



Achieving biodiversity conservation through effective management and enhanced resilience to climate change in the existing protected area of the North Albanian Mountainous Region

Part I: Project Information

GEF ID

10839

Project Type

MSP

Type of Trust Fund

GET

CBIT/NGI

CBIT No

NGI No

Project Title

Achieving biodiversity conservation through effective management and enhanced resilience to climate change in the existing protected area of the North Albanian Mountainous Region

Countries

Albania

Agency(ies)

UNEP

Other Executing Partner(s)

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment

Executing Partner Type

Government

GEF Focal Area

Biodiversity

Taxonomy

Protected Areas and Landscapes, Biodiversity, Productive Landscapes, Terrestrial Protected Areas, Focal Areas, Community Based Natural Resource Mngt, Financial and Accounting, Natural Capital Assessment and Accounting, Mainstreaming, Tourism, Agriculture and agrobiodiversity, Forestry - Including HCVF and REDD+, Supplementary Protocol to the CBD, Access to Genetic Resources Benefit Sharing, Convene multi-stakeholder alliances, Deploy innovative financial instruments, Influencing models, Demonstrate innovative

approache, Private Sector, SMEs, Stakeholders, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, Type of Engagement, Participation, Information Dissemination, Consultation, Partnership, Local Communities, Civil Society, Academia, Community Based Organization, Non-Governmental Organization, Communications, Behavior change, Education, Awareness Raising, Public Campaigns, Gender results areas, Knowledge Generation and Exchange, Gender Equality, Participation and leadership, Capacity Development, Access and control over natural resources, Gender-sensitive indicators, Gender Mainstreaming, Beneficiaries, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Women groups, Integrated Programs, Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration, Comprehensive Land Use Planning, Integrated Landscapes, Landscape Restoration, Smallholder Farming, Knowledge Exchange, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Targeted Research, Innovation, Learning, Adaptive management, Indicators to measure change, Theory of change, Knowledge Generation, Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making

Rio Markers

Climate Change Mitigation

Climate Change Mitigation 1

Climate Change Adaptation

Climate Change Adaptation 1

Duration

48 In Months

Agency Fee(\$)

134,062.00

Submission Date

7/27/2021

A. Indicative Focal/Non-Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
BD-2-7	GET	1,411,188.00	7,810,000.00
Total Project Cost (\$)		1,411,188.00	7,810,000.00

B. Indicative Project description summary

Project Objective

To strengthen the management effectiveness and sustainability of the Albanian Alps protected areas system and increase resilience to climate change.

Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
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Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
Component 1: Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park	Technical Assistance	<p><u>Outcome 1.1:</u> Albanian Alps National Park (NP) territory valorised, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place</p> <p>[updated threats, including climate change resilience building]</p> <p><u>Indicators:</u> Revised, updated and refined Zonation and Management Plan addressing key threats to biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods</p> <p><u>Outcome 1.2:</u> Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established</p> <p><u>Indicator:</u> Increased sustainable revenue generated in the Albanian Alps by at least 10%</p> <p>Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional, and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1[1])</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <p>Gaps in systemic and institutional capacity reduced (measured by - change in status between gap analysis and completed Outputs)</p> <p>NP staff competency level (measured using IUCN Competency Register)</p> <p>[1] See draft Albanian Alps National Park Management Programs (2015)</p>	<p><u>Output 1.1.1:</u> Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building</p> <p>Output 1.1.2: Establishment of a committee for the assessment of constructed and planned HPP status in the Albanian Alps PA,</p> <p><u>Output 1.1.3:</u> Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based on any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors)</p>	GE T	520,000.00	2,100,000.00

Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
Component 2. Strengthening the practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats	Technical Assistance	<p><u>Outcome 2.1:</u> Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated NP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term</p> <p><u>Indicator:</u></p> <p>Effective management of 82,844 ha of terrestrial protected areas ? measured by increased METT score (baseline and targets to be determined at the PPG)</p>	<p><u>Output 2.1.1:</u> Support to establishment of effective NP biodiversity conservation actions in the NP (law enforcement, sub-programs for targeted conservation of rare species/habitats, fire and invasive species control, human wildlife conflict reduction, fuelwood supply (MP Program 2))</p> <p><u>Output 2.1.2:</u> Support to sustainable economic development: strengthening of regulation and management of sustainable natural resource management, livelihoods, and cultural heritage within communities in the NP in order to reduce pressures on BD and incentivize sustainable use and livelihoods, and encourage maintenance of cultural heritage (MP Program 3)</p>	GET	550,000.00	3,000,000.00

Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
Component 3. Support to national level adoption and upscaling of sustainable PAs management best practices	Technical Assistance	<p><u>Outcome 3.1:</u> Lessons learned, and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the Albanian Alps NP captured and applied to the wider national PA system</p> <p>-</p> <p><u>Indicator:</u></p> <p>Degree of environmental awareness of stakeholders, access and sharing of environmental information by stakeholders</p>	<p><u>Output 3.1.1:</u> In depth evaluation of the critical lessons learned during the establishment and initial management of the NP captured and documented</p> <p><u>Output 3.1.2:</u> Positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps document and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application (particularly CC resilience and financing).</p>	GET	212,899.00	2,000,000.00
Sub Total (\$)					1,282,899.00	7,100,000.00
Project Management Cost (PMC)						
		GET	128,289.00		710,000.00	
Sub Total(\$)			128,289.00		710,000.00	

Project Management Cost (PMC)

Total Project Cost(\$)

1,411,188.00

7,810,000.00

C. Indicative sources of Co-financing for the Project by name and by type

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	2,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Grant	Investment mobilized	800,000.00
Recipient Country Government	National Agency of Protected Areas	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	1,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	National Agency of Protected Areas	Grant	Investment mobilized	200,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Tirana Agricultural University ? Environmental Department	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Tropoja Municipality	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Shkodra Municipality	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Male?si e Madhe Municipality	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	300,000.00
Donor Agency	Italian Development Cooperation	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
Donor Agency	SIDA	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
GEF Agency	UNEP	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	710,000.00

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Civil Society Organization	PPNEA	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	150,000.00
Civil Society Organization	INCA	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	150,000.00
Total Project Cost(\$)				7,810,000.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

Investments mobilized were identified following close consultations with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. Government co-financing will come from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the National Agency for Protected Areas, other Government agencies, CSOs and other donor agencies in the form of both cash and in-kind contributions. The grant investment mobilized will be mobilized through EU's Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA) financial assistance for Albania. Co-finance will be confirmed during full project preparation.

D. Indicative Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount(\$)	Fee(\$)	Total(\$)
UNEP	GET	Albania	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	1,411,188	134,062	1,545,250.00
Total GEF Resources(\$)					1,411,188.00	134,062.00	1,545,250.00

E. Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

PPG Required **true**

PPG Amount (\$)

50,000

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

4,750

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount(\$)	Fee(\$)	Total(\$)
UNEP	GET	Albania	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	50,000	4,750	54,750.00
Total Project Costs(\$)					50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00

Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
82,844.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Indicator 1.1 Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly created

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 1.2 Terrestrial Protected Areas Under improved Management effectiveness

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
82,844.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
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Name of the Protected Area	WDA ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
Akula National Park Albanian Alps	125689	Select	82,844.00						

Indicator 11 Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	41,000			
Male	41,000			
Total	82000	0	0	0

Provide additional explanation on targets, other methodologies used, and other focal area specifics (i.e., Aichi targets in BD) including justification where core indicator targets are not provided

The figure of 82,844 ha. is the current figure for the NP area based on the draft Decision of Council of Ministers ? however, the 2015 draft management plan foresaw an area of 86,086 ha. The decision on the final area will depend on the final Decision of the Council of Ministers expected soon. However, for the current time the conservative figure of 82,844 ha. is used as PIF target and will be amended as required at PPG stage. 3 management zones: a) Central Zone A, with an area of 1,695.1 ha; b) Central Zone B with 54,180.07 ha; c) Traditional Use Area, with an area of 26,969.48 ha; in accordance with the draft Decision of the Council of Ministers, published for public consultation in July 2021.

Part II. Project Justification

1a. Project Description

1) The global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)

Background: Country Description

Albania has a total surface area of 28,748 km². It borders Montenegro to the northwest, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) to the northeast, North Macedonia to the north and east, and Greece to the south and southeast. Its coastline, facing the Adriatic and Ionian seas is around 362 km long (see Map 1 below). About 70% of the country is mountainous, with rugged and often inaccessible terrain, while the remaining 30% is mostly alluvial plains that form either fairly arid areas or poorly drained wetlands. Albania lies at the interface between the mountainous Balkans, which has continental European climate (mild temperate and wet winters; hot dry summers) to the east, and the Mediterranean ecosystems and climate on the coastal plains to the west.

Socio-economic context: With a population of almost 3 million, Albania is fairly densely populated for a small country, with 98 people per square kilometer. The country has a high Human Development Index (HDI value of 0.749 and ranking of 39 in 2015) and provides a universal health care system and free primary and secondary education.

Albania is an upper-middle income economy with the service sector dominating the country's economy, followed by the industrial sector and agriculture. The Albanian economy is mostly in private hands, but the state continues to control key enterprises, particularly in the energy sector. Although foreign direct investment has increased in recent years - notably to fund the development of its oil and natural gas resources - overall levels still remain among the lowest in the region. Its transportation and energy infrastructure remains poor by European standards.

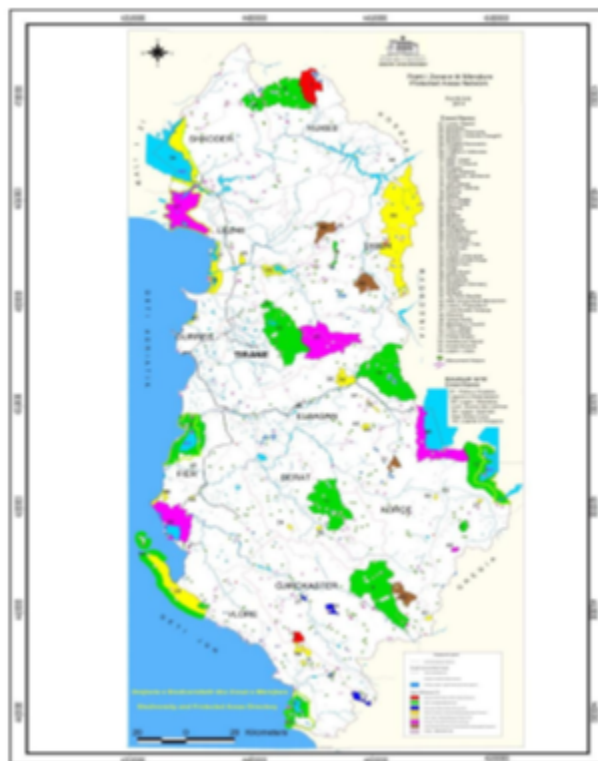
While the agricultural sector employs about half of the workforce and accounts for about 21% of GDP, it is primarily driven by small family operations and subsistence farming. Modernization of the agricultural sector is hampered by a lack of modern equipment, unclear property rights, and the prevalence of small, inefficient plots of land. A significant part of Albania's national income also comes from tourism, which accounted for about 10% of its GDP in 2014. Outside of agriculture and tourism the economy is dependent largely on textiles, mining (petroleum, natural gas, coal, bauxite, chromite, copper, iron ore, nickel), lumber and hydropower as well as remittances from migrant workers largely residing in Greece and Italy. Albania became a candidate for EU accession in June 2014.

Gender gaps in economic opportunities include low labour force participation, high levels of informality, gender segregation, and low access to productive inputs. Women's labour force

participation (61.6 percent) is lower than men's (77.6 percent), with a persistent average gender gap of 18 percentage points. Occupational stereotypes limit women's choices, with women working predominantly in sectors such as health and social work, education, manufacturing, and agriculture, which are characterized by lower salaries. Agriculture remains the primary sector employing women, with 41.6 percent women compared to 32.3 percent men[1]¹.

Poverty levels: Albania has suffered some of the highest levels of poverty in the region, though steady progress has been made over past decades in reducing this. Nonetheless, World Bank projections[2]² based on GDP, consumption growth and other data sources suggest it is still about 37% in 2020. Poverty in Albania has marked spatial and regional dimensions with rural areas and mountains in particular being poorer than the rest of the country. Mountain area poverty is much more pronounced with a poverty gap index of 11%. The National Institute of Statistics has been conducting the Income and Living Condition Survey (SILC) since 2017 however the methodology applied for computing the share of population at risk of poverty does not capture gender-specific differences and inequalities between female and male household members. Despite this, it is a known fact that household resources are not distributed equally among its members, making women an at-risk population for poverty and social exclusion.?

National Biodiversity Context: Albania is ranked as one of the most bio-diverse countries in Europe. It is well known for its diversity of ecosystems (marine / coastal, woodland / forest, high mountain, grassland, heathland, wetlands, rivers, and lakes) and habitats (coastal and inland dunes; coastal and halophytic; temperate heath and scrub; freshwater; Mediterranean scrub; natural and semi-natural grasslands; raised bogs, mires and fens; temperate forests; and mountainous beech and coniferous forests), as well as its species level diversity. Approximately 3,200 species of vascular plants, 2,350 species of non-vascular plants and 15,600 species of invertebrates and vertebrates have been documented in Albania[3]³. Some 30% of the European flora and 42% of European mammals are represented in Albania. Thirty two endemic flowering plant species, and another 110 near-endemics share habitats between Albania, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99), Montenegro, Croatia, and Greece. In comparison with the flora, the Albanian fauna is not as well documented, although a considerable number of endemic and ancient species have been recorded (notably in Lake Ohrid). One hundred and nine animal species and 319 plant species are considered threatened at the national level in Albania[4]⁴. At least 72 vertebrate and 18 invertebrate species of global importance have part of their range in the country and for some of them ? such as *Pelecanus crispus*, *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, *Salmo letnica* and *Acipenser sturio* ? Albania is of critical importance. According to the national Red List of wild fauna and flora approved in November 2013, the total number of protected species of Albania is 980; of which 405 are plant species and 575 animal species.



Map 1: Topographic map of Albania & Protected Areas System (as of 2019)

The country has made significant progress in improving the coverage of its protected area system, effectively doubling the extent of the protected area estate over the last 15 years: from 238,347 ha in 2005 to 460,060 ha in 2015 and 599,846.5 in 2020 (see Table 1 below). The protected area system covers an area of more than 18% of the total surface area of the country. *National Parks* (~48% of the total area of the protected area estate), *Managed Natural Reserves* (~37%) and *Protected Landscapes* (~13%). The first Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Albania was designated in 2010 as the ?Karaburuni-Sazan? Marine National Park (124.3 km²). Today almost 18% of the territory is protected. According to the latest Decision of the Council of Territory no. 10, date 28 December 2020 a total area of 5,998.4 km², is protected in Albania, comprising of national parks, managed natural reserves, protected landscapes (terrestrial and marine), and one Marine Protected Area.

Table 1. Area covered by Protected Area in Albania indicating the increase and changes in the past fifteen years

National PA Category	2005	2010	2015	2020[5]⁵
Area (km²)	Area (km²)	Area (km²)	Area (km²)	Area (km²)
1. Strict Natural Reserve	145.0	48.0	48.0	
2. National Park	625.3	1,889.4	2,105.0	2,868.3
3. Natural Monument	34.7	34.7	34.7	
4. Managed Natural Reserve	669.6	674.2	1,271.8	2,208.8
5. Protected Landscape	726.4	958.6	958.6	796.8
6. Protected Managed Natural Resource Area	182.4	182.5	182.5	
(Marine Protected Area)	0	124.3	132.6	124.3
Total Area	2,383.4	3,787.4	4,600.6	5,998.4

The 2020 Decision of the National Council of the Territory of Albania, re-established the map of protected areas in Albania increasing the surface of the protected areas in the northern mountainous region of Albania, thus establishing the ?Albanian Alps? National Park with a total protected area of 82,567.9 ha. In order for this decision to become final, a Decision of the Council of Ministers will follow.

PA System Legal Context:

Albania is a signatory to various international environmental conventions such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Bern Convention, CITES, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification etc. Of further importance are the Birds and Habitats Directives as not only relevant to countries within the EU, but also those countries trying to gain accession, such as Albania.

The planning, administration and use of protected areas in Albania is directed by the *Law on Protected Areas* (Law no. 81, dt 2017^[6]). This Law establishes the legal context for the declaration, conservation, administration, management and use of the protected areas and their natural and biological resources, as well as facilitating conditions for the development of environmental tourism, public information and education and the generation of direct and indirect economic benefits by the local population as well as the public and private sectors. The Law on Protected Areas makes provision for six categories of protected area ? Strict Nature Reserve/Scientific Reserve, National Park, Natural Monument, Managed Natural Reserve, Protected Landscape and Protected Area of Managed Natural Resources^[7].

In preparation for the Natura 2000, initiatives were undertaken by the Albanian Government to amend the Law on the protection of biodiversity, and subsequent bylaws in order to achieve approximation to the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. Thus the Ministry of Tourism and Environment in the frame of Natura 2000 prepares every six years a report on the implementation of the protecting measures, including the conservation measures, the evaluation of their influence on the conservation of the species and of the natural habitats, plants and animals, as well as the main results achieved.

Other relevant legislation promoting nature protection in Albania includes:

- ? Law No. 9587 ?*On Biodiversity Protection?* (as amended);
 - ? Law No. 10006 ?*On Wild Fauna Protection?*;
 - ? Law No.9867 ?*On rules and procedures for international trade of endangered species of flora and fauna?*;
 - ? Law No. 10253 ?*On hunting?* (as amended);
 - ? Law no. 57/2020 ?*On forests?*;
-

Of significant importance with regards to PAs is the legal basis that enforces a ban on hunting initially approved in 2014 later re-confirmed in 2016 for a period of 5 years. Similarly, the logging ban (Law no. 5/2016), is in force in Albania for a period of 10 years from its approval.

In accordance with Article 10 of Law no. 81/2017 'On protected areas', the declaration of the protected areas requires both a decision of the Council of Territory and that of the Council of Ministers. Article 12 of the law explains that the procedure can be initiated by the Minister responsible for protected areas.

After the first decision (from the Council of Territory) the Ministry prepares a draft management plan for the area, the plan is made available to the public for a period of at least one month, at which time the public may make suggestions on amending the plan. After this period the plan is considered valid and following this plan the Ministry prepares the Draft Decision of the Council of Ministers for the final approval of the protected area.

Institutional context:

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) is the responsible authority for environmental management and policy at the national level. The MoTE's main tasks include: implementing relevant national policies, defining priority environmental and forestry investments, developing national research programs in the field of environment, and coordinating environmental protection activities with other ministries and local authorities. In terms of organization, the MoTE has four structural functions (policy, inspection, permits and support services) along with four sub-sector functions (environment and pollution prevention, forestry and nature and water protection).

Recent negotiations with the European Union have raised the issue of the capacity of the MoTE to manage the protected area system and the future demands associated with the establishment and administration of a Natura 2000 network. In recognition of some of the capacity constraints affecting the management of protected areas the Government of Albania (GoA) has gazetted a '*Decision on establishing and organisation and functioning of the national agency for protected areas and regional administration for protected areas*'. The Decision of the Council of Ministers (No. 102, dated 4/2/2015) established the **National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA)** as a public state budgeted entity subordinate to the MoTE. The NAPA extends its services in the territory by means of the Regional Protected Area Administrations at the regional level. The establishment of this agency will, over the longer-term, result in a significant improvement in the overall management effectiveness of the protected area system. The NAPA has a total of 204 employees (including support and logistic staff); both the central office and the regional branches have conservation management and monitoring functions as well as legal, financial management and communications capacity. NAPA is a state budget dependent institution, but it will be empowered to supplement its budget through donations as well as other legal sources of income such as generating revenue through providing services to third parties. On December 24, 2020, by Decision of the Council of Ministers no 1156, *NAPA has been assigned as the responsible institution to manage revenues generated from annual fees in all protected areas.* Furthermore in January 20, 2021, by Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 19, *a special fund has been created to be used in the environmental protected areas and administered by NAPA (15% of the funds to be generated from PA revenues, and 85% from donor contributions and projects supported by international institutions).*

The **National Environment Agency (NEA)** is a central public institution that is responsible for functioning as the technical arm of the MoE. It is financed by the state budget and its own revenues, and its jurisdiction extends throughout the territory of Albania through its central office and its regional branches, which are referred to as Regional Environment Agencies (REA).

The **National Forest Agency (NFA)** is another central public institution that was created by Decision of the Council of Ministers in September 2019[8]⁸, as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. The mission of the agency is to ensure the good governance of forests at the national level, the preservation and sustainable development of resources included in the forest fund, as a resource of national importance.

The MoE also works closely with the **Ministry of Interior** on the management of illegal logging and hunting activities in protected areas.

Protected Areas Financing: There are three major sources of funding for Albania's protected area system:

Annual allocations from the state budget are used for the staff costs of NAPA and RAPAs, and operational costs related to administration of PAs (e.g. costs of energy, fuel, office supply and similar). Total allocations from state budget, over the period 2016 - 2018, account for 85% - 90% of total funding of PAs system through NAPA and RAPAs administration. Funding of investments and emergency issues is determined separately, by the decision of Minister.

International financial flows are comprised of grants from donor agencies and foundations (e.g. Global Environment Facility, German Government etc.) and EU financial mechanisms (e.g. IPA, Interreg etc.) that directly contribute to implementation of activities under NAPA area of responsibilities (physical and non-physical investments - studies, trainings and similar). Total international flows consumed directly through the NAPA administration amounts approximately 6% of the total budget.

User fees, conservation taxes, fines, and other self-generated income in the analysed period (2016 - 2018) has been comprising of income from: sale of wood and wooden materials, hunting, pasture leasing, rent and land use and revenue from entrance tickets. Revenues from entrance tickets for 2018 amount just 3% of total revenue, and according to tourism statistics of the country and the upward trend of travelling at the global level, this revenue source represents the biggest potential opportunity for income generation for the protected area system in Albania. **Self-generated income from the use of protected areas is directly transferred to the state budget and not exclusively earmarked for funding of protected areas**, which is one of the top issues to be resolved in the further process of enhancing financial sustainability of PAs^[9].

Despite the above there are serious gaps in sufficiency of PA funding for achieving on-ground management. The financial sustainability of protected areas in Albania continues to be one of the most significant challenges of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas, particularly considering the gradual expansion of the system of protected areas, which currently covers 18.31% of Albanian territory (compared to 5.2% of the country's territory in 2005). Although some progress on financial development has been achieved over the past five years, most protected areas in the country are still severely underfunded and the funding gap is increasing in relation to the rapid growth in the coverage of the protected area system, and associated management costs.

The GEF financed "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" project (UNDP) initiated in 2015 identified 2 key barriers to sustainable financing of PAs in Albania:

- ? weak business planning skills of, and limited financial administration capabilities in, the protected area system.
 - ? insufficient and unreliable revenue streams to address the recurrent expenditure costs of protected areas.
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The above project has been working since 2018 to address these two barriers in the country through the development of a national PA financing strategy and financing plan, plus the practical application of them in 3 pilot protected areas[10]¹⁰.

Summary of broad National level threats to biodiversity: Important threats to biodiversity in Albania are habitat loss and transformation (including loss of meadows and pastures and desertification), habitat fragmentation and over-exploitation of certain natural resources.

According to the 2019 Report on the State of Environment[11]¹¹, in Albania there are approximately 7,233 plant groups and 5,438 species of wild fauna. Estimates show that 91 species of fauna are endangered globally, species for which the country is an area of special importance. Meanwhile regarding the state of the flora, the situation is more serious. There are about 196 invasive species that have been adapted and cultivated in the environment, as well as 81 species completely naturalized, 16 species are harmful naturalized plants, 11 species are former agricultural crops, 9 species of relics and 38 species that make up new species discovered, of which 41 introduced species which were presumed and registered as extinct.

Despite the work and progress made in the conservation and promotion of biodiversity in the PAs, mainly related to the establishment of the NEA, a series of issues and shortcomings remain to be addressed, within a system that fully meets international criteria. The mapping of habitat types was not performed for all PAs and in cases when it was done they do not conform to the standards of Natura 2000 or the national legislation which approximates that of the European Union? (EU). Likewise, the study and mapping of the vegetative cover and the use of the territory of a PA is not performed for all PAs and is not unified, consequently it has brought confusion in the use, maintenance, updating and uploading of data in the respective databases. In addition, the RAPAs have undergone changes in the use of territory and zoning, which require reassessment, and the definition of measures to improve the situation, until the preparation of the necessary changes to strengthen control over the territory, the implementation of legality and their good administration, through a well-handled staff as well as supported by the necessary logistics to perform the task.

Some national biodiversity data is being made available through the Biodiversity National Network of Albania (BioNNA - www.bionna.al/) which was launched in 2016 and populated with information in 2017 within the frame of Natura 2000. So far biodiversity data, i.e. occurrence records of about 900 species (May 2017) are registered in this database as plants or animals while other groups are not represented. Furthermore, the Wildlife Monitoring System of the NAPA (NAPA-WiMS), is aimed to set up an effective and reasonable, staff-based wildlife monitoring system, within the organizational structure of NAPA. This system has been established for monitoring the wildlife trends across the country, covering territory of all the 12 RAPAs. NAPA-WiMS will gather data and information on wildlife distribution and abundance, wildlife mortality, illegal activities, human-wildlife conflict, and patrol effectiveness.[12]¹²

Albania's 5th National Report to the CBD (2014) identified industrial development, urbanization, deforestation, soil erosion, uncontrolled pollution, illegal hunting, and fishing as the activities most threatening to biodiversity; while agriculture, energy, mining, transport, and tourism were identified as being the sectors which contribute most to the negative impacts. Additionally, there are issues relating to land-use planning and land tenure that allow for legal conditions to exist which make it difficult to control development. As a result of this, some inappropriate land uses, and infrastructural developments are occurring in protected areas and threatening their biodiversity.

Women and the environment in Albania: women and men ? in their respective social roles ? have different impacts and are differently affected by environmental issues and climate change. Reasons are mainly to be found in different responsibilities for care work and income generating work. Women especially in remote, rural and mountainous areas are generally more dependent on natural resources though they often lack easy access to environmental services, or in knowledge and capacities to cope with their negative effects because of differences in the access to education and information systems. The participation of women is not only in above processes but also in decision-making regarding the environment, ecosystem services, biodiversity conservation and climate change policies and their implementation in instruments and measures is very low. In general, it is men's perspectives which are taken into account in planning processes. This poses a threat not only on creating a big information gap on environmental issues in general but also in making any planning process, its implementation ineffective[13]¹³. Thus, there is a need for a far wider involvement of women's voices and perspectives in all environmental planning and its implementation.

Habitat loss ?this occurs primarily because of illegal logging and overexploitation of forests. It is estimated that 800 km² of forest have been destroyed in the past two decades[14]¹⁴. In the last twenty years, the national forest fund has decreased in terms of volume by 30 million cubic meters (about 1.5 million m³/year) or by 40%, and the area with virgin forests has decreased by 85%, or from 70,000 ha (in 1997) to 11,000 ha today. Forest cutting for firewood is about 2-2.5 times more than forest annual growth, while two-thirds of forests are burned inefficiently exacerbating their degradation[15]¹⁵. To put a permanent stop to such activities in January 2016 a 10-year moratorium on forest activities was adopted by the Albanian Government. Attempts have been made to control this illegal and unsustainable activity by placing a sanction on the export of charcoal from wood and a ban on the export of the raw wood itself, but the levels of law enforcement are low, and these controls are not yet having the desired effect. This is further undermined by the lack of reliable and current data on forestry cadastres which creates uncertainty around where certain activities may or may not occur.

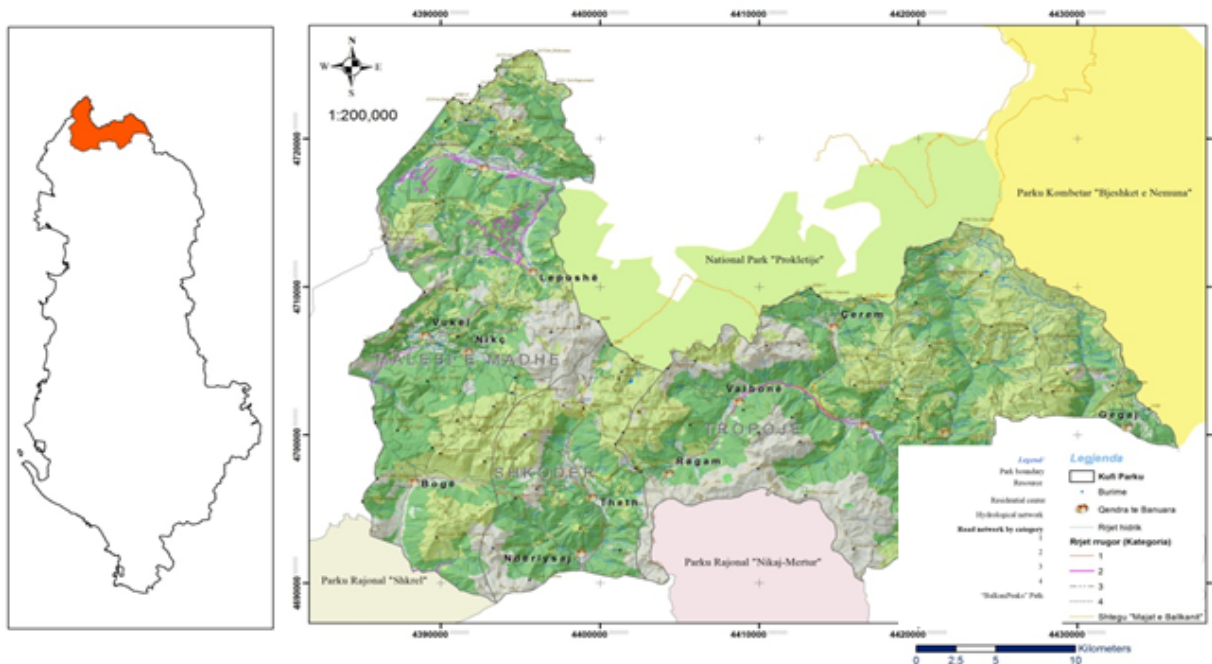
Hunting of wild animals - mostly mammals and birds, has essentially been uncontrolled over the past two decades resulting in a significant increase in the levels of hunting and a notable decline in target species as well as an impact on the genetic integrity of individual populations. The detected decline

includes for those bird species which are migratory and not resident in Albania. A short-term (2-year) ban on hunting was approved by parliament in 2014, and what was foreseen as a temporary measure will remain in force until 2026, since its 10 year extension in 2016. This intervention is expected to reduce the impact on the target species for the period of the ban until more sustainable long-term measures are in place.

Profile of project target protected area and landscape (Albanian Alps National Park)

The Albanian Alps are located in the North-eastern part of the country on the state border between Albania and Montenegro (northern border) and between Albania and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) representing the southernmost part of the European Alps in the line Dinarides Albanides. In the south the Alps extend to the Drini valley, which separates them from the Puka highlands; to the east and northeast they border the Tropoja watershed with the lower reaches of the Valbona River valley, which separates them from the Gjakova and Has highlands; while in the West they descend to the Plain of Mbishkodra. Based on natural features, the Alps can be divided into two main areas: the Western Alps and the Eastern Alps. The dividing line of these two areas crosses the Runica gorge through the Shala valley. The Albanian Alps are characterized by great contrasts of the surrounding relief, valleys and alpine ridges. They have a very isolated geographical position, because the roads that connect it with other regions of the country and the Albanian territories outside the border, are few and in poor condition. The average altitude above sea level is 1500 m. but there are numerous peaks with an altitude of over 2000m (the highest two are Jezerca at 2694m and Korab at 2751m). Morphologically the area is characterized by steep slopes, deep valleys, narrow gorges with numerous rapids and numerous glacial forms, in which there are rich lakes, forests and pastures. The climate is mountainous (alpine), with cool summers, cold winters, and many frosts. Due to the mountainous relief, there is more rainfall than anywhere else in Albania, especially in the form of snow. The hydrography is very rich with rivers and mountain streams of abundant fast flowing water, especially in the spring season, when the snow melts. There are groups of glacial lakes, which have great eco-tourism value. The territory of the Alps is distinguished by its biological and landscape diversity, thanks to its geographical position, geological, pedological, hydrological conditions, relief, and climate characteristics. The rugged relief of pronounced verticality provide conditions for the existence of a large number of plant and animal species.

Map 2: General Location of Albanian Alps (in Albania and relative to state boundary with Montenegro's National Park Prokletije, and Kosovo's (under UNSCR 1244/99) Parku Kombetar ?Bjeshket e nemuna? Source ? draft Albanian Alps NP management plan



Source: GIZ, NAPA

Description of important flora and fauna in the National Park: Several plant species (at least 5) that naturally grow in the territory, are protected by international agreements such as: Bern and Habitats Directive. These include the *Ramonda serbica Pancic*, *Geum bulgaricum Panc.*, *Gentiana lutea L.*, *Galanthus nivalis L.*, and *Campanula scheuchzeri Vill.*, which are listed in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive (92/43 / EEC), Bern Convention and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The territory of the Albanian Alps NP consists of important forest vegetation. The most important plant communities with protection interest from a management point of view are combinations of chestnuts and beech (*Castane-fagetum submontanum*) or mixed associations with maple, hawthorn and beech (*Acero-Ostrio-Fagetum moesiaca*). Endemic plants such as the *Astrus alpestris*, *Pinus mughus*, two species of willow (*Salix retusa* and *S. reticulata*) etc. are preserved in the Alps today. In the upper parts, in the sections where the oak joins the beech, there are some endemic species such as the Hajek ostrich (*Ranunculus hayekii*), and the rare Koshanin (*Viola kosanin*), etc. The rare spruce forest (*Picea excelsa*), lies in the gravel of the Valbona valley, in its upper sector (between the villages of Rragam and Valbona), which has been severely damaged. In addition, other rare species are found, such as: White patch (*Pinus peuce*), Pine (*Pinus heldreichii*) or maple species such as: *Acer obtusatum*, *Acer heldreichii*, etc. The coniferous forest belt, in all its width and height, mixes to form mixed deciduous and coniferous forests, creating habitats important for the flora and fauna of the NP. An important type of this floor is the Black Pine (*Pinus nigra*), which has a very limited area, rarely meets mixed with beech in its lower sub-floor.

The alpine pasture floor, extending to altitudes above 2000m, is dominated by primary secondary plant associations of heather (*Pinetum mughii*, *Vaccinium myrtillus*, *Vaccinium uliginosum*, *Juniperus sibirica* or *Bruckenthalia spiculifolia*). They are generally pastures with gram or non-gram herbaceous vegetation, dry, wet, alpine meadows or peat meadows or swamps around glacial lakes or along the

watercourse, all associations of the classes *Molinio-Arrhenatheretea*, *Festuco-Brometea*, *Cucumbesleslerietae*, *Nardo-callunetea*, *Montio-Cardaminetea* or *Schechzerio-Caricetea*.

A distinctive feature of some of these pastures is the wide spread of blueberry bushes (*Vaccinium myrtillus* L.); with species of shrubs such as *Salix* ssp, *Dryas octopetala*, *Daphne oleoides*, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, Dwarf juniper (*Juniperus nana*). At the same time, the presence of some endemic species is characteristic including: Albanian Vratiku (*Ligusticum albanicum*), *Petasites doerfleri*, and about 50 sub-endemic species: *Asperula doerfleri*, Klok?z lulegja (*Silen? Edranthus serpyllifolius*, *Aquilegia dalmatica*, *Wulfenia carinthiaca*, etc.

Sloping rocky outcrops, stony ballasts of various geological origins, are covered by a rare herbaceous and shrubby vegetation, often rich in rare, endangered species, where the classes *Salicetea herbacea*, *Thlaspeetea rotundifolii* and *Drypetea sposa* (*Drypetea* spin) stand out. The considerable altitude from the sea level, the high variation of the mountainous terrain and the alpine pastures make the territory of the park a favourable space for the growth of medicinal plants. There are approximately 500 species of medicinal plants in this territory.

The territory of the Alps is distinguished for its faunal diversity, thanks to its geographical position, geological, pedological, hydrological conditions, relief and climate characteristics. Rugged relief with pronounced verticality provide conditions for the existence, conservation of a large number of animal species. In general, from the faunal point of view, they belong to the Holarctic region, respectively to the Euro-Siberian subregion. It is characterized by a very rich, heterogeneous, endemic and interesting fauna. This faunal wealth is as a result of the numerous influences of the Mediterranean, Euro-Siberian and Nordic-Alpine region, as well as the frequent changes of ecological conditions in the past.

The NP territory contains species of mammals and birds that are quite rare for the Balkan region and beyond. Some of them are relics, endemic, endangered and therefore found in the lists, in the international red books. From the species of mammals meet: Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), Fox (*Vulpus vulpus*), hare (*Lepus europaeus*), the badger, marten, etc. Among common bird species are: Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naummani*), Eurasian capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), Hazel Grouse (*Tetrastes bonosia*), Mountain sparrow (*Pyrhocorax graculus*), Bearded eagle (*Gypateus barbatus*), Horned laurel (*Eremaphila alpestris*), Red crawler (*Tichodroma muraria*), Mountain deer (*Arthus spinoletta*), Mountain partridge (*Alectoris graeca*), etc. Trout are common in the rivers of the Alps, in [particular in the river Valbona. Among the amphibians is the mountain frog (*Rana temporaria*), Tritoni alpine (*Triturus plpestris*), Black salamander (*Salamandra atra*), etc. From the reptiles: Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), Viviparous Lizard (*Lacerte vivipflra*), European viper (*Vipera berus*), Meadow viper (*Vipera ursinii*), etc. 20 species of butterflies are known from insects. The table below shows the globaly and nationally protected species of vertebares present in the park.

Table 2: Evaluation of vertebrates of ?Albanian Alps? Natiiona Park

Group	Types vs Types reported in Albania	Endemic in the Balkan	Endangered Globally (IUCN)	Endangered in Albania	Habitats Directive	Birds Directive

Land Mammals	65/79	4	3	8	56	na
Birds	155 /330		4	29	na	65
Reptiles	29/38	5	1	2	31	na
Amphibians	13/16	4	0		8	na
Sweet Water Fish	8/60	2	2	2	11	na
Total	270 /522	15	10	41	106	65

As outlined above, the total number of vertebrate species in the NP that enjoy a protective status:

- 15 species are endemic to the Balkans;
- 10 species are endangered globally in accordance with IUCN classification;
- 41 species are considered endangered in Albania.

As a complex ecosystem, the NP is built from a large number of different habitats, rich in plant and animal species, often of high economic interest for local communities in the Albanian Alps. A habitat and landcover map are provided in Annex A

Socio-economic context of the National Park

The planned National Park covers a total area of 82,844 ha. (828 km²) and includes territory in 2 districts and 3 municipalities (see Table 3 below). Currently, about 82,000 inhabitants live in region and the average population density is approx. 0.37 inhabitants per km². There are approximately 110 small and scattered rural settlements within the planned National Park territory. They are located mainly in the valleys and slopes, where there has been more opportunity for arable land. Traditional dwellings are built of stone and wood, in the shape of towers, with very sloping roofs. Due to isolation, the inhabitants preserve many customs and traditions from the past.

Table 3: Administrative districts within National Park boundary (source: Draft Management Plan)

No.	Administrative Designation	Surface area (in ha)	Percentage of Surface area in the NP (in %)

1	SHKODRA DISTRICT		
1.1	Malësia e Madhe Municipality	32,935.23	38.26
1.2	Shkodër Municipality	12,988.22	15.08
<i>Total Shkodra District</i>		45,923.45	53.34
2	KUKËS DISTRICT		
2.1	Municipality of Tropoja	40,162.89	46.66
<i>Total Kukës Region</i>		40,162.89	46.66
Overall area of planned National Park		86,086.34 ^[16]	100

The main traditional livelihoods of the local populations include small scale arable agriculture, orchards, livestock / pasture use, fisheries, hay collection, collection of medicinal plants and secondary forest products as well as traditional wood and livestock related handicrafts traditionally carried out informally and by women. As in all rural areas in Albania, there are increasing levels of poverty which has ramifications for traditional land use. There is a population migration trend (of predominately men) from the area as a consequence of lack of economic development, the limited area of agricultural land, and lack of infrastructure. However, tourism is a growing new source of livelihoods as the area includes a diversity of landscapes, water resources, wild flora and fauna, bio-geo-natural monuments, traditional culture, etc.

Existing Protected Areas: The conservation and landscape/cultural value of the area has been recognized since the communist era, but particularly since the mid 1990's, with 3 protected areas of different status/category being previously established in parts of the landscape including:

- ? Gashi River strict nature reserve (IUCN Cat. I) covering 3,000 ha (1996);
- ? Thethi National Park (IUCN Cat. II) with an area of 2,630 ha (1966), and
- ? Valbona Valley natural monument (IUCN Cat. II) with an area of 8,000 ha (1996).

In total these 3 existing protected areas cover 136.3 km² out of the approx. 860 km² the Albanian Alps region (i.e. about 15%), do not represent all habitats, and have limited inter-connectivity.

History of the declaration of the Albanian Alps National Park: In the 2000's efforts were made, with the support of international donors^[17], to strengthen the management of the above existing PAs in

the area. This included a process to carry out inventory and biodiversity mapping, threats analysis and improved management zoning, and development of new management plans for the PAs.

However, as a result of this greater knowledge of the biodiversity values and distribution, socio-economic situation and the increasing threats to the area, there was an increased realization that the existing PAs alone could not effectively meet biodiversity conservation or sustainable economic development objectives. This increased insight, together with intensive consultations with multiple stakeholders about the future, highlighted two key issues:

- ? firstly, that there are significant increased threats to biodiversity and the sustainable maintainance of local traditional landuse, livelihoods and culture;
- ? secondly, that these can only be addressed effectively at a landscape scale conservation approach (not through isolated protected ?islands? within the landscape).

As a result of consensus on these issues, both at national and local levels, a decision was reached to seek the inclusion of the whole landscape under the National Park status, in order to more systematically apply integrated biodiversity and rural development planning and management at landscape scale. Taking into consideration that an extensive area of the Albanian Alps (77,458 ha) has been included in the List of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (The EMERALD network) and that the Albanian Alps are part of the European Green Belt, the proposal for declaring the wider area of the Alps a National Park was first made by national experts and supported by the EU Project on Natura2000[18]¹⁸, as well as the Ministry of Environment. The EU project delivered trainings for the employees of the National Agency of Protected Areas and its regional offices, covering topics such as conservation biology, implementation of monitoring protocols, ranger foundation, use of IT and field equipment, firefighting, tourist infrastructure development and maintenance, conflict resolution and project writing. Based on this, the boundaries of the planned NP were defined with the support of GIZ in 2015[19]¹⁹. Inventory work and consultation with all stakeholders (both nationally and locally) was carried out, a zoning plan for the entire area developed and subsequently a NP Management Plan was developed by national experts with funds from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. During this work the opportunities for transboundary cooperation was considered and boundaries of the NP are cognisant of existing adjacent PAs in Montenegro and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) (see map 2 above). The process of defining the borders of the proposed park was based on previous studies about the region, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the proposal for EMERALD network and the Green Belt Initiative activities.

Current status of establishment of the new National Park encompassing the three existing protected areas: Since the development of the draft NP management plan and related documents in 2015 there has been an ongoing process to initiate the actions needed to legally establish the new NP and create a functional management system. However, in the last years all concerns were discussed internally and consensually resolved by mid 2020. Subsequently a meeting of the National Council of Territory (NCT), headed by the Prime Minister and composed of several line ministers (Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, Minister of Finance and Economy, Minister of Justice, Minister of Culture, Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Environment and Tourism) took place in December 2020. During this meeting a few amendments were made to the Albanian Map of PA (see Table 1 above),

among which the creation of the landscape scale Albanian Alps National Park was approved. Following the Decision of the NCT a final decision and legal establishment of the NP requires a decision of the Council of Ministers of Albania. The National Agency for Protected Areas, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, has elaborated the draft decision which will be submitted for approval to the Council of Ministers of Albania in August 2021.

Threats, Root causes and Barriers in Project Target Area

Generally, the status of biodiversity in the Albanian Alps is still very good. However, the studies done (see above) have identified that in the past decade increasingly severe threats have emerged.

The key threats to biodiversity currently faced in the Albanian Alps landscape were identified during the NP management Plan development include habitat loss and fragmentation, and reduction in species numbers. These threats result from the following key causes:

Infrastructure development: Various forms of infrastructure development in the target area have been increasing in recent decades with detrimental effects on habitats. Perhaps most serious of these has been the rapid increase in the construction of medium size hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) and the planning of more in the future. According to Riverwatch[20]²⁰, study conducted on the HPP situation in the Western Balkans, the situation in the future Albanian alps Protected area the situation regarding the HPP are as follows:, in Valbona River there is one existing HPP, one under construction and 12 planed, in Gashi River one existing, 2 more planned in Myhejan, as well as one existing and one planed in Theth. The rivers of the Albanian Alps are part of the Drin-Buna water basin which is the most important of the 7 river basins in Albania. According to its water basin management plan (approved by DCM no. 849, date 4.11.2020), there are 4 large HPP with a capacity between 48 and 500 mW, and 47 concessions for a total of 121 small HPP (below 8mW). The National Agency of Natural Resources, reports that in the first quarter of 2018, there were already 29 HPPs in operation in the Drin-Buna basin. These HPPs of varying capacities, have negative impacts not only on aquatic habitats and species but also on terrestrial ones as a result of the impact of new roads, construction pollution and increased human presence. Recognizing this, in 2019, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, as the institution granting contracts formed a commission for a re-evaluation and monitoring of 317 HPP contracts, out of which 80 HPPs were stopped as their work was found to be outside of the terms of their contract[21]²¹. Furthermore, after a long judicial process, in July 23, 2021, the Albanian Supreme Court[22]²² issued a 'stop work' order for two HPPs in Cerem and Dragobi, accepting thus the claims of 27 local citizens of the Albanian Alps and two local NGOs. Similar actions are being undertaken by local stakeholders as well as national and international NGOs for other HPPs that are planned to be built in Albania, such as the actions for protecting the Vjosa River building thus, as significant public discourse on the protection of the natural values of the Albanian rivers while establishing a renewed trust in the judicial power that has been under reform since 2014.

Additional to hydropower plant infrastructure, new roads have been constructed into previously inaccessible areas. Though this has potential positive impacts for socio-economic development, the construction process destroys and fragments habitats, increases erosion, and most significantly, in the longer term, increases access of these areas to people and vehicles ? this is leading to both increases in exploitation of natural resources from previously untouched areas (logging, hunting, etc), and damaging levels of uncontrolled tourism and other exploitation. An example is the request for a road construction in inaccessible areas on the Gashi River ? the road poses a potential risk to the unique remnants of the virgin beech forest, or other high value species of biodiversity and landscapes. For this reason and due to lack of funds, the national government rejected this request put forward by the municipality. There is an urgent need to better regulate and mitigate the impacts of such infrastructural / industrial activity in the area to ensure natural values are not lost.

Socio-economic and demographic changes and repercussions: As in most of the more remote and rural areas in Albania there has been a steady trend of migration by younger people away to larger urban areas in order to seek employment and economic opportunities. On the one hand this had positive effects in terms of decreasing pressures on local resources ? however, on the other hand, it does bring some changes to traditional use patterns that have negative effects. For example, reduced use of more distant pastures is resulting in their transformation which often results in change of existing grassland habitat and a reduction in species diversity. Reduction in arable areas and loss of traditional markets is resulting in loss of agro-biodiversity (traditional crop varieties and livestock breeds).

Furthermore, increased poverty and an aging population can lead to actual over utilization of some resources nearer to settlements as traditional systems start to break down and lack of resources leads to over intense utilization of nearby local natural resources (firewood and NTFP for example).

Inappropriate and unsustainable tourism development: Tourism is one of the few newly emerging economic opportunities in the area. However, so far the development of tourism in the area has been virtually unregulated. Given the high levels of local poverty, tourism has been enthusiastically perused by local entrepreneurs. However, this is occurring without any strategic framework or knowledge for ensuring sustainability and preservation of the key values of the area for tourists (i.e. the natural, cultural and historical values and assets). Key threats in this regard include the rapid and inappropriate construction of tourism facilities without due consideration of impacts or aesthetics/tradition, a rapid increase in waste and pollution from increased numbers of visitors, and increased disturbance of previously untouched or little visited areas.

Climate change: Albania is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change[23]²³. The future climate scenarios for Albania anticipate an increasing trend in annual and seasonal climate related disasters such as floods, land erosion, decreased precipitation and a reduction of water resources and arable land. Mountainous ecosystems are among the most sensitive to climate change and are being affected at a faster rate than other terrestrial habitats. Climate impacts form an important threat to mountain ecosystem services and the populations depending on them, and have

considerable effects on water resources. Fortunately, so far in the project target area the negative impacts of this situation are minimal but lack of law enforcement is leading to some illegal logging and illegal (or at least uncontrolled) hunting. However, with increasing levels of access to the area this may change quickly and dangerously.

In addition, there is a need to apply proactive management in order to respond to climate change related changes, such as increased risk of fire and disease, and to ensure more effective support is provided to local communities to maintain traditional and sustainable forest and pasture use practices in order to preserve the unique natural and cultural values of the area.

Loss of ecosystem service values: The Albanian Alps are an important source of water for downstream areas, deriving the largest river in Albania (Drin River) and one of the most important river basins, that of Drini-Buna. The Drin River is the largest on the Adriatic coast of the Balkan Peninsula. The Drin-Buna water basin is important for 12 municipalities (Mal'si e Madhe; Tropojë; Shkodër; Fushë-Arë, Has; Vau i Dejës; Pukë; Kukës; Dibër; Lezhë; Bulqizë; Pogradec) and is transboundary (Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) and Greece). The Drin-Buna runs through 10 protected areas and is valued for its forest cover. The number of inhabitants effected by this river basin is approx. 461,721[24]²⁴ and is also highly significant for hydro power production. Other important ecosystem services of the Albanian Alps include; recreational services, natural disaster risk reduction, provision of high value NTFPs, etc. No systematic evaluation of the ecosystem service values to the country have as yet been carried out. Furthermore the experience of weather related disasters, previous floods, the recent earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic show that Albania is ill-prepared to adequately respond to natural disasters and to support the most vulnerable citizens, including rural women who lost their subsistence agriculture production, single mothers who went homeless, and women who face domestic violence[25]²⁵.

These threats were identified during the development of the draft Albanian Alps NP management plan in 2015 and management programs to address them included. Specifically, Program 1 of the MP focused on capacity development of institutions and stakeholders to effectively manage the new NP territory, Program 2 focused on actions to conserve biodiversity, Program 3 focused on sustainable economic management including improved regulation and management of infrastructural development such as HPPs, sustainable livelihoods (including tourism and traditional land use), and Program 4 focused on scientific research, education and public awareness aspects.

Since the MP development in 2015 there has been ongoing discussion and consensus building on how to address some of the specific threats identified (such as the hydropower development and continued road construction, development of tourism etc.). Additionally, some details of the draft MP Programs and Actions remain lacking in detail and in need of both further elaboration and rationalization. There is therefore a need to update the threats assessment and to more clearly define the strategy and actions

needed to sustainably address them, in particular the increasingly threats posed by infrastructure development in recent years, and the accelerating effects of climate change.

Barriers

In order to address the threats and their root causes as described above it is necessary for national, regional and local stakeholders to finalize the establishment of the NP and to effectively implement the identified management programs, once they have been updated. However, two critical barriers stand in the way of achieving this, which are as follows:

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Barrier 1: Limited national and local systemic, institutional and individual capacity to effectively establish a landscape scale and complex national park.

As discussed in prior sections, Albania has shown commitment to undertaking deep and ambitious changes from the past communist era management approaches and systems to natural resources management and conservation. However, the very extent and ambition of these changes, and the fact they have occurred frequently since the 1990's has resulted in low systemic, institutional and individual capacity to actually translate into practical management in the field. This is particularly the case at regional and local levels where fairly recently created institutions i.e. municipality forestry units, regional branches of the National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA), etc. are having to grapple with new legislation, ambitious management plan requirements, new operational procedures, etc. that have recently been introduced, while at same time facing rural socio-economic decline, shrinking budgets and rising needs of local communities.

Thus, even once the Albanian Alps NP management plan is updated, there will be significant systemic, institutional, individual and gender specific capacity barriers, to its effective initiation and the establishment of a sound basis for long term management and sustained financing.

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Barrier 2: An absence of practical experience and know-how to manage and sustainably finance a landscape scale multi land use protected area.

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Even if the systemic, institutional and individual capacity needed to effectively initiate the management planning is created, the fact that almost all the planned actions are relatively new and innovative in the Albanian context, means that little practical experience and 'know-how' exists on how to realistically and pragmatically put into action in the field the planned activities in a way that is most feasible and sustainable. As has been demonstrated in many past projects, there always exists a gap between what is planned and what is feasible in practice, and long term success in terms of establishing effective PAs relies heavily on how well initial strategic plans and actions are adapted and applied in practice in the field. Thus, the lack of existing institutionally and individually practical experience on how to

practically implement the NP management plan programs within all stakeholder groups (from NAPA down to local communities) present a significant secondary barrier to the longer term success and sustainability of the Albanian Alps NP.

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Barrier 3: Limited awareness on the socio-economic benefits and the importance of sustainably managed PA at the national and local scale.

One of the significant challenges in Albania is to integrate and continue building on the lessons learned from donor projects, and in turn transform these lessons into long lasting and sustainable practices for the future. As a result, the successes of pilot actions are rarely replicated in other areas, while lessons from challenges are often neglected and often bound to be repeated. To overcome this barrier and for a better absorption level in the national scale and sustainable replications would requires a thorough process of awareness building based on factual on the ground evidence and relevant examples. Powerful tools in this process are the evidence-based interventions, data-based changes, and approaches, as well as socio-economic implications of any new and transformative action, including gender-sensitive lessons learned, awareness building, interventions, and data collection. Additionally, support to the replication/adaption of pilot level experiences to other areas of the country by national stakeholders and institutions would build on and have added benefits for raising practical capacity to upscale. Integration of pilot level experiences and lessons into national recommendations, institutional and legal reforms and planning processes is crucial to enhance the sustainability of the actions undertaken.

2) the baseline scenario and any associated baseline projects;

Relevant Policy, legal, institutional baseline:

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment is the main national institution responsible for drafting policies and programmes for environmental governance, biodiversity conservation, protected areas, forest and pasture management and climate change. The Focal Point for UNCBD lies within the Ministry. Relevant projects include the Natura 2000 - Albania ?Strengthening national capacities for implementation of the Natura 2000 network in Albania?. The project is estimated to start implementation in 2022 with an end date in 2026. The project aims the enhancement of biodiversity conservation by supporting the establishment of the Natura 2000 network and strengthen national capacities necessary for proper management of Natura2000 sites through the 1) provision of full transposition of the Birds and Habitats Directives; 2) improvement of the institutional set up and strengthening of capacities of the relevant authorities (including NAPA?s and the RAPAs of Kukes and Shkoder) in preserving important habitats and species, including proper inspection and enforcement; 3) significantly improving knowledge on distribution and status of important habitats and species, as well as developing appropriate monitoring protocols/procedures; 4) identification and potentially implementation of selected conservation measures; 4) improve understanding and awareness on the importance and functioning of the Natura2000 network. The project?s contribution to the Albanian Alps is an estimated amount of USD 800,000 for the entire project duration.

NAPA extends its activity throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania, and in the Albanian Alps it is represented by the RAPAs of the districts of Kukës and Shkodër. As the main national body to address PAs, the NAPA is currently implementing the project "NaturAlbania"- actions for evaluating and strengthening the environmental framework in the management of the territory. The project started in 2019 and is foreseen to continue until November 2022. Its main objective is to contribute to the sustainable development of natural resources. Through its Objective 1: Pillar of activities in rural mountainous areas: the project will contribute to the Albanian Alps NP through creating and enlarging ecological pathways with the engagement of the local community, contributing also to sustainable tourism, environmental protection, and the sustainable development of natural resources with a focus on local products. This contribution is estimated to about USD 200,000, until the end of the project.

In November 2020, the Government of Albania became party to and endorsed the Leaders' Declaration on the Green Agenda that aligns with EU Green Deal. Through the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, Albania committed to:

- Work towards the 2050 target of a carbon-neutral continent together with the EU through mainstreaming a strict climate policy and reforming energy and transport sectors;
- The process of transition from linear to a circular economy being fully aware of the necessity for research and innovation system to support this transition;
- Depollution of air, water, and soil;
- To work towards ensuring the transformation of the agriculture sector, minimizing its negative environmental and climate impact, and safeguarding affordable and healthy food for citizens and export markets;
- To work on defining the post-2020 biodiversity framework and developing a long-term strategy for halting biodiversity loss, protection, and restoration of ecosystems and abundant biological diversity.

The three municipalities of Tropojë, Malesie e Madhe and Shkodër, are also important local institutions that not only dedicate yearly funds to the protection on the environment, they also lead yearly programs and projects. The Municipalities of Tropojë, Malesie e Madhe and Shkodër will collectively spend about USD 1,300,000 in the administration of forests and pasture, prevention of fires and other natural disasters, coordinate cultural and tourist activities and manage environmental pollution in between 2022-2025, in the territory of the Albanian Alps NP.

The GIZ funded "Open Regional Funds for South-East Europe - Implementation of Biodiversity Agreements" executed by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is a regional project implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99), North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The project aims to strengthen regional cooperation between Western Balkan states about fulfilling international and, in particular, EU-relevant obligations concerning the preservation of biodiversity. The project contribution of USD \$ 1,000,000 will relate to fostering networking and

partnerships with regional and bilateral projects and with international organisations and initiatives, more specifically related to building an NGO platform for conserving biodiversity and cross-border ecosystem management including the Albanian Alps area during the project duration.

In the framework of the project "Institutional Support to the management of Protected Areas in Albania" financed by the Italian Development Cooperation and implemented by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Albania has started to create an infrastructure for the standardization, integration, and dissemination of national biodiversity information. The national biodiversity data is being made available through the website Biodiversity National Network of Albania (BioNNA) representing an important "entry-point" for any initiative aiming to support decisions related to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management. The BioNNA offers the information on the species occurrences through an open-source Web-GIS system developed according to the standards defined by the EU INSPIRE Directive. The training, methodology, software and know-how of this project will also be utilized by the NAPA and RAPA, in the biodiversity information that will be gained in the Albanian Alps, for a total contribution of \$500,000 for the period 2022-2025.

The SIDA founded "ADAPT: Nature-based solutions for resilient societies in the Western Balkans" is an initiative, started in 2020, and foreseen to be completed in 2023, with the aim to increase ecosystem and community resilience to climate change and disaster risks by applying Nature-based solutions in the Western Balkan countries. ADAPT further provides solutions for disaster risk reduction, increases knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities and scale-up activities. It offers opportunities to analyse national ecosystem management and biodiversity policy from a climate change perspective, and adaptation indicators, which will have implications for the actions taken in the Albanian Alps, related to the revision of policy and institutional arrangements, accounting to a value of \$ 500,000.

The non-governmental organization INCA (Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania), who was involved in the elaboration of the draft Management Plan for the Albanian Alps, will provide any documentations and clarifications on the existing management plan, as well as provide support during the updating and revising of the management plan, and its corresponding programmes. INCA's contribution is estimated about USD 150,000 for the period 2022-2025.

The Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) is a partnership project implementing in the Western Balkan Peninsula (Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo). The project is foreseen to continue for an indetermined period. The Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA) is the implementing agency in Albania, who has installed surveillance cameras and is currently monitoring the Carnivore Ecology in the Gashi River Reserve that is part of the Albanian Alps National Park. The programme's goal is "to establish a continues monitoring system of the Balkan lynx and its prey, enhancing and collaboration among different stakeholders in the focus areas as well as the declaration and improvement of Protected Areas and habitat recovery". The BLRP project is entering to the phase VI in 2021 and its implementation is planed based on six strategies designed during the

first half of 2019, such as: Operation, Education, National Policy, Protected Area Declaration, Protected Area Effectiveness and Research and Monitoring. Initially, each strategy was designed following a generic logic, and then the strategies were adapted to fit the different political and socio-economic conditions in Albania. The BLRP program's budget that will be directly related to the Albanian Alps Project anticipates about USD 150,000 for the period 2022-2025.

The Agricultural University of Tirana through their Environmental Department, has been active in holding international conferences, delivering training and state of the art research. The Faculty of Forestry will support to the project through providing expert knowledge and access to data on the Albanian Alps while at the same time direct their research activities in the Albanian Alps area for a total contribution of USD 500,000 for the period 2022-2025.

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Baseline conclusion: Albania has taken significant steps to increase the extent of its protected areas estate and to introduce more sustainable multi use and larger scale protected area approaches (such as National parks divided into zones) that seek to combine biodiversity conservation with sustainable livelihoods and cultural preservation within traditional landscapes.

However, the legacy of the past decades of communist development approaches means that such approaches are radically different from those of the past and entail changes and adjustment of deeply embedded systems, institutional set ups, legal structures, and most significant of all, peoples mindsets. Thus, though significant progress have been achieved in the establishment of the Albanian Alps National park, this barrier has meant that preparatory actions have not yet translated into actual establishment of the NP. Furthermore, the limited relevant experience in how to practically implement the developed management programs in a way that achieves real impact and sustained conservation and rural development benefits significantly undermine the likelihood of success.

In conclusion, the likely baseline scenario is that the Albanian Alps National park may either remain essentially a 'paper park' or that it will fail to be able to deliver effective management programs and thus fail to address either biodiversity conservation goals or support the sustainable livelihoods and cultural heritage of local communities. Furthermore, resilience to mid / long term climate change will not be adequately integrated into conservation or sustainable rural development planning and management and financing will remain precarious and insufficient to ensure the NP fully meets its objectives.

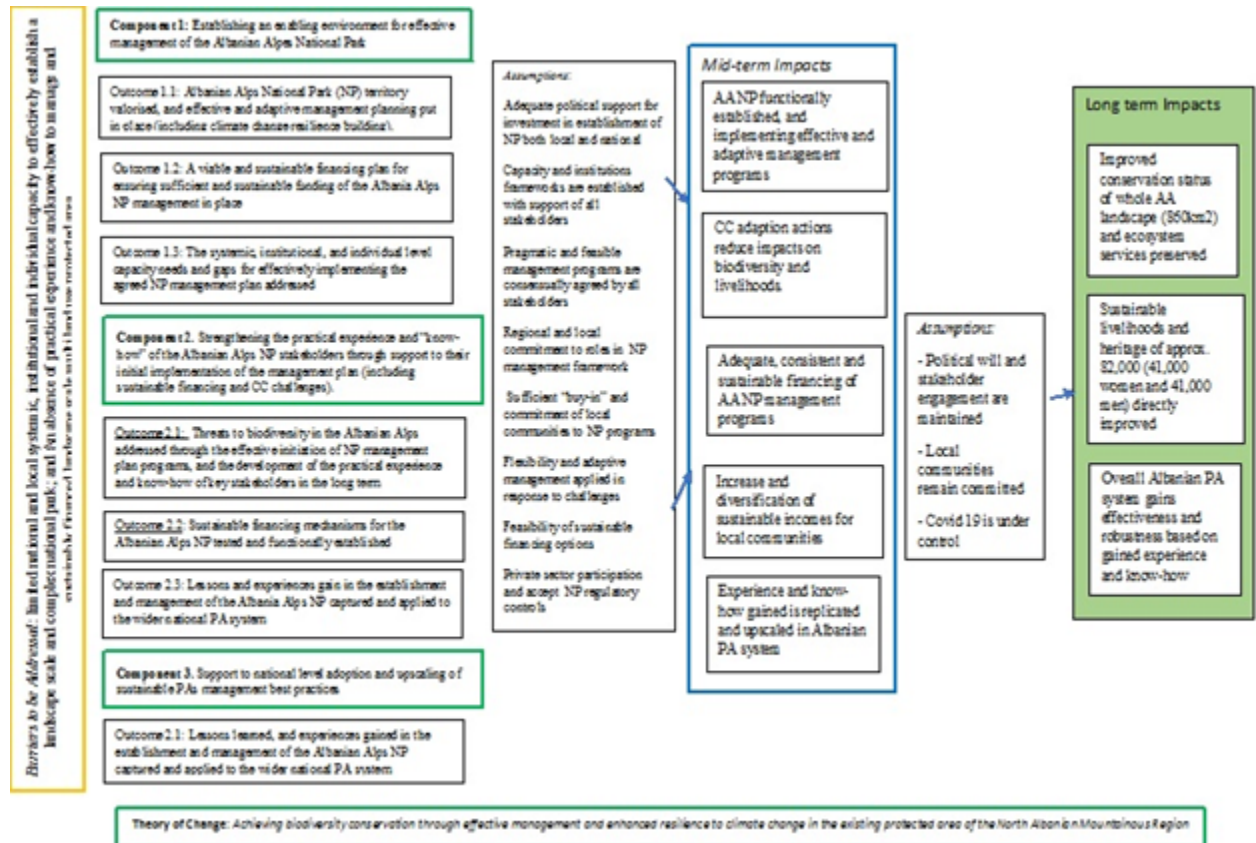
3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project;

The proposed alternative scenario of this project is to support national and local stakeholders to effectively initiate the functional establishment and practical management of the Albanian Alps NP, on a sustainable basis, by addressing the three key barriers previously identified i.e. limited systemic, institutional and individual capacity; limited practical experience and 'know-how' to implement new integrated conservation and rural development approaches, and limited awareness for upscaling and integrating lessons learned, and limited awareness on the socio economic benefits and the importance of sustainably managed PA at the national and local scale.

In addition, the project will address two issues not adequately addressed in existing planning, specifically long-term sustainable financing mechanisms for the NP in order to ensure financial sustainability, and the need to incorporate actions to increase resilience to climate change.

The overall project objective is therefore to *“To achieve biodiversity conservation through effective management and enhanced resilience to climate change in the North Albanian Alps Mountainous Region?”*. The project’s theory of change (see below) is based on delivery of three components: Component 1 aims at ensuring the establishment of the necessary enabling environment for effective management of the NP, Component 2 seeks to support the transition from planning to effective management to address the identified threats, by strengthening the practical experience and “know-how” of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to effectively implement the management plan, and Component 3 aims to capture the key lessons and experiences gained in order to raise awareness of the benefits and facilitate replication of good practices. The project will further enhance sustainability of the NP through strengthening the availability of sustainable financing, and introduction of focused management planning and actions to enhanced CC resilience. Component 2 will ensure that the lessons learned during the project are integrated into any future actions and intervention in the PAs, as well as observing the socio-economic benefits of effective management and planning practices.

Theory of Change



Component 1: Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park:

Component One has 3 outcomes aimed collectively to ensure that a viable basis and capacity exists to initiate the functional establishment of the Albanian National Park.

The first outcome will undertake the process of updating the baseline data and threats analysis contained in the draft management plan prepared in 2015 in order to incorporate any changes in circumstances that have occurred, and to ensure actions related to all currently identified threats, including increasing climate change resilience, are incorporated. It will then, in consultation with all stakeholders, review the overall strategy of NP management, and in that context refine the original zonation plan (if necessary) and the MP programs. In particular, effort will be focused on clarifying and simplifying as far as possible the planned actions in order ensure they focus on the priority threats and are as feasible as possible, and to introducing CC related aspects plus any understated gender-sensitivities. Furthermore, a committee will be created with all relevant line ministries, (including MoTE and MIE), with representatives from local governments as well as local communities and NGOs, with the purpose to truly evaluate all current and planned HPPs in the Albanian Alps, taking into

consideration their impacts on biodiversity and the local communities, while ensuring proper information dissemination and providing a constructive platform for dialogue with stakeholders aiming for more sustainable HPP infrastructure development.

The second outcome seeks to address the long term sustainably financing of the NP, building on the existing results and progress of the GEF financed project "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" (UNDP). The first output will focus on undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the ecosystem service values of the Albanian Alps NP territory in order to identify the real values to various stakeholders and the country as a whole. This will provide an economic rationale for justifying state financing inputs, as well as highlighting the stakeholders with the highest economic dependency on maintaining healthy and functional ecosystems, and thus the greatest incentive and interest to ensure this. On this basis, and existing experience and guidelines of the UNDP "Sustainable Financing" project, opportunities for the long-term sustainable generation of financing can be identified and mechanisms for practically capturing such income worked out in detail. The results of the GEF "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" project will be invaluable in terms of ensuring that planned actions for establishing NP financing mechanisms are built on pragmatic experience of what works in practice in Albania. The second output of Outcome 1.2 will be including a NP financing plan (business plan), that not only elaborates the required budget, but also the source of the funds for this budget and mechanisms for its generation. The third output will support activities within all the 3 abovementioned programs (in Outcome 1.1) related to establishing sustainable financing mechanisms (based on those identified during as most viable). What specifically these my involve is not as yet identified but options probably include: fees related to tourism access and use (entrance fees, concession fees, etc.), productive land use rents and tenancy agreements, natural resource sustainable harvesting (pasture user fees, fuelwood, hunting/fishing licences, etc.), payments for ecosystem services (hydropower entities and others). The project will support all steps required to functionally establish at least 3 demonstrations on such financing mechanisms and provide ongoing inputs and guidance on both the management and longer-term development of financing opportunities. On the basis of the experience gained on sustainable financing, both within the Albanian Alps NP and elsewhere through the UNDP/GEF "Sustainable financing" project, the overall NP financing plan will be reviewed, updated and fine-tuned after 3 years. Finally, the project will identify national financial institutions and banks and present them with the proper tools and methodologies to integrate considerations on environmental and social safeguards, as well as reduce natural resource use and biodiversity impacts of HPPs in Albania.

The third outcome will seek to build the systemic, institutional and individual capacity, mainly at the Albanian Alps regional and local levels, to implement the updated and refined management plan. The first step in this process will be to assess in detail what is actually required to implement the programs and actions articulated in the MP ? i.e. what institutions are required, what would be their mandates and structures, what legal instruments do they need to work effectively, what staff will they need, what skills will those staff need to possess, what equipment, the role of local community structures, non-government organizations, and private sector, etc. The second step would be to compare these identified needs with the actual currently existing systems, institutions and individual capacities in order to identify gaps. Based on this pragmatic gap analysis the appropriate adjustment / refinement of existing institutions (structure, mandates, staff, operational procedures, equipment, community roles, etc.) can be carried out, the legal framework for their activities and collaboration clarified, individual

staff competencies built to match needs, appropriate community based structures established and trained, roles and involvement of non-government and private sector entities agreed, and critical equipment procured. This outcome corresponds approximately to Program 1 of the draft Albanian Alps NP management plan.

Component 2: Strengthening the practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats

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This component of the project focuses on supporting the transition from the planning and preparation undertaken in Component 1 to practical implementation of the NP management and, thereby the practical addressing of the priority threats facing the Albanian Alps National Park territory. It therefore contains 4 Outputs, which correspond to and supplement one of the draft Management Plan Programs 2, 3 and 4. Despite the creation of a positive enabling environment in Component 1, lessons learned in past GEF projects have proven the transition from planning and initial capacity building to practical management necessitates adaption and adjustment to the on-ground realities and issues faced, and is often extremely challenging for inexperienced stakeholders. Adaptive management and pragmatic flexibility will be essential during this phase to ensure the subsequently evolved management system is robust and sustainable. In that context, the NP institutions and stakeholders will require a substantial combination of ?in-process? advice and guidance while initiating practical action.

The 1st output (Program 2 in the draft Management plan) relates to supporting the achievement of core biodiversity conservation aims and includes: effective establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement of the new regulations and rules to be applied in the different management zones of the NP; fire, disease and invasive species management sub-programs; specific species and habitat restoration/rehabilitation sub-programs, human / wildlife conflict reduction activities, fuelwood extraction management and NTFP regulation, etc. During the initial years of the NP establishment emphasis on awareness building on rules and regulations, rather than punishment, is essential and collaboration with local communities, rather than conflict, the main basis for operation whenever feasible. Activities related to minimizing negative costs for communities of new rules and regulations will be a priority, for example ensuring essential resources such as fuelwood supplies are maintained and addressing wildlife damage to agriculture or livestock. Such systems need to be effectively established in order to reduce negative impacts of the NP status on communities from enforcement of stricter controls on resource use, thus reducing incentives for illegal activities and building trust. The project, by bringing experience and examples from other comparable protected areas, and through strategic guidance, will support the process of establishing the on-ground enforcement presence of the NP administration in the most sustainable manner.

The 2nd and 3rd Outputs, which correspond to Program 3 of the draft Management Plan, aim to address the most crucial root causes of threats in the NP territory (i.e. those related to inappropriate and unsustainable economic development and rural livelihoods) will be the most challenging for the new NP authorities and stakeholders to address. The support of the project will be critical in bringing international experience to the issues and ensuring transparency and opportunity for all stakeholders to play a role in their solution. Briefly there are 3 key areas that will be contained under this Program of the Management Plan and which the project will support the NP stakeholders to implement: a). improved regulation, mitigation and management of existing and planned infrastructural development, in particular HPPs and road construction, b). sustainable tourism development, with the main focus on community benefits and cultural heritage conservation, c). sustainable land use (pasture, arable and forestry) with focus on supporting and strengthening rural communities to add value to traditional land use products in order to help preserve the cultural landscape while maintaining or improving livelihoods. The most challenging of these will be undoubtedly the existing and planned infrastructural development in the NP territory. In this context a key role of the project will be to ensure regional and international best practices are applied and to support balanced and pragmatic solutions that reflect the inputs and interest of all parties, particularly those at local level. Solutions will need to combine the strengthening and proper application of both pre-existing and new regulations for such development that adequately reflects their environmental and local socio-economic / cultural impact, as well as pragmatic efforts to mitigate the impacts of already existing (or future approved) development. Sustainable tourism development will focus on ensuring that the currently unregulated and unplanned, but accelerating, sector is redirected in order to maximize longer term sustainable benefits for rural communities in the NP, private sector entities that provide the bridge between the market and the area, and the NP authorities themselves. Support to sustainable land use to maintain traditional landscapes and agro-biodiversity will focus on supporting adding value to traditional products to improve incentives for their maintenance, and the introduction where appropriate of new technologies/methods to reduce impact on the environment by local communities (fuelwood demand reduction and improved waste management, for example).

The efficacy of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment will be strengthened by training and educating the national and local law enforcement officers, the private sector and community representatives on how to better use these guidelines in their planning and implementation activities.

Output 4 under this component will seek to: a). establish a feasible and meaningful monitoring and evaluation system for the NP in order to ensure positive feedback adaption and revision to future management based on data, b). facilitate the use of the NP for scientific and socio-economic research of both site level and wider national/international application, c). establish effective mechanisms for increasing awareness and education of both local stakeholders and residents, but also of visitors to the area and national audiences, on the values and importance of the biodiversity and landscape of the NP ? activities under this aspect of the Output will be integrated with tourism development components, and be further amplified during the project duration by Component 3 (see below).

Collectively the above support to the implementation of these 4 Outputs is expected to achieve, by the end of project, a functionally established and effective NP management system. Most critically, the aim

is to have established a system in which adequate technical and practical experience exists within the key stakeholders to sustainably adapt and adjust future management as necessity requires towards achieving the NP objectives.

Component 3. Support to national level adoption and upscaling of sustainable PAs management best practices.

The third Component is aimed at ensuring the lessons and experience gained during the period of the project is captured in a meaningful and accessible way so that these lessons, both in the Albanian Alps NP but also in other PA's in Albania, and the positive experience internalized and replicated. Lessons learned will include any gender disparities and gaps identified, while awareness building, a gender strategy, and gender specific communication means, interventions based on collected data, can be applied.

4) alignment with GEF focal area and/or Impact Program strategies:

This project is well aligned with GEF7 Biodiversity Objective 2: Address direct drivers to protect habitats and species, and more specifically the global objective to improve the financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate. The project will support to the functional and sustainable management of the Albanian Alps National Park and therefore directly addressed the above. This is being achieved by the following outcomes:

Outcome 1.1: Albanian Alps National Park (NP) territory valorised, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place [including climate change resilience building, and practical implementation]

Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established

Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1).

Outcome 2.1: Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated NP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience and know-how of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term.

Other elements of the GEF7 biodiversity strategy are taken into account such as:

1) effective protection of ecologically viable and climate-resilient representative samples of the country's ecosystems and adequate coverage of threatened species at a sufficient scale to ensure their long term persistence, to be achieved by Output 1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities

for mitigation/resilience building, and Output 1.1.3: Validate, update and rationalize existing management plan programs based on Climate Change findings, consultation with all stakeholders, and any changes in circumstances since their initial development.

2) sufficient and predictable financial resources available, including external funding, to support protected area management costs to be achieved by Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established 3) sustained individual and institutional capacity to manage protected areas such that they achieve their conservation objectives to be achieved by Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed.

The project will further promote the participation and capacity building of local communities, especially women (at least 50%), in the design, implementation, and management of protected areas.

5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from baseline, GEFTF and co-financing;

Scenario without the GEF investment: Significant steps have been taken in the Albanian Alps area to increase the extent of protected areas estate and to introduce more sustainable multi use and larger scale protected area approaches. Within the draft management plan threats have been identified and programs to address them defined (such as appropriate management zones, programs that address capacity needs, core biodiversity conservation tasks, regulation and sustainable economic development, cultural heritage preservation and awareness and education, etc.. Under the "business as usual" scenario the country would continue such efforts. However, firstly existing draft Management plan is considerably out of date (prepared in 2015), and therefore does not adequately reflect changes that have occurred in the past 6 years. Furthermore, the MP contains limitations in terms of content and feasibility. Secondly, the legacy of the past decades of communist development and unilateral approaches means that the management approaches are radically different from those of the past and entail changes and adjustment to deeply embedded systems, institutional set-ups, legal structures, and most significant of all, people's mindsets. As a result, significant challenges to the effective implementation of the management plan and functional establishment of the NP remain. The Albanian Alps NP will therefore continue to suffer habitat loss, fragmentation, and reduction of species due to rapid unplanned or inappropriate development, limited viable local livelihood opportunities, unsustainable tourism and climate change. Though significant progress has been achieved in the establishment of the Albanian Alps National Park, these preparatory actions will not translate into the effective functional establishment of the NP. The limited relevant experience on how to practically implement the management programs in a way that achieves real impact and sustained conservation objectives, and rural development benefits, significantly undermines the likelihood of success. Furthermore, under the "business as usual" scenario the NP will fail to generate sufficient sustained financing to be able to maintain effective management. Without adequate assessment and identification of climate change impacts resilience options for both conserving biodiversity and maintaining sustainable resource use will be unlikely to be applied in time to avoid negative impacts.

Scenario with the GEF investment: The proposed project aims to leverage the significant existing baseline efforts to establish the Albanian Alps National Park, and by adding targeted incremental investments, help ensure that these efforts can be translated into a fully functioning and adaptive management system that meets biodiversity and sustainable economic development objectives.

Specifically, by addressing the 3 critical barriers facing the Albanian stakeholders at this point in time, the project will ensure that the existing investments are supported to have long term sustainable impact. By updating, strengthening and rationalizing the management plan work done to best target current threats, building systemic, institutional and individual capacity, and then supporting development of practical 'know-how', to apply more integrated and synergistic approaches at a landscape scale, the project will elevate the level of sustained impact and achieve positive multiplier effects for biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development, with knock-on sustainable national development benefits (and global environmental benefits). Previously absent attention to sustainable financing, plus consideration for climate change impacts, will further build the likelihood of sustain and effective impact. Unsustainable developments (such as HPPs and road constructions) and their impacts are carefully assessed by a capacitated local community who is also provided with the proper platform to influence national decision making and policymaking, while stronger environmental and social safeguards are put in place with financial institutions. Under the scenario with GEF investment a dedicated component will allow the lessons and experience gain to be meaningfully transitioned to the national PA system and to landscapes under similar threats. Including specific gender data and addressing gender sensitivities and needs will provide the opportunity to contribute to gender equality locally while upscaling lessons learned will providing a meaningful contribution to close the national gender gap. This will be achieved through a strategic mix of evidence-based awareness-raising, pilot replication in different landscapes, support to relevant policy adjustment, and targeted capacity building.

The project's incremental investment of 1,600,000 USD from the GEFTF will thus support a shift from the baseline scenario in terms of a greatly enhanced impact and sustainability of the Albanian Alps National Park, and the generation of experience, know-how and expertise that are directly transferable to both the PA system nationally, and to many of the mountain landscapes in Albania that face similar threats. The increment of the project will build on the existing baseline efforts and the identified co-financing of a total of 7,700,000 USD to transform the impact and sustainability of the Albanian Alps establishment efforts and thereby the achievement of national and global environmental.

6) global environmental benefits (GEFTF) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF);

The GEF investment will significantly contribute to strengthening the management effectiveness of the national PA system and its resilience to climate change. The project will help improving the conservation status of the Key Biodiversity Areas, of unique systems, important ecological corridors, priority habitat types, at an area over 82,844 ha. The implementation of the project will mean a reduction in threats to globally important and threatened species as indicated nationally, Balkan wide inclusive of the Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, and IUCN. The project will generate and test mechanisms for the increased financing of PAs through innovative financing mechanisms and partnerships, while building on existing and ongoing projects in the country.

The project will contribute to the national effort toward meeting the Aichi targets and national biodiversity targets with its incremental effort at strengthening management capacity, resilience, and financial sustainability of projected areas (Aichi target 11), PA access to sustainable tourism development funding (target 20), restoration and building resilience of key ecosystems and habitats (targets 10 and 15), and PA valorisation (target 1).

The project will build on the GEF project 'Enhancing Financial Sustainability of the Protected Areas System in Albania' that is currently implemented by UNDP in partnership with MoTE and NAPA and aimed to improve mainly the management of marine protected areas. This project's financing is not part of the co-finance but this project is an important baseline for enhancing the financial sustainability of protected areas in Albania. The long-term objectives of the project contribute to (i) secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources for protected areas; (ii) allocate these resources in a timely manner; and (iii) ensure that the protected areas are managed effectively and efficiently with respect to conservation and other complementary objectives. The four-year project is foreseen to end in 2022, and was designed to assist the GoA in reducing existing funding gaps for the system of protected areas, and with its nation-wide contribution to analyse and improve cost-efficiencies in protected areas and building the financial management capacities of protected area staff in the NAPAs and RAPAs, while improving revenue. So far, the project has achieved several objectives on which the current project can build on such as a national financing strategy for PAs, business plans for several PA, as well as reporting, training, and assessment of management tools such as METT (management effectiveness training tools), FSS (financial sustainability scorecard). This GEF investment will closely collaborate with the UNDP project by improving the effective management of the Albanian Alps NP, revalorizing the ecosystem services, and updating the management plan for this PA in order to achieve compounded benefits.

National GEB's impact: Above and beyond the site level GEB's project aims to leverage the ILM and innovative natural resources, socio-economic and natural capital experiences gained to achieve a national level impact which cannot at this stage be quantified.

7) innovation, sustainability and potential for scaling up

Innovation: The project seeks to address, in a systematic and integrated manner the establishment of a truly effective, functional and sustainable management system for the Albanian Alps National Park. Critical for achieving this is the focus on pragmatically reviewing the draft management plan and realistically identifying what systemic, institutional, and individual level gaps exist to actually applying the proposed management so that these gaps can be addressed before initiating on-ground management. However, the project goes one step further and, in recognition of past lessons learned, will focus effort in facilitating the practical transition from planning to management, including whatever in-process adaptation and adjustments are required. This process will recognize that the key to sustainability lies in the adequate representation and role of local communities and private sector. While none of the above is perhaps singly 'innovative' the focused and explicit recognition of the need to address them in an integrated manner in order to achieve an effectively functioning NP is new in Albania.

The project will support the practical application, testing and local adaptation of a wide range of innovative natural resources management approaches new to Albania, most crucially the concept and practice of integrated conservation approaches that seek to coordinate and synergize socio-economic, land use management, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem service maintenance issues previously approached in a sectorial manner. In order to create the 'tools' for achieving this, the project will introduce, test and locally adopt innovative approaches to the valuation of functional landscapes and management of specific natural resources (forestry, pasture, arable land, etc) that respond to the practical political, socio-economic, demographic and climate change conditions that now exist in the country. At the site level, the project will introduce and demonstrate a range of innovative good

practices and approaches based on the regional and international experience of what works in practice. Furthermore, the value at a national scale of integrated landscape-scale approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural livelihoods will be demonstrated, economic justification proven, and the capacity and experience to monitor and replicate them put in place.

The project intends to support what is hoped to be a demonstration of effective approaches and 'good practices' for addressing one of the most significant mountain environmental threats currently faced in Albania and the wider Balkans region, namely inappropriate and economically questionable HPP development.

Sustainability: The main risks to sustainability of the Albanian Alps National Park lie in the limited systemic, institutional, and individual capacity and experience of all stakeholders (from national authorities, financial institutions down to the NP direct management institution, local non-government organizations and rural communities themselves) to work constructively together to apply the new approaches necessary to achieve the NP objectives. Additional to this is the limited historical capacity to generate sufficient financial resources to support the necessary management actions. The project seeks to address all three of these sustainability risks in a very focused and concerted manner and thereby greatly increasing the likelihood of sustainability.

Central to the project approach is the need to adapt the current management systems and approaches to meet the existing socio-economic and political context. A key aspect of this relates to strengthening the relevance of the system to the livelihoods of the rural mountainous populations and ensuring the conditions and incentives for them to pursue sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Albanian Alps. This is the best means to ensure long term sustainability. The project aims at supporting upscaling and replication, thus ensuring the lessons learned are captured and transitioned to the wider PA system. In this way, project efforts to impact at a national scale will be based on practical experience and an existing core level of awareness and capacity, which should enhance the sustainability of impact.

Scalability: The current situation in the mountainous region of the Albanian Alps is very typical of such landscapes in Albania and thus the lessons and experience from the pilot site will have direct applicability and potential for upscaling in approx. 40-50% of the country. The project addresses the need to ensure better recognition of the wider values of functional ecosystems and the adoption of integrated and landscape scale approaches into economic and long-term development decision making and efficient planning. Through the practical on ground testing and development of approaches for addressing many of the typical threats faced in mountain areas of Albania (and the Balkans generally) such as inappropriate HHP and road infrastructure, collapse of rural livelihood options, unsustainable tourism development, etc. the project will provide scalable experience both nationally and regionally inclusive of the private sector. The project will support the testing of new innovative collaborative approaches to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem service valorisation, resilience and protection, effective management of PAs, forest and pasture management, sustainable tourist and nature based approaches as possible income generating activities for the PAs at a pilot scale in the context of the Albanian Alps NP, based on regional and international best practices and experience. The principles and methodology from this experience can be applied widely. Furthermore, the project is devoting considerable resources and effort to ensuring the experience and lessons learned from the project site are meaningfully captured and transitioned into national-level awareness, capacity, policy, and planning. This provides a sound basis for real adoption and upscaling and national scale impact.

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- [1] Albania Country Gender Equality Brief, 2020, UN Women Albania, Dec. 2020
- [2] https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_ALB.pdf
- [3] Red Book of Albanian Flora and Fauna, last updated in 2013.
- [5] DCT no. 10 Dt. 28.12.2020
- [6] https://turizmi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ligj_81_2017_04.05.2017-Per-Zonat-e-Mbrojtura.pdf
- [7] A 2008 amendment to the Law also makes provision (under Article 11) for the establishment of *Regional Natural Parks*.
- [8] DCM no. 570, dt. 17.7.2019
- [9] GEF, UNDP, Albania's PA Financial Plan, 2019
- [10] The three protected areas cover lagune, marine and a combination of mountainous/marine ecosystems.
- [11] http://www.akm.gov.al/cil%c3%absia-e-mjedisit.html#raporte_publikime
- [12] GEF, UNDP, Albania PAs_ Financial plan, 2019
- [13] GEF, UNDP, REC, Gender differences and civic participation of local communities on environmental information, 2017
- [14] National Biodiversity Strategy 2021
- [15] Albania National Forest Policy 2019-20130
- [16] This is the figure from the draft Management Plan 2015 ? see footnote 2 on page 5
- [17] The European Union's IPA 2010 programme for Albania: Technical Assistance for Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Environment in Albania for Law Drafting and Enforcement of National Environmental Legislation (Europe Aid/130987/C/SER/AL)

Activity A.3: Preparation of Strategy and Plans - Protected Areas Management Plans - Thethi & Valbona Valley National Parks, and Gashi River Strict Nature Reserve Management Plan

[18] Strengthening national capacities in nature protection ? preparation for Natura 2000 network

[19] Proposed zoning for the proposed National Park, Albanian Alps, 2015, GIZ

[20] <https://riverwatch.eu/en/balkanrivers/background>

[21] <https://tvklan.al/prishen-kontratat-per-ndertimin-e-80-hidrocentraleve/>

[22] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDeGbKAQB3k>

[23] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/sem_albania_sup3.pdf

[24] According to the 2011 census

[25] Albania Country Gender Equality Brief, 2020, UN Women Albania, Dec. 2020

1b. Project Map and Coordinates

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.

Please refer to the project maps in Annex A.

2. Stakeholders

Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Yes

Civil Society Organizations Yes

Private Sector Entities Yes

If none of the above, please explain why:

In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement

This project has been endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment in 2019. Since then, national stakeholders in Tirana and local stakeholders in Tropoja have been engaged during the drafting of the project in order to discuss needs, challenges and possible opportunities for improving the biodiversity conservation in the area while positively impacting livelihoods of the local community.

Some of the meetings that took place during the drafting of the project concept and PIF, include:

Meetings with the Ministry of Environment, including the Minister, Deputy Minister, GEF Focal Point, Departments of Environmental Protection, Department of Biodiversity Protection, Department of

Forestry and Pastures and NAPA. During these meetings the PA of the Albanian Alps were identified as a priority site for the protection of biodiversity. The ministry experts also identified the need for increasing the climate change resilience of this area, which has been reflected in Component 1 (Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.3) of the project. Information on existing projects and contributions towards the latest legal acts and strategic documents with relevance to the project were also identified through meetings with ministry experts.

Through a series of meetings with the NAPA, it was determined that the Government of Albania through the proposal of the MoTE was conducting the procedures for expanding the existing PA and declaring the landscape scale Albanian Alps National Park. Threats, and barriers of the area have been thoroughly discussed. Documents such as the Decision of the Council of the Territory, the existing Management Plan, and the latest Decisions of the Council of Ministers on PAs were provided and discussed in detail, and finally reflected in Outputs 1.1.2, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 1.3.3)

Through meetings with UNDP the objectives and results of the GEF financed project "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" initiated in 2015, were identified. Discussions with UNDP were focused on the results of the project and possibilities for creating synergies and applying lessons learned with the National Financing Strategy, Dajti and Llogara Business Plans, which have been reflected in the PIF and will be further detailed through the activities of Outputs 1.2.2 and 1.2.3.

Several meetings and communications were carried out with GIZ, which contributed to the description of the Albanian Government's initiative of expanding the protected areas in the Albanian Alps, as well as the maps outlining the borders, habitats, and land use of the expanded National Park.

In July 2019, a team of experts conducted meetings with key local stakeholders in Tropoja Municipality. Discussions with the Kukes Regional Agency of Protected Areas, located in Tropoja Municipality, were centered on gathering of data on biodiversity, issues in the territory of the PA, the RAPA's needs for equipment, capacity building, and greater cooperation with other local and regional institutions in the Albanian Alps. This information formed the backbone of the description of the environmental problems, threats, and barriers in the PA, as well as Outputs 1.3.2, and 1.3.3.

Meetings were held with two local NGOs TOKA and Journey to Tropoja. The discussions with this organizations centered on local issues, past and existing projects in the area, needs for comprehensive maps of the area, the current engagement of the population in planning processes (inclusive of gender disparities), potential for development of financing mechanisms that would improve the local livelihoods while support the conservation of the biodiversity in the area. Introductions to existing operators were made showcasing the areas potential for activities such as kayaking, hiking, horseback riding, training of local guides, marketing of local products jams, honey, blueberries, support the development and marketing for local eco-tourism hostels and mountainous huts, as well as marketing of local artisanal crafts. This has been reflected in the PIF in Outputs 1.2.3 and 1.3.3 and will be further taken in consideration during the PPG phase, while outlining the activities for these outputs. Other meetings included local businesses such as Rilindja Restaurant and Guesthouse in Valbona Valley, a local horse farm as well as a Local Stan and Guesthouse in Lugina e Gjarprit, Gjelaj. Business owner mentioned their needs for creating a more sustainable and ecological business model for operating in a protected area.

A meeting was organized with ECRAN in order to discuss the strategy used to engage stakeholders in the consultation meetings during the elaboration of the Management Plan of the Albanian Alps

National Parks, as well as the issues raised by stakeholders at the time. During this meeting information was gathered on public participation during the 13 consultations meetings engaging more than 200 stakeholders including national government institutions, national agencies, national experts, NGOs and academia. Local stakeholders included participants from local government, local forestry departments, rangers, RAPAs, local hotel and restaurant owners, guide operators, and local NGOs, and the process of consensus building for the current version of the MP.

Meetings were organized with PPNEA to gather information on the ongoing activities of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) and the current monitoring of the Carnivore Ecology in the Gashi River Reserve, while discussing possibilities for creating positive synergies several of the project's outputs under Outcome 1.1.

Meetings were organized with the Agricultural University of Tirana, in order to discuss their future engagement with the project especially on output 2.1.3.

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Council of Ministers (CM)	It is the highest body of executive power, important decision maker for approving relevant legislation for Protected Areas, environment, biodiversity, fauna, flora, medicinal plants, forests, fisheries, mines, renewable resources, etc.	Declares Protected Areas after the initial declaration by the NCT (which is still a necessary step for the finalization of the declaration of the NP) decides on the regime of management control.
National Council of the Territory (NCT)	It is the main decision-making body. Determines the national importance of an issue, area or object in the planning of the territory, approves the detailed plans for areas of national importance, when such are foreseen by the General Plan of the Territory. Declares protected areas as a first step to be later further confirmed by the CM.	Decides on the approval, approval with amendments or postponement for later review of planning documents, requested for approval by the planning authorities, according to the provisions of this law; - decides on the approval of sectoral planning documents, defined by special legislation, which have effects on the territory. The NCT will be an important stakeholder during the approval and finalization for the management plan for the Albanian Alps NP, and ensure integration to other strategic documents for the Albanian Alps.

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE)	Its mission is to draft and propose policies, strategies, action plans for protection, environmental management and forests in order to achieve sustainable development, improve the quality of life of the country's integration into the European Union. Fulfilling this mission will be achieved by participating, promoting and coordinating activities that lead to long-term development and well-being by protecting nature and raising public awareness.	With UNEP support, the Ministry will be the main executing entity of the proposed project. Its executing services are expected to include: Political and institutional supervision; Substantive review and backstopping, with a focus on coordination of efforts and effective project delivery; Hosting of the Project Steering Committee and coordinate the participation of other Ministries, state agencies and other stakeholders; Responsible/owner of the integrated BD monitoring and reporting system
The Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Responsible for developing and enacting policies programmes and projects related to social protection and gender equality issues.	This will be an important partner and collaborate with respect to the gender perspectives of this project.
National Environment Agency (NEA)	It is responsible for environmental protection, exercises the functions charged by the laws ?On environmental protection?, ?On environmental permits?, ?On environmental impact assessment?, as well other related legal acts and bylaws.	As an entity depending on the Ministry of Tourism and Environment the NEA is part of the main executing entity of the proposed project. Its main role will be coordination with national stakeholders and local stakeholders.
Regional Environmental Agencies (REA)	The main function is to strengthen the implementation of laws, implementation of procedures related to the provision of environmental permits, collection, processing of information, environmental data at the district and county level.	As an entity depending from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment the REAs of Kukes and Shkodra are part of the main executing entity of the proposed project. Its main role will be coordination with local stakeholders, provision of data and integration of findings from the valorisation into their databases/reporting systems.

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA)	<p>The main purpose of the work is to ensure: - the protection of the PA according to the requirements, international standards, experience of European countries, preserving, using in a sustainable way the natural resources in them; - the preservation and development of the PA of nature in Albania, other natural networks such as Natura 2000, according to MP designed; - monitor, inventory the flora and fauna in these areas, as a very important aspect is the generation of revenue from services to others. NAPA extends its activity throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania, according to the network of approved protected areas and those that are expected to be approved in the future.</p>	<p>As an entity depending on the Ministry of Tourism and Environment the NEA is part of the main executing entity of the proposed project. Its main role will be coordination with national stakeholders and local stakeholders, provide necessary information on existing PAs, and their management regime, as well as provide guidance with regards to future plans, other ongoing or future projects, coordination with local entities such as RAPAs, information centres and other local stakeholders.</p>
Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA)	<p>Extension of the NAPA in the territory.</p>	<p>The role of the RAPA (Kukes and Shkodra) in the project will be to provide information on existing work undertaken in the Albanian Alps protected areas, as well as participate in all the activities of the project, especially those conducted on site, designed to, revalorize, built capacity and raise awareness, improve management effectiveness of the park.</p>
National Forest Agency (NFA)	<p>The NFA is a subsidiary of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, created in 2019 in order to ensure the good governance and sustainable development of the National Forest Fund[1]. Its responsibilities include providing standards and methodologies for the functioning of the forestry sector, engaging stakeholders and strengthening stakeholder coordination and cooperation, creating a system suitable for summarizing information and transferring knowledge.</p>	<p>Due to the fact that the NFA plays in the good governance of the forestry sector, and the nature of the Albanian Alps as one of the most important forested areas in the country, this stakeholder will be highly engaged in the management plan of the NP, as well as in activities for stakeholder engagement and capacity raising.</p>

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MIE)	MIE is the responsible institution for the development of policies, programmes and projects in the field of energy, urban development, transport and infrastructure. MIE is also responsible for the assessment and revision of the requirements for the rights to concession for the construction of hydropower plants and for the authorizations of other types of technology for the energy production from renewable resources such as wind, biomass, solar resources, etc.	MIE is important in achieving and building consensus on finalizing the declaration the new NP, as well as support the zonation and allowed activities within the NP.
National Agency of Natural Resources (NANR)	NANR focuses on the development and supervision of the rational use of natural resources and has several responsibilities under the law for Renewable Energy Sources, as the body responsible for RES development.	The NANR is an important stakeholder for collecting and sharing information on the ongoing activities in the PAs as well as the valorisation of the PAs of the Albanian Alps region.
Ministry of Culture (MC)	The Ministry of Culture is responsible for declaring cultural monuments as well as draft and implement policies programmes and projects with the purpose to protect the cultural values in Albania.	This is an important stakeholder for the project to be included in the development of the different financial mechanisms to support the sustainable development of the Albanian Alps (cultural tourism, protection and development of heritage values of the Albanian Alps, integration with cultural activities happening regionally or internationally).
Ministry of Education Sports and Youth (MESY)	MESY is responsible for developing policies, programs and projects that encourage environmental education and research activities in this field.	This stakeholder is to be consulted and engaged especially during the implementation of activities under <u>Output 1.1.6</u> : Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and a long term NP monitoring system (MP program 4)

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Research Institutions	Educational and research institutions such as the Agricultural University of Tirana and the Polytechnic University of Tirana have active and strong Environmental Departments, and are responsible for conducting state of the art research on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services.	This stakeholder is to be consulted and engaged especially during the implementation of activities under <u>Output 1.1.6</u> : Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and a long term NP monitoring system (MP program 4). Furthermore research institutions are the responsible bodies in Albania, engaged by the NEA in biodiversity monitoring, thus they might be an important actor to engage for the implementation of Outcome 1.1 and Outcome 1.3.
National Inspectorate of Territorial Defence (NITD)	NITD is responsible for inspecting and responding to notifications on illegal activity in the territory including a special directory on the environment which includes illegal hunting or logging in forests, extraction of material in river basins, and the illegal disposal of waste.	This institution and its extension offices in the territory should be considered in order to effectively coordinate efforts in the local level for the detection of illegal activities in and around the protected areas in collaboration with other local institutions.
National Agency of Water Resource Management	Approves strategies and management plans for water basins in Albania. Coordinates work among all other stakeholders and bodies (local, regional and national) exercising responsibilities on water resource management.	Important stakeholder to be consulted and engaged in gathering and sharing information on the water resources of the Albanian Alps, as well as mainstreaming specific measures into specific water management plans.
Municipalities and Municipal Councils	Exercises its functions related to water supply, sewerage, sewage, drainage, irrigation, construction, rehabilitation, maintenance of local roads, public transport, pollution management, planning, the possibility for the local level to expand the rights competencies his; Approve spatial planning instruments; Issue development permits, construction permits, through NLC; Approve planning, construction regulations at the local level; Provide and maintain public services, including water supply and sewerage, integrated waste management, etc.	The three identified municipalities in the PA (Shkoder, Tropoje, Malesi e Madhe), are an important partner to include in most project activities, especially the activities conducted in the local areas, involving engagement consensus building as well as improved coordination and information sharing with local community members, private sector, entrepreneurs and other actors in the area.

Stakeholder	Current Mandate / Responsibilities	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Civil Society Organizations (CSO)	<p>There are many active environmental Civil Society Organizations in Albania. A few NGOs have already been identified and are cooperating in the planning and implementation of biodiversity and protected areas related campaigns and projects.</p>	<p>TOKA, INCA, GOPA, PPNEA, Journey to Valbone, Accommodation Society, Valbone, Thethi Guide Infopoint, are active local NGOs, and potential partners for different project activities, organize and facilitate local meetings, assist with training of local communities and help to mobilize monitoring, and support the sustainability of the project's activities on site. International NGOs with pertinent information for the field of work and the location are UNDP and GIZ, who may be consulted and invited in national activities, and other awareness raising activities.</p> <p>Some of the CSOs have been consulted during the preparation of the PIF. Additional national CSOs locally based in the pilot site will be identified and consulted during the PPG phase and involved as a potential partner in the implementation of the project activities.</p>
Private Sector	<p>The most significant private sector actors include relevant tourism services entities, the hydropower developers and operators as well as the financial institutions that support such developments, entities involved in agricultural services, product processing and marketing, etc.</p>	<p>Tourism, guide and accommodation companies will be involved in multiple ways in order to build a bridge between local service providers and national/international tourists, tourism planning, tourism product development, tourism capacity building). Accommodation managers, agricultural supply chain, food marketing entities, local guides, local rafting groups, local horse riding entrepreneur, mountainous hut owner, camp ground owners, will be engaged as both advisories and in implementation. Several of these stakeholders have been identified during the project conception phase.</p> <p>Furthermore HHP operators will need to be engaged in process of developing operational guidelines and brought together with renewable energy and environmental experts, as well as the local leaders in the community who share the history and customs of the Albanian Alps traditions. Financial institutions will be capacitated to include environmental and social safeguards to increase the sustainability of developments in protected areas. Private sector opportunities and priorities will be assessed in more detail during the PPG phase.</p>
Other local stakeholders	<p>Other local stakeholders utilize the Albanian Alps territory including inhabitants of the area, shepherds, local tourist guides, and visitors.</p>	<p>A thorough stakeholder identification will be conducted during the PPG phase, and will be engaged in events and consulted with regards to most activities conducted on site, especially any activities that regard the zonation of PAs and allowed activities in and around the PAs.</p>

[1] The totality of the forests in Albania

3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis).

Gender Issues:

While national institutions have made strides to put women and girls at the forefront of national priorities, the country needs to strengthen implementation of laws and policies, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the achievement of all gender related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. Wide gender gaps in economic opportunities persist, including low labour force participation, high levels of informality, and low access to productive inputs. While the overall activity rate of the population aged 15 ? 64 steadily increased over the years, women?s labour force participation continues to be lower (61.6%) than men?s (77.6%). Occupational stereotypes limit women?s and girls? choices, as they work predominantly in health and social services, education, manufacturing, and agriculture, all sectors characterised by lower wages. Agriculture remains the primary employer for women (41.6% compared to 32.3% men). The concentration of women and girls in the informal economy and in few sectors also acts as a break on the overall economic growth of the country, when there is growing consensus that Albania needs to increase productivity and diversify employment and education opportunities (e.g. towards science, ITC, and entrepreneurship). Women participation in business increased during the last decade, with 25.4%. of women owning or managing a business. However, the majority of women?s enterprises are under-capitalised micro/small businesses in mostly informal and lower value-added sectors (e.g. in manufacturing and agriculture). Women?s active participation in private sector development remains low, especially for women in rural areas, and the impact of discriminatory gender norms and behaviours is found at all levels. While women formally enjoy equal rights to inheritance and ownership of land and property, over 80% of land titles remain in the name of the ?head of household? (mainly husbands, fathers-in-law, brothers, fathers, grandfathers), thus limiting women?s entitlements to productive resources[1].

Gender equality and women?s empowerment will be mainstreamed into project activities, ensuring that women have an equal voice in project implementation, as well as governance and an active role during the entire project. Women will participate equally with men in any dialogue or decision-making initiated by the project and will influence decisions that will determine the success of the project and ultimately the future of their families. The proposed project will adopt UNEP's commitment to gender equality and women?s empowerment and taking into account the differences, needs, roles and priorities of men and women. The project is

consistent with the GEF Policy on Gender Equality (GEF/C.53/04, October 2017) and is also in line with the UNCCD ?Decisions 21/COP.9, 11/COP.8, 15/COP.5, 15/COP.4, 15/COP.3 and 13/COP.2.

In addition to ensuring gender-sensitive communication throughout project implementation, practical activities will also be developed to highlight the role of women in conservation and effective management of PAs, where specific communications materials and knowledge management tools will tackle the gender-specific targeted matter. Further to the overall mainstreaming of gender equality measures and the fostering of women?s participation in the implementation of project activities, a Gender Impact Assessment will be conducted during the PPG to identify specially the gender-sensitive issues in the northern Albanian mountainous region, avoid adverse impacts and maximise positive effects on gender at the outcome level.

[1] ?Advancing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls in Albania A position paper by the United Nations in Albania?, UN Albania, 11 May 2021

Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes

closing gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources; Yes

improving women's participation and decision-making; and/or Yes

generating socio-economic benefits or services for women. Yes

Will the project?s results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators?

Yes

4. Private sector engagement

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

Please briefly explain the rationale behind your answer.

In the project territory, the inadequately planned and regulated activity of the private sector is one of the sources of many of the greatest threats (for example, inappropriate HHP development, unplanned tourism development that actually undermines the resources that attract tourists, etc.). However, the private sector also has the potential to be the driver of positive and sustainable development if engaged effectively and supported to do so (i.e. appropriate infrastructural development, sustainable tourism, sustainable land use marketing and service provision, etc.). The effective and constructive engagement of the project, and project key stakeholders such as the NP management authorities, with these private sector actors is a critical component of addressing threats and generating sustainable solutions.

Apart from the HHP and other infrastructure developers, there already exists a substantial private sector presence in the project area. As in most areas of Albania the private sector, particularly SMEs are the most vibrant component of the economy currently (Small to Medium Enterprises [SMEs] represent a driving force in economic development i.e. about 98% of total companies with a significant contribution of about 70% to the national GDP)[1]. The cities of Tropoja, and Koplik/Malesi e Madhe, are strategically located east and west of the NP, and are equipped with typical economic entities such as tourist and accommodation service providers of different varieties (very small to large with differing conditions and facilities), entertainment and cultural service providers, markets of local products and handicrafts. According to the development plans of the two cities, Tropoja is characterized of activities such as agriculture, tourism, extraction (mining and aggregates), and renewable energy (wood and hydropower)[2], Malesi e Madhe is characterized of economic activities inclusive of agriculture (especially cultivation and trade of medicinal plants) and tourism. A special characteristic of this city is the railroad in Bajze that is seen as an important node for transport and future economic development of the city[3]. The most significant private sector actors include relevant tourism and accommodation entities including tent park owners, as well as mountainous huts, agricultural product providers, handicraft service providers as well as the cultural and entertainment service providers such as guides. During a scoping exercise conducted in 2019 with tourist organization in Tropoja Municipality meetings were organized with several operators offering services such as:

- Accommodations in Valbona Valley, and mountainous huts (Albanian stans) discussing their needs for better marketing of the eco-tourism features of their businesses, as well as better business models/plans for more sustainable year-round activities.
- Local guide operators as well as kayaking, and hiking tour guide in the Valbona and Thethi areas expressing needs for better path markings and comprehensive maps of the entire area, as well as detailed maps showcasing the biodiversity and cultural values of the PAs.
- Horseback riding and farm owner outlining the need for better business plan, and better connectivity in the PAs.
- Blueberry collector, honey producer, dairy produce producer and artisanal worker outlining the great potential of the area for producing quality and unique products, expressing needs for better post agriculture management and better marketing tools.

In terms of engaging with HHP and other significant private sector actors, the project can provide a valuable mechanism for bringing together potentially conflicting parties in a transparent and constructive context, in order to reach pragmatic compromises and solutions in all parties' interests. In the context of tourism the NP authorities, with support of the project, need to closely engage with tourism actors (tour operators, local service providers, local communities, etc) in order to agree with the strategic approach that will guide ongoing tourism development, the limits and parameters for tourism access and development in the region, and the facilitatory role that the NP can play in

promoting, training and regulating future tourism. The project needs to support the development and mobilization of the private sector in providing appropriate marketing of local products and by working together can help identify where real opportunities in this regard lie. National financing institutions will also be identified and capacitated to include environmental and social safeguards for more sustainable financing practice in major infrastructure developments in Albania such as HPPs.

During the PPG phase the project will start engaging all the representative stakeholders, private sector operator and discuss further sustainable tourism initiatives to be taken into consideration in the zonation, and management plan, as well as the drafting of specific financing mechanisms for the Albanian Alps and the practical applications (outputs 1.1.2, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 1.2.3). Private sector engagement will aim to strengthen communication efforts among the different types of entities with connected but also conflicting interests in biodiversity conservation, and better connect them with NGOs and the local leaders of the community as important actors and advocates of the good governance and effective management of the PAs. The private sector will be involved in project implementation through direct participation in meetings, awareness raising activities, trainings, and as such take an important role in the sustainability of the project activities and their further replication. More specifically the implementation of activities relating to the sustainable income generation mechanisms and approaches, for contributing to NP financing, will require the engagement of the private entrepreneurs in the area, and thus their identification and involvement will begin in the earliest stages of project implementation. Several community members and entrepreneurs have been involved in the design of the project and have already been visited and interviewed onsite.

[1] Polis University, "Measuring the Performance of SMEs for Evidence - Informed Economic Development Policies in Albania?", 2019

[2] Tropoja Development Plan, approved in 2017

[3] Malesi e Madhe Development Plan, approved in 2017

5. Risks to Achieving Project Objectives

Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the Project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the Project design (table format acceptable)

Risks	Risk Level	Mitigation Measures
Lack of political will and commitment by the national governmental institutions, due to other priorities	Medium	<p>The current political situation in the country is stable. State and local government are fully supporting the initiative of proclamation and sustainable management of the future national park.</p> <p>The project team will provide continuous monitoring of the security and political situation in the country and update the Steering Committee on a regular basis, so there is enough lead time for adequate response actions and adjustment in project strategy.</p>

Risks	Risk Level	Mitigation Measures
Unclear roles in the execution of the project may result in a lack of commitment/buy-in from local communities and therefore may result in failure of collaborative activities	Medium	A stakeholder engagement plan will be developed, and community stakeholders will be engaged during the PPG phase, to ensure their buy-in into the project. The project is devoting significant attention (Outcome 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) to awareness and community mobilization/capacity development and lessons learned. During the initial implementation, the project will actively engage communities (provide equal possibilities to both men and women) in order to clarify the implications of the project and build awareness of their expected role and benefits
Limited cooperation among governmental agencies with competencies in BD limits the delivery of results	Low/Medium	The project will actively involve governmental agencies beginning in the design phase to ensure their support and participation in the project. Representatives of the relevant institutions will be invited to join the Project Steering Committee to facilitate cooperation, decision making and project follow up.

Risks	Risk Level	Mitigation Measures
The outbreak of diseases (Covid-19)	Medium	<p>To achieve the proposed objectives, the project team will continue applying corresponding measures to adjust to COVID19 restrictions during the PPG stage. Following the past year experience, in order to protect human health and also for cost-saving reasons, most of the stakeholders' meetings will be conducted virtually using different online tools. In case of inevitable face-to-face/in-person meetings, the project will adhere to the standardized measures of protection to reduce infections risks (social distancing, masks, disinfectants). Analytic work, capacity development and production of knowledge management materials will be conducted (as much as possible) as desk-work, in virtually connected teams or in small groups of people/participants to reduce COVID-19 infection risks. As the project is in its initial development stage, and its technical implementation start is expected in late 2022, all the risks that the project may face by COVID-19 protection measures will be elaborated/redesigned in details during the PPG phase. Activities will be carefully planned in order to allow enough time for site work to be conducted in small groups and spread out in the territory in order to minimize traveling and meeting in big teams, while bringing in international expertise and using the best online tools available. The project design also incorporates a recognition that resilience is linked to diversity of land uses and livelihoods and that over dependence on any one option brings risks (as demonstrated currently in terms of tourism during the pandemic). Thus, the design of practical implementations will not be based only on sustainable tourism options but also activities such as production of quality food and sustenance options. The Covid19 pandemic brings opportunities as well as risks that the project needs grasp. In July 2020, the UNCT in Albania also developed and approved the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery and Response Plan, identifying 113 priority actions to promote socioeconomic development in Albania by minimizing and mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19, and by building forward better. The actions outlined support the Government of Albania in its recovery across five pillars, namely, (i) health response and systems strengthening, (ii) pro-poor social systems, (iii) resilient economic recovery, (iv) macro-economic and fiscal management, and (v) social cohesion and local resilience. The objective is to ensure a concerted, collaborative and all-inclusive effort to address the multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19, and to protect the needs and rights of people living under the duress of the pandemic. This project is in line with the objectives and actions outlined in this document and will support the local community in the Albanian Alps, in their recovery actions while also mitigate the risks of any future outbreak, by mainstreaming information, preparedness and mitigation actions in the management plan, capacity building and awareness raising events.</p>

Risks	Risk Level	Mitigation Measures
Climate change impacts (e.g. increased flooding; more severe droughts; forest fires) may affect some project activities	Medium	The project activities have been designed to address (directly or indirectly) vulnerabilities to climate hazards. The project will provide diversified livelihood alternatives to enhance adaptation and resilience. Project support to the sustainable use of natural resources will further improve the management and conservation of these resources, create income opportunities that enhance adaptation and resilience, and strengthen food security.
Poor monitoring of environmental, social and economic impacts after the project implementation	Low	The Project will strengthen capacities of major stakeholders for environmentally sound practices in sectors competing for natural resources.
Project implementation in a gender-responsive way may be challenging	Medium	Although on the national level, and in national institutions, women participation is increasing, this is still not the case with the pilot region.

Risks and Opportunities within the context post COVID ?Green Recovery initiatives: COVID?19 is having a serious and long?term impact on the economy, society and vulnerable groups, for Albania and its regional Western Balkans neighbours. Most affected sectors include travel, tourism, hospitality, trade and small manufacturing. All this will significantly impact the development trajectory of the country towards the 2030 Agenda and threatens to undo the recent SDG gains at the time when the Government?s fiscal capacity to provide economic stimulus has been shrinking.

However, at the same time the current COVID crisis has stimulated a recognition that fundamental changes in approaches to natural resource use, economy, and sustainability are increasingly urgent and that the situation presents a unique opportunity to initiate such changes i.e. the Green Recovery opportunity. Though Albania has no specific Green Recovery plans in place it is party to the EU Green Deal initiative for the Western Balkans. The summit in Sofia in November 2020 was an important step taken to advance the regional cooperation and boost socio-economic recovery and convergence with the EU, where the leaders have also committed to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Being part of the region, Albania will receive support for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management, seen as a stimulus to be used as a green recovery post COVID-19. This project has the potential to be a valuable contributor to this process and should benefit from the greater willingness to consider transformative change and the opportunities this provides in terms of meaningful uptake and absorption of new conceptual approaches to future sustainable development.

UNEP has a very active portfolio in the Western Balkan region, including Albania where despite the challenges presented by the pandemic excellent results have been achieved on every project through application of adaptive management practices, flexibility, and revisions of workplans and careful

monitoring of work on-site. Several activities were conducted through online platforms, field work was rearranged and performed as soon as the situation allowed and restrictions were lifted, work was adapted and moved around the workplan so that it reflects the seasonality of the covid-19 workplans. Constant communication was kept with local project offices, while an array of local experts have been engaged on-site, exercising careful monitoring and engagement of local stakeholders including equal participation of both men and women.

6. Coordination

Outline the institutional structure of the project including monitoring and evaluation coordination at the project level. Describe possible coordination with other relevant GEF-financed projects and other initiatives.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment is the governmental institution to provide political and institutional supervision and act as the National Executing Entity/Responsible Partner. The overall responsibility for the project execution and implementation by MoTE implies the timely and verifiable attainment of project objectives and outcomes. The project will identify key stakeholders and partners on the ground that can help and support the implementation of the agreed and approved work plan. The key institutions will be consulted during the PPG phase, and all stakeholders that are important for the implementation of this project, will be involved through a project steering committee, that will be informed and consulted through the project duration. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection will be also an important partner and collaborate with respect to the gender perspectives of this project, who in collaboration with UNEP will be responsible for gender mainstreaming (in the PMU, but also in the PSC and ensure there is representation from gender equality and/or women's empowerment related entities. Gender expertise in the country will be provided in collaboration with the UN country team especially UN Women.

The project will seek to collaborate closely with current and upcoming projects in biodiversity protection, PA management, ecosystem service valorization and resilience to Climate Change, agriculture, forestry, and land use planning knowledge and information management, including at the local level for project implementation and for receiving stakeholders' inputs and feedback. Exact partner organizations will be identified for each project component during the PPG and at the initial stages of the project implementation. In particular close coordination and the synergistic collaboration will be needed with any ongoing project on PAs and biodiversity.

7. Consistency with National Priorities

Is the Project consistent with the National Strategies and plans or reports and assessments under relevant conventions?

Yes

If yes, which ones and how: NAPAs, NAPs, ASGM NAPs, MIAs, NBSAPs, NCs, TNAs, NCSAs, NIPs, PRSPs, NPFE, BURs, INDCs, etc

The Project is directly in line with the principles of the **National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI II)**, as Albania's most important strategic document outlining the national vision for the social and economic development. The NSDI II vision of "Creating wealth and well-being for European Albania" under second pillar (Through Sustained Economic Growth - the Vehicle for

Albania's Development) considers that economic growth should not be at the expense of the economic and social well-being of future Albanian generations due to unsustainable depletion of natural resources or loss of biodiversity. Achievement of the NSDII-II vision through government policies and actions is aimed to bring Albania to the point of European Accession. Additionally, the project is in line and will strive to support the NSDI equality objectives namely: (i) enhancing women's role in decision making at all levels of government and politics; (ii) women's economic empowerment; (iii) strengthening gender mainstreaming in policies, gender analysis, gender indicators, and coherent monitoring and reporting.

Albania's **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)** is the key document determining the national objectives, on biodiversity. Though the objectives of this document have reached a peak, and the country is preparing for the Post 2020 BD Framework, several of its strategic goals are still important for Albania. The project is in line with the following sectoral strategic goals:

- Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use,
- Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building,
- Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services,
- Improvement of the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity.

As emphasized in Albania's Document of **Strategic Policies for the Biodiversity Protection (DSPBP)**, it is important to substantially enhance investments in biodiversity conservation; expected financing sources include the State Budget, EU financial instruments, donor and other sources, including private sector. This project is in line with the objectives outlined in this document including several of its measures. More specifically the project contributes to:

- ? Measure 1 ? Expansion of protected areas in Albania,
- ? Measure 3 ? Conduct in-situ studies and research on ecology, ecosystems and habitats,
- ? Measure 4 ? Education and awareness raising,
- ? Measure 5 ? Increase implementation of the law.

Recreational values related to biological and landscape diversity represent an asset that can be leveraged for sustainable development. Protection and sustainable development of these values are powerful instruments for fostering development in Albania. The existence of mountaineering, rafting, parachuting, mountain biking, fishing, trekking and other ecotourism-related activities requires the country to protect the environment and its biodiversity. Recently, the concept of ecotourism has turned into an important domain that is generating financial benefits for protected areas, and contributes to the sustainable use of biodiversity components. This element was identified and integrated in the **National Tourism Development Strategy 2013 ? 2024 (NTDS), and the Albanian Alps Tourism Sectoral Strategy (AATSS)**.

The basic principles in the NTDS of sustainable tourism development strongly considers that economic objectives must be balanced with the protection of the environment, culture and community welfare, and that tourism development must be based on, and supportive of, environmental protection, including all of the components of biodiversity.

Furthermore, the project builds on the Albanian **Multi-sectorial Strategy on the Environment (MSE)** while incorporating the objectives of the Law on Climate Change no. 155/2020 as well as the National Climate Change Strategy adopted in 2019. Taking into consideration the vision and strategic objectives for environmental protection and sustainable development of the three local development plans for the municipalities of Tropoja, Malesi e Madhe and Shkodra, as well as falling in line with the strategic principles of the Tourism Strategy of the Albanian Alps (2018) viewing nature-based tourism as an antidote to rapid and chaotic development and a true priority in the local planning context for sustainable development of the Albanian Alps region, prominent for various types of rural and mountain tourism.

The project is also fully aligned to the Government of Albania and the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026**, more specifically Strategic Priority B 'sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management', under which by 2026 Albania will strive for innovative and integrated policy solutions accelerate sustainable, productive and inclusive economic development, enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation and transition to a green and blue economy.

8. Knowledge Management

Outline the knowledge management approach for the Project, including, if any, plans for the Project to learn from other relevant Projects and initiatives, to assess and document in a user-friendly form, and share these experiences and expertise with relevant stakeholders.

The two project components are interconnected and generate knowledge and capacity building on both the national and local levels. Based on pragmatic impact evaluation, the project will provide clear and factual validation of the benefits the project will provide clear and factual validation of the benefits of the ILM approach to rural development and planning and clearly demonstrate that ensuring the mainstreaming of BD is critical for achieving the sustained development and prosperity of the country, as well as meeting international environmental global benefits objectives, while engaging equally men and women.

Component 1. will focus on ensuring the establishment of the necessary enabling environment for effective management of the NP, undertake the process of updating the baseline data and threats analysis in the draft management plan prepared in 2015. It will then, in consultation with all stakeholders, review the overall strategy of NP management, and in that context refine the original zonation plan (if necessary) and the MP programs. This component will further seek to build the systemic, institutional, and individual capacity tailor-cut for both women and men, at the Albanian Alps regional and local levels, to implement the updated and refined management plan.

Additionally, this component seeks to address the long term sustainably financing of the NP, building on the existing results and progress of the GEF financed project 'Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania' (UNDP). The first output will focus on undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the ecosystem service values of the Albanian Alps NP territory in order to identify the real values to various stakeholders and the country as a whole.

Subsequently, this component will strengthen the practical experience and 'know-how' of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders (at least 50% women) to effectively implement the management plan, enhance CC resilience and achieve sustainable financing through support to the initial implementation

of the MP. This component of the project focuses on supporting the transition from planning and preparation, to the practical implementation of NP management.

Component 2 is aimed at ensuring the lessons and experience gained during the period of the project is captured in a meaningful and accessible way so that these lessons can be applied both in the Albanian Alps NP but also in other PA's in Albania, and the positive experience internalized and replicated.

9. Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

Provide information on the identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project/program based on your organization's ESS systems and procedures

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification *

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate			

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

Provide preliminary information on the types and levels of risk classifications/ratings of any identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project (considering the GEF ESS Minimum Standards) and describe measures to address these risks during the project design.

Supporting Documents

Upload available ESS supporting documents.

Title	Submitted
SRIF PIF Albanian Alps_22 July 2021	

Part III: Approval/Endorsement By GEF Operational Focal Point(S) And GEF Agency(ies)

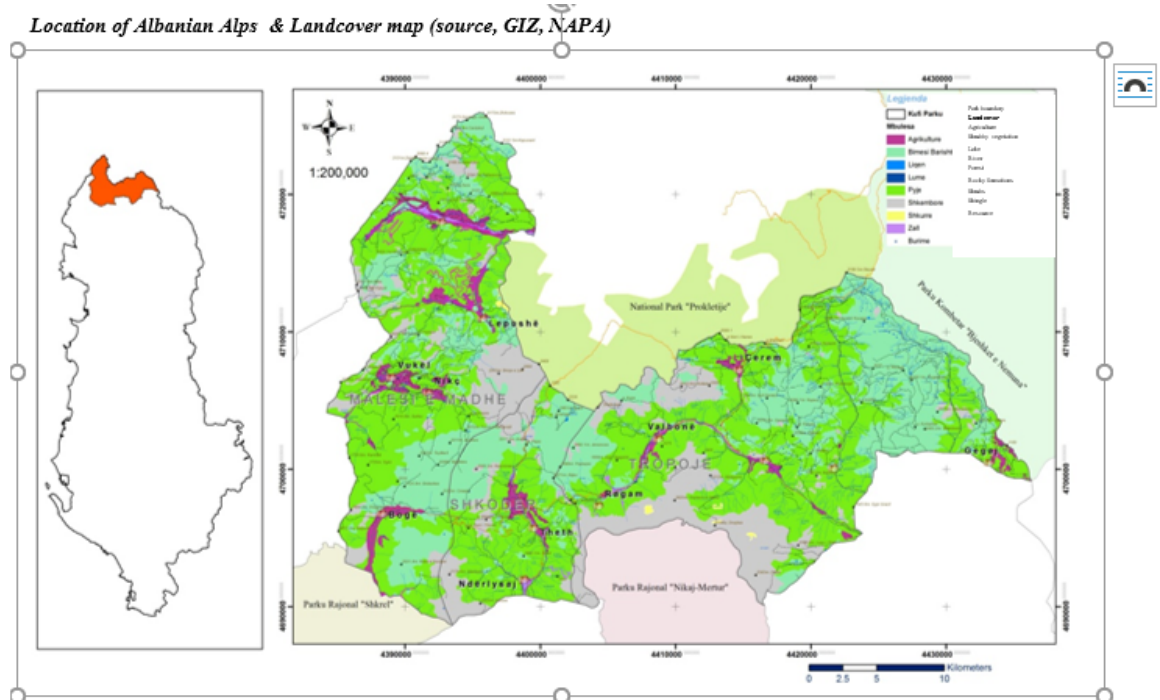
A. RECORD OF ENDORSEMENT OF GEF OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT (S) ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT(S): (Please attach the Operational Focal Point endorsement letter with this template).

Name	Position	Ministry	Date
Mr. Rezart Fshazi	Operational Focal Point Director of Policies and Strategies for the Development of the Environment	MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT	3/17/2021

ANNEX A: Project Map and Geographic Coordinates

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project intervention takes place

Location of Albanian Alps & Landcover map (source, GIZ, NAPA)



Habitat map of the Albanian Alps (Source GIZ, NAPA)

