscape, followed by loss of biodiversity 15% and then deforestation and reduced ecological/hydrological connectivity with 12% of the cases. When it comes to potential or uncertain impact, the respondents chose surface water pollution with 15%, food insecurity with 11%, flooding with 12% and loss of biodiversity with 12%. The respondents were not feeling very sure in identifying the conflict health impact. When it comes to economic impact 54% of the respondents identified agriculture and irrigation water followed by tourism impact with 15%. Losing sense of place and corruption were also considered potential impacts of the hydro-power conflicts. The lack of proper studies and information campaigns among the local organization, citizens, farmers and local decision-makers on the environmental impact of hydropower plants rests among the main justification for such assessment. The author noticed such a gap also during direct conversations with environmental CSOs, local authorities and citizens during various field visits. Additionally, the fact that in many conflict cases which have been terminated once the hydropower has been operational shows that there has been no follow-up or real monitoring of the HPP performance on the water use, and contract respect.

Result

"Result" is the fifth element of the framework assessment which consisted of 5 main questions mainly to analyse the status of the project, conflict results and whether the conflict resulted successful or not. 64% of the respondents said the conflict was not successful and the result was mainly the strengthening of the participation scored with 24% of the cases. However, the expert noted that the definition of success was mainly linked with "construction" or "stopping" of the hydro-power project where 48% of the conflict cases was in operation and 24% under construction and only 1 project had been stopped, due to financial circumstances. The expert believes that the stakeholders need to better define conflict result to optimise the benefit not just with physical construction of a project but its performance while its built through continuous monitoring of water sharing and intake data.

CONCLUSIONS

This assessment study was able to map 18 water related conflicts linked with the development of hydro-power in Albania. In addition, 18 conflict factsheets were prepared thus presenting for the first time a study which will be translated into an interactive conflict map for public access, researchers, local authorities and wide public.

Water sharing rights and irrigation water have been identified as the most serious threats/causes to water related conflicts linked with hydro-power development in Albania. Lack of information and public consultation, however have been recognized as a common cause in 21% of the conflict cases, followed by loss of landscape and sense of place. 52% of the respondents have stated that local communities/farmers and villagers are the most affected stakeholder group due to conflictual hydro-power projects. The conflict impact is being manifested differently from the affected group of stakeholders with ECSOs focussed on mainly in loss of landscape, biodiversity and flooding and the rural villages and communities on lack of irrigation water and agriculture in 54% of the cases. The affected stakeholders were not very optimistic on the conflict result where 64% of the respondents said the cases were not successful, however acknowledged as the main result a strengthening of public information and participation on the hydro-power development issue.

Regrettably, the expert did not identify and/or possess any case or document where the parties reached formal agreement of compensation or approval on the contested project. It was however, mentioned in 2 cases (Vinjoll and Polis) of an informal agreement of irrigation water sharing during summer time after several protests.

The local stakeholders referred a new phenomenon, which was witnessed by the expert during on-site visits of the so-called "*land colonialization*". The energy companies were usurping the land and territory in a large area encompassing the power house, intake and other project components without any document, or permit to do that. The fencing of the territory physically and defended by the "private security" forces demonstrates the consequence of the unresolved conflictual situations in many locations that need to be addressed instantly.

One interesting phenomena that the expert noted during the field work was the intimidation and "*divide and conquer*" approach used by companies through the elders of the village. In various cases the elder of the village was employed as bodyguard in the hydro-power plants, thus causing internal community fights, and shifting the conflict only in time. (Gurshpate 1, 2; Vinjoll).

In the field visits the local authorities proposed *an innovative idea* to reduce conflictual situations related to small hydro-power projects where the municipalities could become the developers of hydro-power plants and translate the generated profit into community development projects. The business example used by the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church with the construction of hydro power plant Rrapun 3&4 is a live example that could be replicated. However, it should be noted that it is not the form of business rather the way of doing business who defines a successful project case.[12]

The affected stakeholders, local organizations and scientists groups should consider preventive measures toward the planning authority through mobilization before the issuance of the concession at the Ministry of Energy and Industry. This would give them more advantage for the planning process, check the plans and projects and have adequate time to provide alternatives and improve the project.

Lastly, all the stakeholder groups, energy companies, local organizations and community groups should really consider to shift their strategy of result related to the conflictual cases from a traditional *win-lose* situation towards a *win-win* situations. This would enable the improvement of the project in the construction phase, monitor water sharing during operation and avoid future conflicts being generated.

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[12] HPP Rrapun 3&4 is part of the contested projects and is very poorly rated by the CSOs because of its environmental impact.

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