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Community Needs Assessment Report for Access to Drinking Water

Implemented by
RILINDJA
GJELBËR

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

CSO:	Civil Society Organizations
DEPW/WD	Department for Environmental Protection and Waters/Water Division
DIENWCP	Dep. for Inspection of Environment, Nature, Water, Construction and Planning
EU	European Union
HMIK	Hydrometeorological Institute of Kosovo
IMWC	Inter-Ministerial Water Council
MAFRD	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development
MESPI	Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure
MESTI	Ministry for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
MFAD	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora
MFLT	Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers
MIET	Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade
MLGA	Ministry of Local Government Administration
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
RWC	Regional Water Company
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SPWM-K	Strengthening Civil Society Organizations and Stakeholder Participation in Integrated Water Resources Management in Kosovo
SRA	Water Services Regulatory Authority

1. Introduction

The aim of this assessment is straightforward: to pinpoint and understand which communities in Kosovo are most impacted by water issues. This includes everything from scarcity to pollution to the effects of infrastructure projects. By mapping these communities, we want to ensure that everyone's water needs are met fairly and sustainably, and to strengthen how people and decision-makers work together in managing water resources. In particular, we're looking to:

The main project objectives are:

- **Support for the National Water Strategy:** The project monitors the implementation of the National Water Strategy of Kosovo, ensuring that it is aligned with local needs and international standards. This includes reviewing current plans to identify gaps that need to be filled. **Prioritizing Inclusion and Gender Equality:** Water challenges often affect certain groups more than others, especially women and marginalized communities. This project is committed to ensuring that the needs of all are met equitably. **Raising awareness and building a culture of water conservation:** Through public awareness campaigns, workshops and educational programs, the project helps individuals understand the importance of water conservation. **Strengthening Local Expertise:** To effectively address these challenges, the project provides training for local leaders, government officials, and others involved in water management, helping Kosovo have the knowledge and skills needed for sustainable water resource management.

2. Methodology

Our approach to this assessment combined several methodologies to create a clear picture of the communities in Kosovo most affected by water challenges. Here's how we gathered and refined our data to focus our efforts on the communities that need it most:

Stakeholder Mapping

To start, we conducted a thorough mapping of all stakeholders involved in water management in Kosovo. This included government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, community groups, and businesses. By understanding the roles and influence of each stakeholder, we could identify who to engage with and how they might support affected communities.

Community Assessment

Initial assessments involved visiting 52 communities that had been preliminarily identified as facing significant water challenges. Through conversations and assessments, we gathered initial data on each community's water needs, challenges, and the current state of water infrastructure.

Based on our findings from these visits, we were able to narrow our focus to the 20 most impacted communities, where we continued more in-depth assessments. These communities were chosen because they showed the greatest need, based on factors like water scarcity, contamination, infrastructure gaps, and community vulnerability.

Field Visits and Direct Engagement

Field visits allowed us to gather firsthand insights and observations from residents. We spoke with community members, local leaders, and government representatives to understand the daily water challenges they face, such as accessibility issues, pollution, and health impacts.

These visits also helped us assess physical infrastructure, like water supply systems and sanitation facilities, giving us a clear sense of where improvements were needed most urgently.

Social Media and Direct Communications

Recognizing that some communities may be difficult to reach in person, we utilized social media to broaden our outreach. By posting in local social media groups and community forums, we were able to gather feedback from residents and learn about their water challenges and priorities.

Additionally, we conducted direct communication through phone calls and emails to ensure that we captured perspectives from as wide a cross-section of the community as possible. This method helped us reach communities that may not have been accessible through traditional outreach.

Civil Participation Operational Toolkit

We used the Civil Participation Operational Toolkit—a structured set of tools designed to analyze a community's social, economic, and environmental assets. This toolkit helped us evaluate each community's unique strengths and vulnerabilities, focusing on how these factors impact their relationship with water resources.

Through this analysis, we were able to measure not just the physical aspects of water challenges, but also the socio-economic dimensions, such as income levels, employment, and education, which affect how communities access and manage their water resources.

3.Legal Framework for water management and community engagement

The following chapter aims to present regulatory framework for water management in general, as well as for possibilities for stakeholders to take part in the process of development, adoption and monitoring of decisions relevant for water management.

Law No. 04/L-147 on Water, adopted in 2013, is a fundamental legal instrument regulating IWRM in Kosovo. The Law transposes most standards and principles from the WFD to the legal system of Kosovo, regulating water policy. Particularities in the implementation of water policy are set by secondary legislation:

- Rule No. 03/2016 for Customers' Charter Issued for Water Services Provider in Kosovo;
- Rule No. 04/2016 for Inspection of Compliance with regulatory Obligations by Licensed
- Water Providers in Kosovo;
- Rule No. 06/2016 for Disconnection of Water Service by Water Providers in Kosovo;
- Regulation No, 09/2019 on Resolution for Customer Complaints;
- Regulation MESP 02/2016 on the Manner for Determining Ecologically Acceptable Flow rates;
- Administrative Instruction No 12/2013 on Water Information System;
- Administrative Instruction No 03/2018 on Procedures for Water Permits;

- Administrative Instruction No. 20/2015 on Criteria for Water for Bathing;
- Administrative Instruction No, 19/2015 on Harmful Water Actions;
- Administrative Instruction MESP 17/2017 on Classification of Groundwater Bodies;
- Administrative Instruction No 02/16 on Water Payment Structure;
- Administrative Instruction No 26/2013 on Determining the Way of Verifying and Legitimation of Water Inspectorate;
- Administrative Instruction No 04/2016 on Criteria and Procedures for the Protection of the
- Water Flows Coasts and Accumulations;
- Administrative Instruction No 12/2015 on Determining Criteria on Protected Areas for Strategic Goals;
- Rule No 05/2016 for Licensing of Water Services Providers in Ko**sovo**

4. Identification of stakeholders for water management

The project implementation team have compiled a list of stakeholders needed to implement the project activities.

This list includes the identification of formal and local institutions, agencies, business and civil society organizations, individual and group initiatives, information sector (media), water users and factors related in various ways to the water activities.

The identification of the role of each stakeholder and the designation of their influence was created based on the current legislation.

As a result, there are parties that are directly related and those indirectly related.

Table 1. Main stakeholder group to be included in water management activities

MAIN STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	
National Authorities	Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure
Local authorities	Line Agencies

Regional actors	National Institutes
CSOs / NGOs	Municipalities
Other stakeholders	Regional water companies
Other stakeholders from central institutions	Business sector, community, media, etc.

The Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI) is in charge of water management. Operates through four departments/agencies:
1. River Basin District Authority (RBDA);
2. Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA) with 2.1 Hydro Meteorological Institute of Kosovo (HMIK);
3. Department for Environmental Protection and Waters, 3.1 Water Division (DEPW/WD), and
4. Department for Inspection of Environment, Nature, Water, Construction and Planning (DIENWCP).

Other identified Governmental stakeholders related to water management are:

- Inter-Ministerial Water Council (IMWC),
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development (MAFRD),
- Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade (MIET),
- Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA),
- Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT),
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora (MFAD),
- Ministry of Health / National Institute of Public Health in Kosovo (MoH/NIPHK),
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration (MIAPA),
- Ministry of Economy and Energy (MEE)
- Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA),
- Ministry for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI),
- Water Services Regulatory Authority (WSRA), SHUKOS and Regional Water Companies (RWCs).
- Municipalities

Other stakeholders that play an important role in implementing initiatives and good practices in water resources management, are civil society organizations. They can be effective by monitoring the implementation of legislation, by increasing institutional transparency, and as well by community mobilization.

Civil society groups are as follows:

- Non-Governmental Organizations, which may be registered as Institutes, Foundations or Associations;
- Individual or citizens initiatives;
- Women's organizations and / or associations
- Youth organizations etc.

Above the initial criteria set based on the activity of Civil Society Organizations, 457 NGOs were listed in the "Environmental protection" category and 47 in the "Flora and Fauna" category.

Other stakeholders that have a special role and importance in networking, information and communication are:

Non-key Stakeholders	Role and responsibility
Media-Public	Distribution of information and increasing awareness, interested in stories
Academia	Producing and dissemination of scientific data and knowledge
Households	Water users interested in quality (health) and availability of water with an affordable price
Business sector including Industry	Water users interested in quality and availability of water and/or water usage rights
Farmers & fishery	Considered as water users with specific interests (water quality and quantity)
Village representatives	Community mobilization and information
Community members	Individuals/experts/environmentalists

5. Overview of Communities in Kosovo

In Kosovo, communities are organized across a diverse ethnic landscape, with each group having distinct social, cultural, and political characteristics. The largest segment of the population is ethnic Albanian, while there are also substantial communities of Serbs, Bosnians, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian minorities, among others. Each of these ethnic communities is represented by political parties, civil society organizations, and local leaders who work to advocate for their specific interests and needs.

Ethnic and Social Structure

Kosovo's community structure reflects a complex interplay between ethnicity and local governance. Each ethnic group has its own social networks, community organizations, and, in many cases, political representatives focused on addressing issues unique to their community.

Local Governance and Municipal Structure

Kosovo is divided into municipalities, each with the authority to provide essential services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, and infrastructure to its residents. Municipalities are headed by elected mayors and councils, who are responsible for making decisions and policies that impact local residents. This decentralized system allows for greater responsiveness to local needs, but it also means that resources and services vary widely across municipalities, depending on their governance capacity, budget, and demographics.

Role of Civil Society and Community Engagement

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in bridging gaps in service delivery, especially in communities that may not have full access to municipal resources. Many CSOs focus on supporting vulnerable and minority communities by providing educational programs, social services, and resources for sustainable development. Through advocacy, these organizations work to ensure that all communities have a voice in policy discussions and access to essential services.

Challenges and Opportunities for Community Development

Kosovo's diverse community structure creates both challenges and opportunities for development. For instance, while the variety of cultural perspectives enriches the social fabric, disparities in access to resources and

political representation can hinder equitable development. In areas with mixed ethnic populations, inter-community collaboration is vital to address shared challenges, such as environmental sustainability, water resource management, and economic development. As Kosovo continues to advance in these areas, inclusive community engagement and equitable resource distribution will be essential to building resilience and social cohesion across all communities.

This understanding of Kosovo's community landscape is fundamental to implementing effective water management and other environmental initiatives, as it enables targeted interventions that respect each community's unique characteristics and challenges.

6.Elaboration of Identified Communities

The findings of this assessment stem from a multi-method research approach that enabled a comprehensive understanding of the water-related challenges faced by different communities across Kosovo. This approach included field visits, in-depth interviews, social media outreach, and the creation of a collaborative platform. Through these methods, we identified five distinct groups of communities, each facing unique environmental and social issues related to water. Below is a detailed description of these community groups and the specific challenges they encounter.

Communities Experiencing Water Shortages

Locations: Prishtina/Priština, Obiliq/Obilić, Fushe Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Pejë/Peć, and Gjakovë/Đakovica.

Challenges: These communities struggle to access adequate quantities of clean and safe water for essential daily needs, including drinking, cooking, and sanitation. The scarcity of water leads to broader health and sanitation issues, impacts agricultural productivity, and makes it difficult for farmers to sustain livestock and crops. As a result, residents face health risks and economic strains.

Implications: Limited access to clean water threatens the overall well-being of these communities. Addressing these shortages is critical to ensuring public health and supporting agricultural livelihoods.

Communities Affected by Water Pollution

Locations: Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Pejë/Peć, and Gjilan-Gnjilane

Sources of Pollution: Industrial discharges, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage.

Challenges: The contamination of water sources in these areas results in unsafe drinking water and has a cascading effect on public health, with higher incidences of waterborne diseases, skin infections, and other illnesses linked to polluted water. Furthermore, local agriculture suffers, as polluted water can reduce crop yields and harm livestock health.

Implications: Addressing pollution sources through better waste management and pollution control regulations is essential to improve water quality and protect both human health and agricultural productivity.

Communities Lacking Water for Energy Production

Locations: Deçan-Dečane, Shtërpce-Štrpce, Kaçanik-Kađanik.

Challenges: These communities experience reduced access to water due to its allocation for energy production, particularly for hydroelectric power. This diversion impacts irrigation, drinking water availability, and other essential uses. The imbalance created by energy needs can lead to conflicts over water resources and highlights the need for sustainable water allocation.

Implications: Developing alternative energy sources that do not heavily rely on water can reduce the competition for water resources and mitigate the strain on local communities.

Communities Affected by Physical Waste in Water

Locations: Gjilan-Gnjilane, Lipjan-Lipjane, Gjakovë-Đakovica.

Sources of Pollution: Physical waste, including plastic, oil, and other debris.

Challenges: The presence of physical waste in water bodies poses serious health risks and affects the cleanliness and usability of water for daily activities. This pollution also impacts the local ecosystem and disrupts farming by contaminating irrigation water.

Implications: Implementing waste management programs, community clean-up efforts, and raising awareness about waste disposal are key to reducing physical pollution in water sources and ensuring healthier environments for these communities.

Communities Affected by Chemical Waste in Water

Locations: Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Drenas-Glogovac, Obiliq/Obilić.

Sources of Pollution: Chemical contaminants, including pesticides, fertilizers, and industrial chemicals.

Challenges: Chemical pollution in water sources results in hazardous drinking water, leading to long-term health issues such as cancer, reproductive problems, and chronic illnesses. Additionally, agricultural productivity is threatened as crops and livestock suffer from exposure to contaminated water.

Implications: Establishing stronger regulations on chemical usage and implementing regular water quality monitoring are essential steps to mitigate the health and environmental impacts in these areas.

Communities Facing Challenges Due to Water Shortages for Energy Production

Affected Areas: Deçan/Dečane, Kaçanik/Kačanik

Challenges: Communities in Decani and Kaqanik struggle with water scarcity issues that impact both energy production and access to water for everyday needs. Hydroelectric power projects, which rely on steady water supplies, often reduce water availability for irrigation, drinking, and domestic purposes. This creates a conflict between energy demands and essential water access, affecting agriculture and community well-being.

Implications: Without sufficient water for all uses, these communities face difficulties in maintaining agriculture, ensuring clean drinking water, and meeting domestic needs. This situation underscores the importance of exploring energy alternatives that do not strain local water resources and ensuring a fair distribution of water for essential community services.

Communities Affected by Physical Waste Pollution in Water

Affected Areas: Gjilan/Gnjilane, Lipjan-Lipjane, Gjakovë-Đakovica

Challenges: Physical waste, including plastic debris, oil, and other pollutants, contaminates water sources in these communities. This pollution has broad consequences, from health risks due to poor water quality to agricultural challenges as contaminated water impedes farming activities. Physical waste pollution also hinders sanitation efforts, creating an unsafe environment for residents.

Implications: Addressing physical waste pollution is crucial to ensure safe and clean water for these communities. Effective waste management systems, public awareness campaigns about proper waste disposal, and community clean-up initiatives could reduce pollution and improve water quality, benefiting both human and environmental health.

Communities Affected by Chemical Waste in Water

Affected Areas: Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Drenas-Glogovac, Obiliq/Obilić.

Challenges: These communities face contamination from chemical pollutants such as pesticides, industrial chemicals, and fertilizers. Chemical pollution not only poses serious health risks—leading to conditions like cancer, respiratory issues, and reproductive health problems—but also threatens local agriculture, as toxic substances impact soil quality and livestock health.

Implications: Combatting chemical pollution in these areas requires strict enforcement of environmental regulations, regular water testing, and efforts to limit the use of harmful chemicals. Providing alternative, eco-friendly agricultural practices and supporting pollution-control initiatives would reduce the risk to public health and help farmers maintain productive, safe livelihoods.

Impacts of Hydropower plans in communities

Some communities, especially in **Deçan-Dečane** and **Shtërpce/Štrpce**, face additional challenges due to hydroelectric power projects:

Reduced Water Availability: Hydroelectric plants draw significant water resources, reducing the supply for nearby communities, especially during dry seasons.

Flooding and Displacement: The construction of dams can lead to localized flooding and displacement of communities, as seen in areas like Kaçanik/Kačanik.

Environmental Degradation: Hydroelectric projects alter local ecosystems, affecting water flow, temperature, and habitats of aquatic species.

Loss of Livelihoods and Heritage: Communities that depend on fishing, farming, or have cultural ties to the land are negatively impacted by restricted access to water and changes in the landscape.

7.Key Impacts on communities

1. **Health Risks**: Contaminated water can lead to acute and chronic health issues, including skin infections, respiratory problems, gastrointestinal illnesses, and an increased risk of cancer. Vulnerable populations are particularly at risk, with children and elderly residents often suffering the most from long-term exposure to pollutants.
2. **Mental Health Effects**: Living near polluted water sources creates constant anxiety about water safety, leading to chronic stress, which further impacts residents' well-being.
3. **Economic Burdens**: Many households must secure alternative water sources, adding financial strain. Additionally, recurring medical costs for illnesses related to water pollution reduce family resources and financial stability.
4. **Livelihood Disruption**: In areas like Gjilan/Gnjilane and Gjakovë/ Đakovica, polluted water hampers agricultural productivity, leading to lower crop yields, reduced livestock health, and economic losses for farmer's dependent on clean water for their livelihoods.

8.Key Challenges communities face

1. **Lack of Access to Clean Water**
    - Communities such as **Zhur/Žur, Obiliq/Obilić, and Vushtrri-Vučitrn** lack access to safe drinking water due to outdated infrastructure, industrial and agricultural pollution, and insufficient regulatory enforcement. This restricts access to water for drinking and sanitation, affecting residents' health and daily lives.

2. **Drought and Water Scarcity-**
    - Kosovo experiences frequent droughts and water shortages, especially during summer. Climate change exacerbates these issues, leading to more extreme weather and further reducing water availability.

3. **Flooding and Water Pollution**

- Heavy rainfall, combined with inadequate infrastructure, causes flooding in regions like **Gjakovë-Đakovica, Malishevë/Mališevo, and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica**. Floodwaters contaminate water sources with pollutants such as sewage and chemicals, damaging homes, businesses, and essential infrastructure.

4. **Inadequate Wastewater Treatment**
    - Many communities lack proper wastewater treatment facilities, leading to the discharge of sewage and other pollutants directly into rivers and streams, increasing the level of water contamination.

These challenges have broad implications for public health, local economies, and environmental sustainability. Addressing them requires a unified effort among government agencies, industries, and civil society to develop sustainable and resilient water management strategies.

9.Specific Risks and Impacts on Communities

- **Contaminated Water**: Communities using water contaminated with harmful substances like bacteria, chemicals, or heavy metals face numerous health risks, including gastrointestinal illnesses and long-term conditions.
- **Lack of Infrastructure**: Without essential infrastructure (wells, water treatment facilities), communities struggle to access safe water, particularly impacting low-income and remote areas like Zhur/Žur and Skenderaj/Srbica.
- **Financial Strain**: The costs associated with securing clean water and upgrading infrastructure place financial pressure on communities, affecting overall economic resilience.
- **Daily Life Disruption**: Women and children are disproportionately impacted, as lack of access to clean water makes basic activities like cooking and personal hygiene more challenging.

- **Environmental Impact**: Insufficient water infrastructure and pollution harm local ecosystems, leading to biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.
- **Political and Social Tensions**: Water issues, often influenced by political dynamics, can fuel conflict among communities competing for limited resources.

Conclusions

Kosovo's communities face critical water-related challenges that demand an urgent, coordinated response. A lack of clean, accessible water affects daily life, public health, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. Aging infrastructure, compounded by pollution from industrial and agricultural sources, has left many communities, especially those in low-income or remote areas struggling to secure safe water. Climate change further exacerbates these issues, with increasing droughts, floods, and temperature extremes intensifying water scarcity and contamination risks.

The consequences are clear: higher incidences of waterborne illnesses, significant mental health stress, and economic strains from rising medical costs and lower agricultural yields. Reliance on hydroelectric power complicates the issue, as energy demands sometimes restrict water availability for communities' essential needs, like drinking water and irrigation. Without a strategic shift in water resource management, these impacts will continue to disrupt livelihoods, degrade ecosystems, and deepen social inequalities.

Addressing these interwoven issues requires collaboration across government, industry, civil society, and local communities. By adopting inclusive, sustainable, and resilient water management strategies, Kosovo can better support the health, well-being, and economic prospects of all its communities.

Recommendations

- **Modernize Water Infrastructure**: Investing in upgraded water and sanitation infrastructure will ensure reliable access to clean water. This is foundational for protecting community health, reducing costs for families, and supporting sustainable economic development.

- **Strengthen Water Quality Monitoring and Enforce Pollution Controls**: Routine testing and monitoring of water sources are essential to safeguard public health. Implementing strict pollution regulations, particularly on industrial and agricultural outputs, is key to maintaining safe water quality. Transparent reporting on water conditions helps communities make informed decisions and fosters trust in water governance.

- **Adopt Sustainable Water Management Practices**: Integrating water conservation practices and sustainable technologies—especially in agriculture—can mitigate both scarcity and pollution. Awareness campaigns focused on responsible water use are vital for fostering a culture of conservation at all levels.

- **Diversify Energy Sources to Alleviate Water Demand**: Reducing reliance on hydroelectric power by investing in renewable alternatives, like solar and wind, will decrease pressure on water resources and allow for more balanced usage between energy and community water needs.

- **Prioritize Community Engagement and Inclusive Decision-Making**: Actively involving communities in water planning and decision-making processes ensures that solutions meet local needs and promote equitable outcomes. Community participation builds trust, enhances transparency, and allows solutions to reflect on-the-ground realities.

- **Provide Socio-Economic Support for Impacted Communities**: Introducing support programs to address the economic burdens from water scarcity and contamination is critical. Financial assistance, healthcare access, and training for sustainable livelihoods can help communities build resilience and adapt to ongoing water challenges.

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