

SURVEY

on biodiversity v. energy and extractive projects



Name of country: **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Name of researcher: **CZZS**

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- 1. Is there a conflict between biodiversity conservation and energy and extractive industries in your country? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly all energy projects are in conflict with biodiversity conservation. From the starting idea and initiation of an energy project to realisation and activity of one, very little attention is given to its impact on the environment and people (very low-quality EIA, no monitoring, local communities and general public are involved in very late stages in the decision-making process etc.) The whole procedure is beneficial for the investor. Whereas local population (most energy and extractive projects are in rural areas) are not familiarized with the bad impacts, but are misled with often false promises (more jobs, better infrastructure etc.)

There are many cases of the conflict and here are few examples, on which our organisation (Centre for Environment) worked:

- plan for five hydropower plants in National park Sutjeska in 2015 (currently there is still a lot of pressure on the protected areas to welcome energy projects and so make it an acceptable practise); (<https://czzs.org/kampanje/the-battle-for-sutjeska/?lang=en>)
- private mine and thermopower plant Stanari- large extractive facility that was proclaimed a public interest to enable expropriation of privately owned land (<https://czzs.org/stanari-the-other-side-of-the-story/?lang=en>)
- springs of river Sana- battle for their protection lasted for more than a decade, unfortunately the mini hydro power plant was built and after five years after the plant was build the springs were proclaimed protected (which shows how easier it is to build a hydropower plant that to protect a natural phenomenon); (<https://czzs.org/kampanje/save-sana-river/?lang=en>)
- river Mušnica and Gatačko karst polje- karst system that is very porous where thermal power plant in such an environment caused great pollution and destruction of a very specific living word; (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5lCoQRDaxk>)
- Big hydropower plant Ulog under construction and seven small hydropower plants planned upstream from hydropower plant Ulog on upper Neretva and its tributaries. This area is Emerald site (<https://czzs.org/podnesena-zalba-sekreterijatu-bernske-konvencije-zbog-planiranih-osam-hidroenergetskih-objekata-na-neretvi/?lang=en>).

- 2. Is there a public attention towards the said conflicts? Is there public media coverage of the said conflicts? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.**

Yes, there is public attention especially in the topic of hydro projects. Against mini hydropower plants a lot of people rebelled for many years and got recognised by the regional and international media, so the local media coverage increased. Now in B&H there is Coalition for the protection of rivers with many members that creates the critical mass.

Besides that, in the recent years there is a general increase of environmental topics in the media, but topics like coal, power plants, climate change, GMO, waste, biodiversity protection never had the coverage as hydro projects.

Women of Kruščica case got a huge amount of media attention because a group of rural women stood up for the protection of their river and they were physically attacked by the police. One of the ladies from Kruščica (Maida Bilal) is Goldman Environmental Prize Winner for 2021 <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/maida-bilal/>

- 3. Are there active civil society organizations working for the protection of biodiversity in your country? Do they implement actions against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples.**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is an Eko BiH network that gathers almost forty environmental organisations. Some are more or less active, but mostly they are very locally focused, even built around fighting one harmful project. As there are a lot of organisations that only fight against hydropower projects, Coalition for rivers was organised but they are not separated from the Eko BiH network and the rest of the organisations.

The action of these organisations and mutual support of the network is the only reason that many harmful projects were stopped. The smaller organisations have protests, petitions, local events, promote public participation and demand investor and state responsibility. Larger organisations can manage to elevate their activities on a larger level with legal activities, media campaigns, advocacy and lobbying and together with smaller, local organisations can fight off unwanted projects.

The case in one small town Sanski Most is quite representable. The old mine already exists there, but a few years ago when the investors wanted to build a power plant local community rebelled. Now the community with our organisation is working on halting the work of a mine also. River and the waterfall Bliha which is polluted from the mine is one of the main attractions of that town and brings a lot of tourists to quite depopulated, agricultural area.

- 4. What would these active NGOs need in order to improve their work against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? What kind of support (e.g., funding, networking, training, joint actions, joint legal cases, scientific support in analysing environmental assessment reports, etc.) would these NGOs require for their work?**

Different organisations need different kinds of support depending on the issue they are tackling, but all need support to improve their work. Funding is a general thing that all can use, especially many local and small organisations that do the work voluntarily. Same importance has training and capacity building (project writing and managing, media literacy, legal basis, organisational skills) so activists can take their activities to a next level, but also be more sustainable and able to gather funding from different sources.

Big issue when fighting for nature protection in B&H is lack of data. Very little of nature is explored and we do not know what we are actually losing when something is disturbed and built. This goes hand in hand with no data on pollution like.

Also, less than 5% of the country is under the protection, but even though we do not promote nature protection per se, this is ridiculously little when compared to natural riches. Main reasons: no data therefore no awareness that goes hand in hand with complicated proclamation for protection and lack of political will. Management of protected areas is another set of problems, but they are rooted in

these issues.

Therefore, scientific research of nature but also research on pollution is one of the places where support is needed. For example, this summer our team did a small biospeleology expedition in Gatačko karst polje where a large power plant and mine has been functioning from the eighties. Publication and a short movie were made and presented to a local community/authority. It was the first time in their town where scientists talked about pollution and biodiversity loss and how it affects people.

Regarding legal assistance, we just want to emphasize that the system in the country is so complicated that it is hard to have an exterior advisor in legal matters.

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