

# **Social Impact Assessment, for Construction of a Hydro-Power Plant in Bratila, Gramsh**

## **Situation analysis**

This Social Impact Assessment of the Bratila Hydropower plan is a product of COMPORT shpk during the period January- March 2005. The work involves numerous NGOs and representative individuals in Gramsh, provincial and district statistics bureaus, the State Statistics institute INSTAT, and a team of national experts. This is a social impact assessment (SIA) survey of the Bratila HEC construction project, undertaken by Landsvirkjun. The investment encompasses the communications means and the interests of 500,000 habitants living in the area (including partially the Prefecture of Elbasani, Korca and Berat). The profiting areas involved in the investment are in the district of Gramsh (the city of Gramsh, the Kodovajt Commune, the Lenias and Skanderbegas Commune), the northern part of Korca's prefecture (the Moglica's Commune) and indirectly the west part of the mountain area in Skrapar - Tomorrica area.

The SIA survey assessed the likely fiscal, social and economic impacts on households and communities living in the area of Gramsh District .

- This survey focuses much more than most SIAs on understanding and analyzing what people in communities along the HEC reservoir expect from this investment' project. COMPORT's approach was to fully understand what these communities aspire and strive for. In addition we aimed to build by this SIA an interactive environment, where development prospective are generated for the entire region in accordance with the local vision and resources. On this ground this SIA tends to meet not only the present needs, but it addresses also the future prospective of the region.
- The SIA aimed to provide a fair evaluation of the potential impacts of the kind, in order to facilitate the adequate response, including diversion or mitigation of possibly adverse effects of the project, project acceptance by the public and at processing for permits and official approvals.
- The SIA was considered an integral part of the planning process for the project. COMPORT shpk strived to promote and enhance a sound and effective project development, keeping negative consequences within affordable and balanced limits.
- The SIA focused keenly on the way a decision-making process was to be completed, encouraging participation and involvement, respect for every community member, the right to information and freedom of expression. COMPORT shpk view was that to understand the likely social impacts of a large project it was important to know what households and stakeholders in communities to be affected think about it.

### Strategy and implementation

As is conventional in most SIAs, this SIA survey gathered community baseline information, and initiated a process of dialogue with stakeholders that we recommend be continued during construction and afterwards. The qualitative sociological research was followed by quantitative research, while a representative sample of communities, households, and stakeholders along the HEC area was made. The full survey was conducted from February 15 to February 24 by a local team of Gramsh students led by COMPORT experts and trained by them. This approach was found more appropriate in order to skip mistrust of locals and increase interactivity. Even important stakeholders refused to be photographed during initial focus groups and in-depth interviews. Clustering and coding of responses to open questions involved judgement calls. There was a slight bias in few responses. In most cases, however, the direction of the bias in the information is known and was taken into account in the analysis.

- **Data collection and questionnaire design:** The process of data collection was foreseen to create baseline knowledge about Demographic situation and trends, economic level and natural resources, psychological momentum and social trends, public services quality – its capacities and needs, etc. This information (data) was intertwined with the questionnaires focusing the public perceptions on the HEC investment project:
  - What households and stakeholders know and do not know about the project and their sources of information;
  - How important they think it will be;
  - What benefits they hope it might bring;
  - What negative effects concern them?
  - What suggestions they have about increasing positive benefits; and
  - What suggestions they have for reducing negative effects.

The questionnaire was tested with a dozen of stakeholders during in-depth interviews. On the purpose of dredging the opinion of the habitants in the city of Gramsh regarding the construction of the HEC plant in Bratila, several sociological research methods such as interviews, casual conversations with individuals or small groups were applied. The questionnaire contains 18 questions: 3 free questions and 15 structured questions; all together offered about 80 alternative answers.

- **Demographic characteristics:** Although the financial status of the majority of the habitants in Gramsh is not satisfactory, the proportion of the respondents who were characterized by optimism was almost equal to the group sharing a pessimistic view. As it can be seen from the data of the survey the gap between the pessimistic people and the optimistic, the major part of the surveyed people are positioned in the optimistic part. The question is: On what grounds lays this optimism? In order to answer to this question it was necessary to analyze through an analytical method the different facts related with the trend of the inhabitants of

Gramsh towards migrating to other cities of the country. The main data of the survey for this issue, were taken altogether and detailed according to gender and education, group – age and location of living. Taken as a whole, the spiritual situation of the inhabitants of Gramsh was characterized by optimism, which has at least two characteristics:

*First*, this optimism does not stem from the current economic situation of the major part of the inhabitants of this region, but is mainly involved with the hopes about the future.

*Second*, the optimism does not stem from the reality of this region or other cities of Albania or even more civilized countries of the west. Having the will and hope to shift from Gramsh, even those people that have experienced working and living in other cities of Albania or other countries in the West, we believe that most of the surveyed people have answered with reality and rationality to their socio-cultural issues with regard to the construction of the HEC plant in Bratila.

- **Inhabitants concerns about the project:** Like all the other big projects, with a long-term usage and with possibilities for causing irrevocable changes to the environment, the HEC in Bratila too can not be seen without scepticism and phobia. From the data of the survey it results that the main concerns provoked by the construction of this dam were the following:

- *Firstly*, the owners of the land that will be flooded by the lake of HEC in Bratila doubt that they will be compensated properly by the respectively structures of the government.

- *Secondly*, many of the respondents think the construction of HEC will not be terminated like that of Banja. In that case, the lands will be damaged, especially the pastures, and there would be no profit in this.

- *Thirdly*, maybe the main concern of the inhabitants in Gramsh, (especially for the inhabitants in the surrounding area of the region where the dam will be built), is the flooding by the lake of the current road Gramsh-Korce. This concern is amplified by the negative impact caused 20 years ago from the destruction of the Gramsh Elbasan road because of the construction of Banja dam. The new road connecting Gramsh with Elbasan is considerably longer, and it has more turns than the previous one.

- **Sources of information used:** The major part of the surveyed people have been informed regarding the construction of this plant by casual conversations with friends, relatives and that nr is twice higher than the part of people informed about it by conversations with authorities from the local government and experts from Tirana, as well as three times higher that the surveyed people informed through means of mass communication. Thus, majority of the surveyed people were informed by traditional means of communication with friends and relatives. This happens because of the following reasons:

1. The construction issue of HEC in Bratila has not been widely covered by the electronic media, let alone the written one.
2. The communication channels of this region, especially those of the villages with the local authority and specialists from Tirana, have been fuzzy, even for other issues.
3. The inhabitants of this region in general do not trust the information means of the official channels of communication. Having experienced negative consequences with the construction of the plant of Banja, the inhabitants of Gramsh, are more prone to not trust the official sources of information. Regarding issues, which are related to vital interests, current and in perspective, the inhabitants of this region, are prone to trust more to friends and relatives. Among this circle of friends and relatives is very much spread the mentality that “there are almost always hidden agendas of various political and economic groups behind the promises of officials or official medias, which make them not trustworthy”.

## **Results**

A striking finding of the survey was that the absolute majority of respondents in all communities said that the investment was a positive and most wanted step. They looked favourably on big development projects perhaps mainly for this reason. But there were worries too -- and they were expressed candidly.

The level of information about the project was satisfactory. People were concerned about damage to local roads, unclear about the environmental impact, worried about loss of some few acres of agricultural land, while some of respondents were concerned about inadequate compensation.

Positive views of the project were based on hopes that there would be benefits for the local economy, employment opportunities, and access to better energy supply.

The mitigation measures proposed were mainly based on the costs and benefits of prevention and early mitigation. Diversifying of expectancies was the key answer to maintain a high profile of the investment. The firms doing the construction work can play an important role in prevention and early mitigation at very little additional cost. If compensation shall be made for Moglica village (for 13 ha that the commune pretends to loose), this decision should be made public without any delay. And the farmers who loose their land should be offered a working place in the construction process.

As it was shown from our survey findings, the net fiscal impact of the HEC construction is a positive one that results in additional revenues for the community as compared to the expenditures for public services.

There are increased health related expenses that should be taken into consideration by the commune of Kodovjat. This increase will be necessary with the growing need for medical services by the new population and workforce that the development will bring into the area.

The Kodovjat commune has two polyclinics located in the villages of Kishte and Mashan. The commune is served by two family doctors who observe also other communes, and the health system has currently employed 12 medical assistants. Bratile village, where the main dam and the workers yard will be located, has only one medical room. This infrastructure of the health system is insufficient to afford the needs of the commune habitants together with the new community that will be deployed there. Thus there is clear need for new medical settings and staff, an intervention which will require additional funds allocated to this line in the commune budget for public expenditures.

It helps to be stressed that there will be no need for additional funds allocated to education because the actual infrastructure of the education system is adequate to support the increase in pupils number due to the population increase associated with the development.