



Evaluation of Non-Profit Organizations in the Municipality of Kukes, in order to increase Visibility and Environmental Good Management

Albanian Centre for Economic Research (ACER)
June, 2021

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Short presentation of the project.....	4
2. Overview of the regulatory and legal framework in Albania.....	5
2.1. Legal framework.....	6
2.2 SWOT analysis for the water sector in Kukës.....	7
2.3 The role of NGOs in good governance	8
2.4 Obstacles and Opportunities.....	9
3. Methodology	11
3.1 Purpose and objectives of the study	11
3.2 Study Design	12
3.2.1 Study sampling and data collection.....	12
3.2.2 Data analysis	13
3.3 Limitations	13
4. Study Findings.....	14
4.1 Assessment of NGO capacities.....	14
4.2 Assessment of the capacities of NGOs in the municipality of Kukës	15
4.3 Building the internal and external capacities of NGOs	15
4.2 Impact and achievements of NGOs	16
4.3 Lessons learned.....	18
5. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	21
5.1 Main conclusions.....	21
5.2 Recommendation.....	22
Annex 2: List of NGO Kukes	25
Annex 3: Self-assessment instrument	26

Lista e Tabelave

Table 1. SWOT analysis for the water sector in the Municipality of Kukës	8
Table 2. Sample number included in the study	12
Table 3. Examples of capacity building activities	16

Executive Summary

Non-Profit Organizations promote the creation of various interest groups to address issues to create bridges of communication and help develop the necessary skills and capacities. This study evaluates local NGOs in Kukës to increase visibility for sound environmental management and promote them as a good opportunity for cooperation in future projects. ACER conducted a qualitative study with NGOs in the municipality of Kukës. Primary data were based on the assessment of the capacities of NGOs and the identification of obstacles, impact, achievements, and lessons learned reported by the NGO participants themselves in Kukës.

In environmental governance, NGOs are usually the most engaged actors who have missions dedicated to environmental protection, sustainable development, conservation of natural and water resources, biodiversity conservation, animal protection, etc. Their involvement and operations vary but may cover local, national, regional, and international levels.

Sustainable cooperation between NGOs and institutions in Albania presents significant challenges despite the progress achieved. Such challenges can be seen in the strategic environment in which NGOs operate, the Legal framework, and inclusive cultural aspects that permeate all forms of interaction between civil society organizations and public institutions. Institutions have limited capacity to prioritize public information and consultation and cooperation in general with NGOs.

To strengthen the role of NGOs in environmental governance and capacity building, projects can use grants to build internal capacity in areas such as leadership, strategic planning, self-assessment, resource mobilization, and strengthening technical, administrative, and capacity-building skills. Financial.

Steps to be taken to increase visibility for environmental good management and promotion of NGOs:

- Close cooperation through the collective action of civil society is the only way different actors of civil society in environmental decision-making.
- NGOs will need further training to improve human capacity to participate as effectively as possible in environmental governance.
- Empowering women is essential in promoting sustainable solutions.
- Micro-grants can promote community awareness of local waste management plans.
- Youth engagement is essential to promote environmental protection in the future.
- The media is the key to raising public environmental awareness.

I. Short presentation of the project

The Clean Water Project for Gjakova and Kukës is part of the calls from the IPA programs for Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) "Albania-Kosovo 2014-2020". The project's overall design aims to “strengthen the relations between the two neighboring countries by promoting economic development towards the environment and social inclusion of the border regions by promoting their tourism potential and respecting the common cultural and natural heritage.” The overall goal of the Program CBC is to stimulate the most balanced, inclusive, and sustainable socio-economic development of the cross-border area. The selected area of the Program is as follows: in Albania: Kukës Regions and Lezha Region - in Kosovo: Southern Economic Region, Economic Region Western.

The project lasts three years (January 2020 - December 2022). It is implemented by a consortium of non-governmental organizations SHE-ERA (managing partner in Kosovo) and ACER (local partner in Albania) and local government units Municipality of Gjakova (Kosovo) and Municipality Kukës (Albania).

This project aims to improve water protection and management policies and practices by improving wastewater management standards. The main activities of this project are:

- Establishment and functioning of regional, multi-sectoral Water Boards
- Public consultation with citizens and businesses on water planning and management
- Development of Water Management Plans for Kukës and Gjakova by the EU
- Monitoring of water pollution levels in Kukës and Gjakova
- Mapping of solid pollution areas in Kukes and Gjakova rivers
- Construction of wastewater collector in Llukac
- Construction of the main wastewater collector in Kukës and their treatment plant
- Improving the infrastructure of the Llukac River
- Annual Campaign to Improve public awareness on the protection of water resources
- Competitions of NGOs and SMEs that promote measures for sustainable water management
- Creation of water conservation websites in local languages

2. Overview of the regulatory and legal framework in Albania

Albania has established a coordination mechanism for water management in all water-related sectors. The Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy (SIBU) has been implemented to manage water resources in Albania. This strategy aims to integrate national water sector policies with those of the EU and present sectoral views and interests.

In SIBU four pillars are defined:

1. **Water for humans**, including drinking water and sanitation;
2. **Water for food**, which includes agriculture;
3. **Industrial water**, which includes hydropower plants, hydrothermal springs, light, and heavy industrial activities, solid waste management, fishing and aquaculture, transport and recreation;
4. **Water for the environment**, which includes protected areas, wetlands, and forests.

For water management purposes, Albania's eight major river basins, since 1998, have been combined into six central hydrographic units called "River Basins" by EU legislation [Union Water Directive European (DKU), Article 3]. Basin agencies are the basis of water resources management. The Basin Councils have legal status and are subordinated to the Technical Secretariat of the National Water Council (NWC). The NCC determines the rights and duties of the Basin Council.

The Basin Council (UN) is supported by the River Basin Agencies (RBAs), which are responsible for enforcing the Law on Water Resources, implementing UN decisions, and generally administering water resources within basin areas. They support municipalities by solving problems related to water resources and are responsible for on-site inspection of all activities associated with the use of water resources. However, agencies have little authority to enforce legal and regulatory procedures.¹

In October 2019, the Council of Ministers approved the "National Strategy of the Water Supply and Sewerage Sector (SFUK) for 2020-2030" (SFUK, 2019)², which as the primary objective defines the management, monitoring, and ensuring the effective functioning of a system integrated for water supply, which guarantees flexibility in different situations.

SFUK sets the following priorities:

- i. expanding and improving the quality of water supply and wastewater services;
- ii. orientation of water services towards the principles of cost control and cost recovery; improving governance and regulation in this sector;
- iii. investment to increase the capacity of the sector, and;

¹ Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy 2018-2027, Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 73 dated 7.2.2018 [[link](#)]

² National Strategy of the Water Supply and Sewerage Sector for 2020-2030, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy [[link](#)]

- iv. moving towards full convergence of Albanian laws and regulations with the EU Water Directives.

The National Waste Management Plan envisages the closure of open landfills with uncontrolled and untreated leachate discharges and their replacement with 12 regional controlled landfills by 2025. Enabling the implementation of national waste management policies, the risks to Groundwater pollution are significantly reduced. As such, these policies are essential for the performance of the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management. Both the National Strategy for Biodiversity and the National Environmental Strategy (2015-2020) include forestry and climate change policies, which are strongly linked to the Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy. They provide a framework for the protection of Albania's valuable natural resources. This is important for the sustainable use of water by all other sectors³.

The main bodies responsible for water management are:

National Water Council (NWC) central executive body for water resources management. The Prime Minister chairs the NWC and is supported by the Technical Secretariat of the National Water Council. The organization of water (resource) monitoring in Albania is complicated because over 20 institutions The National Environmental Agency (KTA), under the Ministry of Environment, is generally responsible for monitoring the quality and quantity of water resources, oversees the work of the relevant water resources monitoring bodies and is the beneficiary. The primary data provided by the following institutions such as the Institute of Geosciences, Energy, Water and Environment, the Albanian Geological Survey, the National Agency of Natural Resources, focuses on the planning and monitoring of hydropower plants, the Institute of Public Health, and the Water Regulatory Authority.

The Water Regulatory Authority is an independent institution. Its main tasks are issuing licenses for drinking water supply, the approval of drinking water tariffs, and monitoring activities for water supply.

2.1. Legal framework

Current legislation and regulations in Albania on water management include primary legislation, bylaws, and cross-sectoral legislation, also implementing EU legislation. The water sector in Albania has been regulated since 1992 by the Law on Water Resources: Nr. 8093, dated 21.3.1996.

The new law no. 111/2012 "On Integrated Water Management" [[link law](#)] authorizes the following:

³ Natural Resource Management in Southeast Europe: Forests, Land and Water (2017), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH [[link](#)]

- Protection and improvement of the aquatic environment, surface water, temporary or permanent, seawater, territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, continental shelf, transboundary waters, groundwater, and their condition.
- Provision, protection, development, and sustainable use of water resources are necessary for the country's country's life, social, and second.
- Equal distribution of water resources, as provided by their effective management.
- Protecting water resources from pollution, overuse, and promoting consumption depending on current needs.

Implementation and approximation of EU legislation

The provisions of the Water Framework Directive have been transposed into national legislation through Law no. 111/2012 "On Integrated Water Management." This law is fully in line with Directive 2000/60 / EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000, establishing a legal framework for community action in the field of water policy. The transposition of the Flood Directive (DG) has progressed due to drafting the Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) on the content approved by the National Water Council. Among other EC directives, this DCM transposes Directive 2007/60 / EC on the assessment and management of flood risks.

2.2 SWOT analysis for the water sector in Kukës

The Municipality of Kukes is rich in water resources and diversity of fauna and flora. The water system includes lakes and rivers. The main watercourses are the Drini i Zi River, the Drini i Bardhë River, the Luma River and the Tërshenë stream. Fierza Lake, which is an artificial lake, built in the Drini valley, which serves to join the flow of streams and rivers. Rivers in the area are at risk of water pollution due to the decomposition of agricultural and industrial waste.

The water system is mainly used for electricity, agricultural activities, and water supply. The main problem in the municipality of Kukës is water pollution, mainly in Lake Fierza as a result of inflows brought by the rivers Drini I Badhë and Drini I Zi, economic activity as a result of inflows brought by the rivers Drini I Badhë and Drini I Zi and very few urban areas belonging to the Municipality of Kukës.

The water potential of the Municipality of Kukës has great hydropower values. Fierza hydropower plant is the primary source of electricity in the country, but also the main source of government revenue, with a direct impact on economic stability.⁴

⁴ General Local Plan of the Municipality of Kukës (2017), [\[link\]](#)

Table I. SWOT analysis for the water sector in the Municipality of Kukës

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presence of numerous groundwater and surface watercourses. ▪ The rivers that pass in the Municipality of Kukës are used for electricity generation and irrigation for agriculture.
Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pollution of the Fierza basin resulted from inflows brought from the rivers Drini I Badhë and Drini I Zi. ▪ Non-implementation of bilateral agreements signed between the Municipality of Kukës-Municipality of Prizren signed for waste management ▪ Difficulties and obstacles related to wastewater services. ▪ Lack of adequate infrastructure for wastewater treatment. ▪ Sanitary control: Must be improved and extended throughout the system.
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reorganization of water treatment. ▪ Investments to improve water supply service. ▪ Cooperation with water resources regulators and NGOs operating in the municipality of Kukes.
Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Utilization of the hydropower network without impact for the Municipality of Kukes. ▪ Flood risk during periods of rainfall. ▪ Numerous informal and illegal connections.

Source: ACER, Adaptation by the authors: General Local Plan of the Municipality of Kukës (2017)

2.3 The role of NGOs in good governance

Civil society is one of the main actors in the transmission of information between citizens and politics. It has an essential role in gathering and disseminating information, advocating, developing and implementing policies, and evaluating and monitoring, ensuring that the concerns and challenges of a particular community are taken into account by decision-making bodies. NGOs also promote the creation of various interest groups to address issues collaboratively and help develop the skills and capacities needed to address these issues.

In the last ten years, the Albanian government has undertaken some initiatives to involve NGOs in the policy-making process. These initiatives have created several joint government-civil society councils, such as the National Council for Civil Society, the National Council for European Integration, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and the National Council for Gender Equality. The culmination of civil society-government cooperation has been judicial reform. Lawyers' associations, academic circles, and independent experts were involved in drafting the reform package. Moreover, the new institutions that run the judiciary, such as the High Council of the Prosecution and the High Council of the Judiciary, include members who are not judges or prosecutors but who have practiced law or research in academia.

Civil society includes a wide range of actors: individuals, research and academic institutions, and non-profit/non-governmental organizations. In environmental governance, NGOs are usually the most engaged actors. They have missions dedicated to environmental protection, sustainable development, conservation of natural and water resources, biodiversity conservation, animal protection, etc. Their involvement and operations vary over local, national, regional, and international levels.

In particular, in environmental governance, NGOs can take on an important role and a wide range of functions. These include, but are not limited to:

- Mobilizing public opinion: NGOs can raise awareness and influence public opinion through information campaigns and dissemination;
- Representation of underrepresented persons or groups: NGOs can help represent civilian interests, which are often underrepresented in policy-making, and facilitate constructive dialogue between civil society and the authorities;
- Expert analysis and recommendations: NGOs can come up with concrete ideas and solutions for policymakers, thus facilitating negotiations and bringing the voice and concerns of the public to the policy level;
- Crisis Response Capacity: NGOs often demonstrate better technical and analytical capacity and capabilities to respond more quickly than government officials and provide concrete suggestions and timely action.
- Management and implementation: NGOs can contribute with technical expertise on environmental challenges and solutions, as well as participate directly in operational activities, supporting the implementation and management of environmental projects and programs by governments;
- Monitoring: NGOs can influence the implementation of projects through continuous monitoring of the situation on the ground.
- Legitimizing decision-making mechanisms: NGOs can expand the information base for decision-making by increasing the quality, authority, and legitimacy of decisions and policies undertaken based on international best practices.

Sincere and stable cooperation between NGOs and institutions in Albania presents significant challenges despite the progress achieved. Such challenges can be seen in the strategic environment in which NGOs operate, Legal framework, and inclusive cultural aspects that permeate all forms of interaction between civil society organizations and public institutions. Institutions have limited capacity to prioritize public information and consultation and cooperation in general with NGOs.

2.4 Obstacles and Opportunities

The existence of an active civil society indicates functional democracies that give space to public life and decision-making to a wide variety of different opinions, concerns, and solutions. By combining other public and private resources to achieve their mission, civil society

organizations are often a source of social innovation by providing solutions to issues of public interest.

The political and social environment and the legal framework affect the opportunities of NGOs to act and interact with public institutions. As such, the legal framework should be adapted in such a way as to facilitate the development and operation of Civil Society Organizations. In terms of the social environment, an essential precondition for a vibrant civil society is the space provided for public discussion of different perspectives. About the policy landscape, the participation of various NGO voices in the policy process through genuine cooperation between the state and civil society is considered to be of paramount importance to the democratic process.

Currently, there is a tendency to reduce the space of civil society in Albania, which prevents NGOs from following the voice of different communities and properly performing their oversight role. NGOs face obstacles in fully exercising their functions to channel citizens' concerns into policy processes through appropriate mechanisms for genuine participation and consultation. Albanian NGOs are often perceived as influenced by solid political agendas and special interests.

Although the engagement of civil society is critical, most organizations suffer from insufficient capacity, lack of resources, and understanding of issues to have a significant impact. Therefore, although NGOs at the local level have stronger links with the community, they have substantial limitations in terms of the appropriate structures, resources, and competencies to interact consistently and meaningfully with decision-makers.

The lack of political will to carry out genuine consultation processes and improve cooperation between NGOs and institutions is evident. State institutions do not consider engaging with NGOs essential for promoting the public interest but rather as another workload without significant impact. Consequently, this further increases the mutual distrust between public institutions and NGOs regarding its cooperation and influence. Much of the interaction between the two entities is hampered by the limited transformational culture in state institutions.

Beyond all obstacles, civil society has every opportunity to be an essential factor in decision-making and influence the transmission of the voice of various interest groups in institutions. With further capacity development and space to act, NGOs represent an essential resource for regional/local administration by providing coherent expertise and information on environmental effects. NGOs can intervene to assist in service delivery and to support government policies and management functions. NGOs conduct a control and monitoring action on compliance with international/cross-border agreements by encouraging states / administrative units to prioritize the implementation of the accords. These include taking independent movement and working in collaboration with government agencies at various levels on policy formulation and implementation, conducting research, monitoring

environmental quality, participating in environmental education, and raising awareness of pressing ecological issues. And the search for solutions and the direct management of natural resources - such as protected areas - together with communities and citizen groups.

In the absence of other channels, environmental NGOs can represent vulnerable and marginalized populations and serve as a channel for minority views in policy debate, thus contributing to an active civil society.

3. Methodology

The methodology applied in this study is based on the purpose and focus of the project "For clean water in Gjakova and Kukës" for Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) "Albania - Kosovo 2014-2020", which is to strengthen relations between the two neighboring countries through promoting economic development towards the environment and social inclusion of border regions by promoting their tourism potential and respecting the shared cultural and natural heritage. " The aim of the project to improve water protection and management policies and practices and the involvement of local NGOs in the promotion and protection of water resources is reflected in the methodological development of this study.

3.1 Purpose and objectives of the study

This study aims to evaluate local NGOs in Kukës, with the aim of increasing visibility for environmental good management and promoting them as a good opportunity for cooperation in future projects.

The main objectives of this study are:

- I. Evaluation of projects / studies developed by NGOs in Kukës, with the main theme of the environment: management, awareness, promotion, capacity building or improvement of environmental protection policies and practices, etc.
- II. Assessment of the capacities of NGOs in Kukës:
 - a. Capacity to engage in analysis of national dialogue policies and processes related to environmental governance and management.
 - b. Capacities to generate, access and use information and increase knowledge.
 - c. Capacities for developing policy strategy and legislation in environmental management.
 - d. Capacities for management and implementation (project development, resource mobilization, resource planning).
 - e. Capacities to monitor and assess environmental impacts and trends.
- III. Identification of obstacles, impact and lessons learned of NGOs in Kukës, in the framework of projects / studies undertaken related to the environment.

3.2 Study Design

The methodological approach implemented by ACER is based on primary and secondary data to meet the purpose and objectives of this study.

Primary data: ACER conducted a qualitative study with NGOs in the municipality of Kukës. Primary data were based on the assessment of the capacities of NGOs and the identification of obstacles, impact, achievements, and lessons learned reported by the NGO participants themselves in Kukës. The purpose of the qualitative study, through primary data, is to have valuable and reliable information, which can not be obtained through other secondary data, thus developing the main findings and conclusions of this study.

Secondary data: Secondary data includes the collection of data that already exist or from the internal sources of the agencies involved in the project (project documents/development objectives/indicators / preliminary reports, narrative, etc.), publications of government institutions and non-governmental, data on free internet access, professional newspapers, and magazines, reports of international organizations, etc. Literature review and secondary data collection is essential from the initial stage to gain specific training and knowledge on the topic, as well as providing useful guides that will help to get the most out of the study.

3.2.1 Study sampling and data collection

At the beginning of the development of the project "For clean water in Gjakova and Kukës", ACER has identified NGOs in the municipality of Kukës, in a list of 22 NGOs (see Annex 2). 20 NGOs were initially contacted by ACER, to list their projects / studies with the main theme of the environment: management, awareness, promotion, capacity building or improvement of environmental protection policies and practices, etc. After an evaluation of the projects and studies of 20 NGOs in the municipality of Kukes, 7 of them were selected for a second evaluation of the capacities, obstacles, achievements, impact and lessons learned within the projects undertaken ([see appendix 3](#)). The NGOs were contacted by e-mail and telephone by the ACER expert in the municipality of Kukës. Data collection took place over a two-week period (May 10 - May 21, 2021). The final sample of the study is 6 NGOs in Kukës, as listed in the table below.

Table 2. Sample number included in the study

No.	Sample (NGOs included in the study)	Contact
1.	DMO Kukës	dmokukes@gmail.com
2.	Ekologët për Rajonin Kukës	ekologetrajonit@gmail.com
3.	Federata e Përdoruesve të pyejeve, Kukës	fedkuk@yahoo.com
4.	Mbrojtja e Mjedisit dhe Zhvillimi i Turizmit	mbrojtjamjedisit@yahoo.com

5.	Qendra për Progres Rinor	orgcyp@hotmail.com
6.	Shoqata mjedisore SIRA	shoqata_sira_kukes@yahoo.com
7.	Shoqata e Pyejeve dhe Kullotave	shpk_novosej@hotmail.com

Burimi: ACER “Vlerësimi i OJF-ve në Bashkinë e Kukësit, me qëllim rritjen e Vizibilitetit dhe Mirë-menaxhimit Mjedisor”, 2021

3.2.2 Data analysis

Each interview conducted by NGOs in the municipality of Kukes, was stored on the server located in the ACER offices. For unclear and not well-analyzed questions, the relevant NGOs were contacted again, in order for the evaluators of this study to have a broader picture of the questions and the results of this study. The interviews were viewed and reviewed by 3 evaluators and further the data analysis was done in function of the purpose and objectives of the study.

3.3 Limitations

It is worth mentioning that, due to the pandemic period (Covid-19), in-depth interviews with NGOs in the municipality of Kukes were conducted through online meetings and not face to face. Also, in this study are included a small number of NGOs in the municipality of Kukes, as only these NGOs were involved in projects and studies with main theme environment.

4. Study Findings

4.1 Assessment of NGO capacities

The assessment made by ACER was supported by five statements related to the capacities of NGOs in the municipality of Kukes. Based on the opinions of NGO leaders, below is a summary of each statement and a summary table of results.

1. Capacity to analyze national or sub-national dialogue policies and processes related to environmental governance and management.

Capacity building for stakeholder involvement in policymaking is achieved by setting up roundtables with actors in the field to cooperate with government institutions to set the agenda for consultations and environmental development policy processes.

2. Capacities to generate, access, and use the information and increase knowledge

Improving and strengthening the role of NGOs in awareness of environmental issues and policies. Accessibility of information and increase environmental knowledge for NGOs to address the problems and find the appropriate solution.

3. Capacities for the development of strategy, policies, and legislation in environmental management

Strengthen the capacity of organizations to participate in the development of policies and legislative frameworks for environmental governance and management. This includes raising ecological concerns at the institutional and national levels and promoting constructive dialogue between government and NGO leaders on environmental policy formulation.

4. Capacities for management and implementation (project development, resource mobilization, resource planning)

They are improving organizational capacity, including skills in project development, resource mobilization, business plans, and administrative capacity, to participate in activities and policy-making, and environmental reforms.

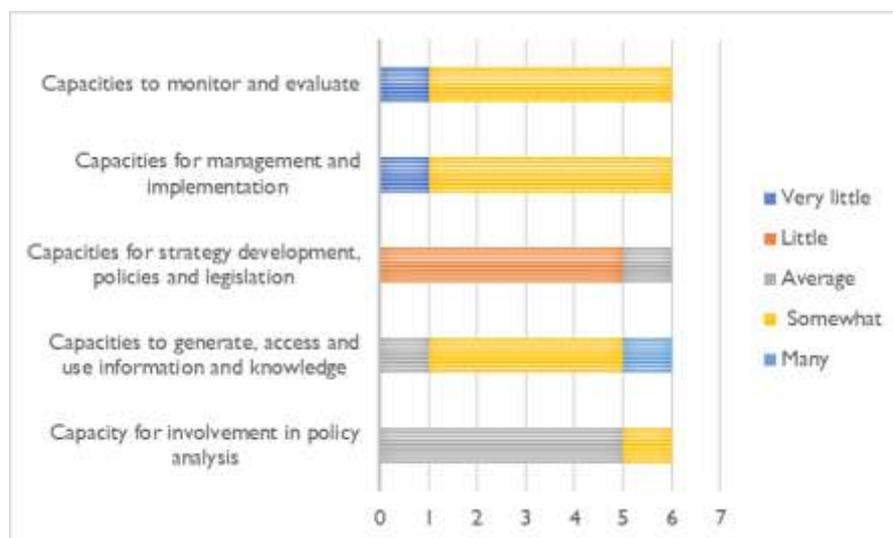
5. Capacities to monitor and assess environmental impacts and trends

Improving organizational capacity to monitor and evaluate environmental issues, information on policy planning and decision-making processes, and support for policy changes, thus increasing the responsibilities of NGOs.

4.2 Assessment of the capacities of NGOs in the municipality of Kukës

ACER assessed the capacities of NGOs in the municipality of Kukes through the use of the Likert scale from 1-Very little to 5-Many. The following graph presents the assessments made by ACER for the NGOs participating in the study. NGOs have assessed the capacity to engage in policy analysis and national dialogue processes on environmental issues as “average.” The NGOs in the study evaluated "to some extent" the capacities related to project development, resource mobilization, resource planning. As well as the ability to monitor and assess environmental problems. Meanwhile, the capabilities of NGOs for the development of strategies, policies, and legislation related to environmental management are limited (The assessment for this capacity is equivalent to two, which means "little").

Figure 1. Capacity assessment



Source: ACER "Assessment of NGOs in the Municipality of Kukes, in order to increase Visibility and Environmental Good Management", 2021

4.3 Building the internal and external capacities of NGOs

To strengthen the role of NGOs in environmental governance and increase capacity, projects may include various activities specifically designed to contribute to a particular outcome. NGOs use grants to build internal capacity in areas such as leadership, strategic planning, self-assessment, resource mobilization, and strengthening technical, administrative, and financial skills. To build external capacity, grants support training in areas that improve advocacy, technical and scientific skills, and alliances to participate in policy-making, various dialogues, and monitoring and evaluation activities.

In terms of external capacity, the grants support conceptual and practical training in several important areas related to environmental governance:

- Participation in environmental decision-making;
- Training on environmental legislation through approaches to law, court, and public opinion;

- Using communication and media campaigns strategically to promote environmental governance;
- Building alliances and network of NGOs at the national and regional level;
- Collection, analysis, and promotion of access to environmental information and sustainable development;
- Policy evaluation and monitoring, participation in policy consultations and their implementation;
- Assess environmental conditions and monitor compliance with environmental laws and agreements (government, industry, communities, etc.).

Table 3. Examples of capacity building activities

Capacity score	Examples of capacity building activities
Results 1: Capacity for involvement in policy analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing a strategic partnership between NGOs and NGOs to develop roundtables with policy actors and not only with a focus on setting the agenda and environmental policy-making processes.
Results 2: Capacities to generate, access and use information and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissemination of information on the environmental consequences of economic activities to promote behavioral changes. ▪ Awareness of environmental challenges, policies, and measures, and advocacy for change.
Results 3: Capacities for strategy development, policies and legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying environmental challenges and problems and promoting a constructive dialogue between the government and NGO leaders to design mitigation measures. ▪ Evaluate and review existing environmental policies at the national level and develop recommendations to promote sustainable practices.
Results 4: Capacities for management and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement of NGOs in the drafting process, implementation of policies at the national level on environmental issues
Results 5: Capacities to monitor and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The responsibility of the public sector to create space for the involvement of NGOs to monitor problems and continuity, in order to raise awareness and support change. ▪ Organizational, financial, and technical knowledge and strategic planning capacities within the NGO itself.

Source: Adaptation by the authors

4.2 Impact and achievements of NGOs

As described above, nonprofits often lack legal knowledge and skills to participate effectively in environmental governance processes. Moreover, although mandated to involve the general public in decision-making, government institutions seldom translate civil society recommendations into policies in an adequate manner. As a result, large donor grants should support initiatives in the municipality of Kukes and beyond, strongly focused on empowering non-profit organizations to participate in environmental governance processes. This includes efforts to build the institutional capacity of NGOs to raise awareness of environmental issues and strengthen their ability to analyze and influence the current legal framework in Albania.

Participation of non-profit organizations in environmental governance processes.

The non-profit organizations included in the study reported that they were involved in joint discussions/tables between NGOs and local government bodies to identify issues and provide ideas/recommendations on various environmental processes. Regardless of the meetings held, broader and more effective participation in environmental governance is required. Also, the NGO in the municipality of Kukës expresses a need for stronger participation in policymaking and strengthen partnerships in local and national institutions.

Improving environmental protection policies and practices. NGOs have developed projects and studies focusing on improving environmental protection policies in the municipality of Kukes. One of the projects developed by the Federation of Forest Users in the municipality of Kukes is "Decentralization of local government; Inventory and transfer of public property to the local government " to record the DCM on the transfer of real estate from the central government to the local government. The evaluation of governance by the institutions responsible for the environment to increase capacity and improve policies has been one of the projects developed by Ecologists for the Kukës Region entitled "WHERE-HOW Is Governed."

Strengthen advocacy and lobbying capacities as one of the achievements with significant impact from the NGOs included in the study is lobbying and advocacy activities. "Strengthening the institutional, legal and policy framework related to municipal forests with special attention to the principles of good governance" is one of the projects developed by the Federation of Forest Users to increase advocacy/lobbying activities and improve the legal framework " "Forest law and forest policies." It is worth noting that there is room for improvement in strengthening the capacity of NGOs on advocacy and lobbying activities.

Capacity building and knowledge sharing. NGOs in the municipality of Kukes have as their main focus the continuous building of local capacities and sharing of knowledge with public or non-public institutions in environmental protection. The wider impact of the projects and studies developed is the transmission of knowledge to the public (mainly young people) on the importance of environmental protection and the possible consequences on human health from a polluted environment.

Awareness and Promotion. All NGOs involved in this study have developed projects and studies in the field of awareness, awareness, and promotion of environmental issues in the municipality of Kukes. "Promoting and addressing the sustainable use of natural resources and values in PA" and "Increasing local capacity for nature protection and promotion in the area of Has" are two of the organization's main projects Environmental Protection and Tourism Development, with promotional impact. Awareness-raising, capacity building, and promotion are the main objectives of the projects developed by the Ecologists for the Kukës Region, such as: 'Green Club and Garden'; "Ecological Network"; Agro Tourism in Kukës Region "etc.

Increase access to environmental information through problem identification and training. Identifying and promoting green businesses through increasing knowledge is one of the focuses of the project "Green Businesses" developed by Ecologists for the Kukes Region. Training on greater public environmental awareness and wider involvement of young people and women in environmental information has had a major impact. Training with local actors (municipal structures) has been one of the project's focuses "Strengthening the institutional, legal and policy framework related to communal forests with special attention to the principles of good governance" developed by the Federation of Forest Users. As a result, it can be noted that NGOs in the municipality of Kukes have impacted increasing access to environmental information through problem identification and training.

4.3 Lessons learned

Close cooperation through the collective action of civil society is the only way different actors of civil society in environmental decision-making. To influence change at the national level, civil society representatives must communicate consistent and unified recommendations. Moreover, NGO coalitions that demonstrate a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, and capacities and represent different regions are more likely to have a stronger voice in negotiations and participate effectively in policy development. Environmental. Systematic, issue-specific meetings between NGOs and other stakeholders and organizational development training to meet the institutional needs of individual NGOs are essential to building the necessary skills and mutual understanding between these organizations.

This approach also fosters networking and partnerships between stakeholders, facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and often provides opportunities to apply new skills in practice through joint projects and initiatives. Networks of stakeholder organizations working towards a common goal are practical tools for sharing knowledge and promoting change. In these networks, each member organization should have equal opportunities to present and express their key messages and recommendations, share their practices, and learn from others.

Active use of social networks and communication platforms is essential to raise awareness among the mostly young population, given that the majority of the people in the country is young and the widespread use of social networks would be an effective way to raise awareness and youth involvement in the community on environmental issues. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube would be highly effective for this purpose. Ongoing cooperation between ecological NGOs and decision-makers will be essential to increase project efficiency. Dialogue and collaboration will ensure that the project results are sustainable and provide a platform for successful partnerships in the future. The local organization operating in the Municipality of Kukës, "Environmental Protection and Tourism Development," states that "the main obstacle that we as NGOs face in developing projects is the lack of cooperation with local government."

A sound legislative basis for civil society participation and possible frameworks for active civic engagement in environmental governance. Capacity-building initiatives alone are not sufficient for the active involvement of NGOs in ecological management but must be accompanied by a sound legislative framework. For example, establishing a centralized environmental assessment and monitoring laboratory for national NGOs could further increase civil society organizations' institutional capacity in environmental governance, risk assessments, project implementation, and monitoring, among others.

NGOs will need further training to improve human capacity to participate as effectively as possible in environmental governance. During the projects supported by European Union organizations, local capabilities to engage and cooperate with the authorities have been identified. The Federation of Forest and Pasture Users, which operates in Kukës Region, states that “... *lack of human capacity to apply and manage environmental projects by local NGOs and lack of cooperation from consolidated NGOs with greater experience and capacity operating at the national level is one of the main obstacles we as NGOs face.*” Addressing this problem will require further training in the future. Environmental NGOs should continuously receive additional thematic training on environmental issues and possible solutions. It would also be helpful to establish mechanisms for these NGOs to focus on ongoing ecological monitoring to increase the effectiveness of environmental governance.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and dialogue platforms are key to improving environmental governance in the long run. Networking and dialogue are powerful tools for exchanging knowledge, building strategies, and strengthening the potential of environmental NGOs to influence policy-making at national, regional, and local levels. At the same time, long-term partnerships and platforms with many actors (including, for example, government authorities, NGOs, private sector actors, and education and research institutions) are needed to bring to the table opinions, expertise and experience. Different from different sectors. These are also essential to building a kind of consensus among stakeholders needed to avoid future opposition. Empowering women is also essential in promoting sustainable solutions. However, women's representation in decision-making positions is still low, and they are often unable to express their specific concerns. Designated committees, with members performing various functions such as strategic planning and coordination, communication, networking, monitoring, and evaluation, can help facilitate long-term engagement and collaboration.

Micro-grants can promote community awareness of local waste management plans. A microgrant component that provides access to local finance can complement community waste management action plans. It can provide a strong mechanism for community mobilization, building a culture of community co-financing, and increasing the waste management implementation capacity of the target communities through testing innovative waste management approaches on the ground.

Youth engagement is essential to foster environmental protection in the future. Integrating environmental issues into school curricula has a substantial positive effect on community

awareness. Youth is the herald, protector, and agent of change. They can advocate for environmental protection and can show through their example. Through eco-clubs, children learn about local environmental issues and actively participate in addressing them, gain research skills, become environmental actors, and promote environmentally friendly behavior. Eventually, they become concerned citizens who can make informed decisions and positively influence the decisions of others. Through promo through-raising campaigns, Eco-clubs are effective tools for youEco-clubs the engagement, outreach, advocacy, and behavior change and thus represent strong mechanisms for influencing decision-making.

The media is the key to raising public environmental awareness. Good environmental governance can only be achieved when everyone, from young to old, understands the importance of the environment and the need to protect and preserve it. To this end, the role of the media in disseminating and educating information is critical. Therefore, training a generation of journalists to understand the importance of natural resources and the value of responsible institutions, and to reflect this understanding in smart reporting on environmental issues, is essential for the production of an environmentally informed and educated society, which can take an active part in decision-making and policy-making.

Partnerships are vital to the success of governance with a focus on environmental policies. The willingness of state authorities to cooperate with civil society is essential for the participatory processes of environmental governance. Also, the geographical location of the project sites should be carefully determined. A comprehensive implementation plan should be developed when selecting project sites so that appropriate local partner can support project activities. Involving community leaders in disseminating information and engaging them in environmental activities is extremely important. Partnering with trusted community leaders, such as teachers, professors, religious representatives, and political figures, and building their capacity to participate in environmental awareness and various initiatives can significantly increase trust and cooperation from communities and local organizations. These partners can effectively function as information multipliers.

National environmental awareness is shallow in small rural communities, with limited input from NGOs and the private sector in this area and limited sources of information. Poor environmental support like local government often discourages civil society actors from speaking out and participating in discussing environmental concerns. There is a significant lack of human capital in the environmental fields in Albania. However, students and young people are showing a greater interest in environmental issues and sustainable solutions to today's environmental challenges. These young people can promote a change in society's perceptions of environmental concerns and changes in existing practices that do not take into account environmental impacts in policymaking. EU NGO projects supporting environmental education are an effective investment in developing individuals who can lead change.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Main conclusions

Some of the main conclusions drawn from the literature review and the study: "Evaluation of Non-Profit Organizations in the Municipality of Kukes, in order to increase Visibility and Environmental Good Management" are:

- Albania has established **a coordination mechanism for water management** in all water-related sectors. The Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy (SIBU) has been implemented to manage water resources in Albania.
- The Municipality of Kukes **is rich in water resources and diversity** of fauna and flora. The main water sources are lakes and rivers. The main watercourses are the Drini i Zi River, the Drini i Bardhë River, the Luma River and the Tërshenë stream.
- Water resources are mainly used for electricity, agricultural activities, and the water supply of residential centers. **The main problem in the Municipality of Kukës is water pollution**, especially from the inflows brought by the rivers Drini I Bardhë and Drini I Zi.
- Civil society is one of the main actors in the transmission of information between citizens and politics. In the last ten years, **the Albanian government has undertaken several initiatives to include NGOs (including NGOs in the Municipality of Kukes) in the policy-making process.**
- Despite the undertakings of these initiatives, there are currently reduced funding sources, which affects NGOs **in conveying the voice of different communities** and properly performing their oversight role.
- **The NGOs involved in the study face obstacles in the full exercise of their functions to channel citizens' concerns into policy processes** through appropriate mechanisms for genuine participation and consultation.
- **A novelty of recent decades is public consultation.** Still, there is a lack of political will to carry out genuine consultation processes and improve cooperation between NGOs and institutions. Consequently, this further increases the mutual distrust between public institutions and NGOs regarding cooperation and its impact..
- Most organizations **have insufficient capacity and resource scarcity** to have a significant impact on the community.

- The capacity to be involved in the analysis of policies and processes of the national dialogue on environmental issues was assessed “on average” by the NGOs included in the study. NGOs in the Municipality of Kukes assessed "to some extent", capacities related to project development, resource mobilization, resource planning. As well as the capacity to monitor and assess environmental problems.
- Meanwhile, the capacities of NGOs to develop strategies, policies and legislation related to environmental management are limited.
- Although mandated to involve the general public in decision-making, government institutions seldom translate civil society recommendations into policies in an adequate manner.

5.2 Recommendation

- ***Ongoing cooperation between environmental NGOs and decision-makers will be essential to increase project efficiency.*** Dialogue and collaboration will ensure that the project results are sustainable and provide a platform for successful partnerships in the future.
- Establishment of cooperation networks between local NGOs to strengthen their influence on decision-making bodies on environmental issues
- Establishment of cooperation networks between the environmental NGOs of the Municipality of Kukës and the Environmental NGOs of the Municipality of Gjakova, Peja to promote the solution of cross-border ecological problems - such as the case of stream management brought by the White Drin River, but also ecological issues others
- Increasing environmental education among young people by increasing the number of courses dealing with environmental issues. This will be realized when the IA (Educational Institution, i.e., school) offers in the primary curriculum a module with a focus on environmental issues. The module "Climate Change" is currently offered as an elective curriculum in a high school approved by the responsible institutions. Youth engagement is essential to foster environmental protection in the future. Through social media promotion and awareness-raising campaigns, Eco-clubs are practical tools for youth engagement, outreach, advocacy, and behavior change and thus represent robust mechanisms for influencing decision-making.
- Promoting awareness activities according to the international calendar of environmental days. To increase environmental education and civic response to the problems that concern them.
- Establishment of a joint/active awareness campaign on Youth Climate Change between the Municipality of Kukës and the Municipality of Gjakova. This is in response to the initiatives taken by the EU in the framework of the "Climate Emergency" and the contribution of young people in their solutions.

- **Active use of social networks and communication platforms is essential to raise awareness among the predominantly young population.** Given that the majority of the people in the country are young, the widespread use of social networks would be an effective way to raise awareness and youth involvement in the community on environmental issues.
- Beyond all obstacles, civil society has every opportunity to be an essential factor in decision-making and influence the transmission of the voice of various interest groups in institutions. **With further capacity development and space to act, NGOs can intervene to assist service delivery and support government policies.** Capacity building for stakeholder involvement in policymaking is achieved by setting up roundtables with actors in the field to cooperate with government institutions to set the agenda for consultations and environmental development policy processes.

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Annex 2: List of NGO Kukes

No.	Name of NGO-s	Place	Contact Person	Phone	E-mail
1.	Agjencia e Zhvillimit Rajonal	Kukës	Arjola Domi	672738945	rdakukes@gmail.com ;
2.	ALB-AID	Kukës	Jonuz Kola	024224006	
3.	Federata e Përdoruesve të Pyjeve dhe Kullotave Komunale (FPPKK)	Kukës	Xhelal Shuti	692371753	fedkuk@yahoo.com ;
4.	Qendra Integrim e Zhvillim Demokratik Kukës (QIZHDK)	Kukës	Zyrjan Alushi	0692097016; 0672018016	zyrjanalushi@yahoo.com ;
5.	Qendra për Progres Rinor	Kukës	Lavdrim Shehu	682095148	orgcyp@hotmail.com ;
6.	Rinia në Sipërmarrjen e Lirë	Kukës	Rifat Demalija	024223113;	rslog@hotmail.com ; orgsl@yahoo.com ;
7.	Shoqata Integrimi	Kukës	Xhëvdet Hoxha;	0692072920;	integrimda@yahoo.com ;
8.	Shoqata Mjedisore "ALPIN"	Kukës	Astrit Metaliaj	682404490;	alpin_m@yahoo.com / ametaliaj@hotmail.com ;
9.	DMO-Kukes (Organizata e Menaxhimit të Destinacionit Turistik Kukës)	Kukës			
10	Keshilli Rinor Rajonal Kukes	Kukës	Merita Hoxha	693084637	keshillikrrk@gmail.com ; Krrk@yahoo.com
11	Shoqata Mbrojtja e Mjedisit dhe Zhvillimi i Turizmit	Kukës	Jahir Cahani	685584931	mbrojtjamjedisit@yahoo.com
12	Organizata e Menaxhimit te Peshkimit Kukes	Kukës	Besart Halilaj	068 625 6566	besihalilaj@hotmail.com
13	Green peace albania	Kukës	Oljora Zoto	066 554 4590	
14	Shoqata Biznesi per Biznesin	Kukës	Sokol Kolgjini	068 201 3297	biznesiperbiznesin@gmail.com
15	Agjencia e Zhvillimit Rajonal Rural Kukes	Kukës	Vexhi Halili	068 232 4515	
16	Federata e Fermereve Kukes	Kukës	Kadri Bulica	068 401 2673	
17	Observatori për të drejtat e fëmijëve, kukës	Kukës	Shkelqim Muça	00355 67 27 86 298	kukes@observator.org.al
18	SHoqata kombëtare e shëndetësisë shqiptare	Kukës	Azem Brasha;	0242 2655	gi_cahani@yahoo.com ;
19	Shoqata për Kulturë Demokratike, Kukës	Kukës	Ylber Cejku	069 2094196	ylbercejku@yahoo.com ;
20	Ekologet per Rajonin Kukes	Kukës	Bukurosh Onuzi	692096645	buabon@yahoo.com ;
21	LAG	Kukës			lag.korabkoretnik@gmail.com
22	SWG				

Annex 3: Self-assessment instrument

Name of the Organization you represent:

Rate from 1 to 5

		1. Very little	2. Little	3. Average	4. Somewhat	5. Many
1.	Capacity to engage in analysis of national or sub-national dialogue policies and processes related to environmental governance and management.					
2.	Capacities to generate, access and use information and increase knowledge					
3.	Capacities for the development of strategy, policies and legislation in environmental management					
4.	Capacities for management and implementation (project development, resource mobilization, resource planning)					
5.	Capacities to monitor and assess environmental impacts and trends					

Based on the projects / studies you have received within the environment, please list:

Obstacles⁵ you as an NGO face, in project development or capacity building:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Impacts and achievements of NGOs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Lessons learned from the projects / studies developed:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

⁵ There can be more than 5.