



Final Report

Technical Workshop Gender Equality for sustainable development in Nexus sectors in Albania

Held online on 29 June 2021

In the framework of the project
*“Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Southeastern Europe, through the
use of the Nexus approach”*

financed by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA)

implemented by the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med)
in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Introduction

Gender Equality in Albania

Albania has made significant improvements in advancing the normative framework for gender equality in recent years. However, inequalities still exist, and the institutional set-up for gender equality remains under-resourced (both in terms of finances and staff) and requires additional support in human and technical capacity. Challenges in effectively implementing the legal and policy framework on gender equality negatively affect equality between women and men, and the country's development outcomes overall.

Due to different interventions, Albania has progressed in some areas more than others which supports its general advancement. But progress needs to be even in all key development areas. For example, Albania has shown progress in the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum since 2006. In the 2020 GAP, Albania ranked 20 among 153 countries. While this is a significant improvement compared to previous years, it is primarily a result of women increased formal representation in political decision-making. This however is not matched by equality scores in all other GAP subindexes such as Economic Empowerment and Opportunity, Educational Attainment and Health and Survival gaps.

Similarly, for the same reason Albania scores relatively high in the EU's Gender Equality Index (GEI) published in 2020, with 60.4 out of 100 points, which is seven points below the EU-28 average. A closer look shows a significant variability within the index categories. So, women are doing much better when it comes to be represented in politics and attending tertiary education. But these figures are in striking contrast with women's lack of essential productive resources, as evidence by the scores in the domains of money, care provision, time use, and social power.

In UNDP's Human Development Report 2019, Albania occupies rank 69 among 189 countries, reflecting an overall and gradual upward tendency over the past decade. However, Albania scores in the respectively lowest tercile under the "Women's Empowerment" and "Life-course Gender Gap" categories in the following areas: women's employment in senior and middle management; the number of girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); the sex-ratio at birth; the share of female employment in non-agriculture; and domestic chores and care work.

Gender and sustainable development

Sustainable development at its core encourages us to think about how to improve economies and societies without compromising the natural environment or the well-being of future generations. But for any development effort to be sustainable and effective, it must consider the needs of all people, including those who do not typically have a voice in decision making. That is why gender equality is a critical ingredient in achieving sustainable development.

Gender equality and sustainable development are inseparable. Gender equality can enable and even accelerate the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While

gender equality is captured as a stand-alone goal (SDG 5), its benefits are multiplied when gender is integrated across all the SDGs, and gender considerations are included in all sustainable development work.

Addressing gender inequalities—including access to and control over natural resources—accelerates the impact of sustainable development policies connected to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Many of the barriers to effective sustainability policies are found in outdated discriminatory social norms and legal systems. Investing in girls and women requires no radical inventions but can break systemic barriers of power and privilege that continue to leave millions behind.

Nexus approach and sustainable development

Sustainable socio-economic development requires, among others, growing levels of food-energy- and water-services. The overall security of resources can be improved by co-optimising different sectors' objectives through an integrated **Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems "Nexus"** approach that aims at reconciling the interests of the different sectors, while respecting environmental needs and human rights. This is done by adopting an integrated and coordinated approach across sectors as they compete for the same scarce resources, all while capturing existing opportunities and exploring emerging ones. Under such an approach, interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs among the relevant sectors are assessed, with the aim of identifying solutions that foster water-food-energy security and efficiency and reduce impacts and risks on water-dependent ecosystems.

The Project "Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Southeast Europe (SEE), through the use of Nexus approach" is supported by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and implemented by Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Its overall aim is to introduce the Nexus approach and catalyse action for its adoption and implementation in SEE at the national and transboundary basin levels. Serving this purpose, Nexus Dialogue Processes are being implemented in the transboundary basins of the Drin and Drina rivers, and in Albania, including the development of analytical technical Nexus Assessments.

Gender Equality under the Nexus Assessment in Albania

From an initial gender analysis, it can be noted that commitment to international, national gender policies and strategies is present at national level, but that nexus sectors policies and strategies, in general, do not have adequate references to gender, including in relation to the nexus sectors, water-energy-environment-food and to climate change, whose impacts are very cumbersome especially on women and poor rural areas.

It is in rural development plans/strategies and partly in disaster management related to extreme climate events, such as floods, that gender dimensions and especially women needs/challenges come more evident forward. Due to their close link with nexus sectors such as agriculture, water services/management and environmental management, rural development interventions and adaptation to climate change efforts could contribute in

bringing forward the importance of mainstreaming gender in the Nexus. However other areas need to be explored further.

Albania has made significant improvements in advancing the normative framework for gender equality in recent years. However, inequalities still exist, and the institutional set-up for gender equality remains under-resourced (both in terms of finances and staff) and requires additional human and technical capacity especially in the Nexus related sectors. Challenges in effectively implementing the legal and policy framework on gender equality negatively affect equality between women and men, and the country's development outcomes overall.

To address the above, under the Nexus Assessment for Albania, a dedicated chapter on gender dimensions will be prepared to assess how gender issues are reflected and considered in Nexus related sectors and what are the specific challenges for a more gender mainstreaming approach in the sectors. The methodology to prepare this chapter will be through desk review, the workshop, and a questionnaire to identify the progress, challenges, and potential areas of interest for a more gender sensitive approach in each of the Nexus sectors.

Scope and objectives of the workshop

In the framework of a Gender Equality Nexus Sectors Assessment, this technical workshop aimed to initiate a coordinated discussion on the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in Nexus sector for sustainable development between key actors and stakeholders. It also aimed to inform and discuss how gender is addressed in sectors' strategies and policies and bring some concrete best practices on how gender can be addressed in development programmes. More specifically it aimed to:

- Introduce and update the Nexus-related stakeholders with the basic concepts on gender equality for sustainable development and how gender inequality impacts progress towards Agenda 2030.
- Be informed on what is Albania's progress in fulfilling gender equality obligations.
- Discuss the importance of gender mainstreaming in policy making and how gender is addressed in the Nexus related strategies and policies.
- Discuss on gender-related challenges and opportunities relevant to the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystem sectors.
- Share policy-related experiences, best practices and lessons learned from the Nexus sectors that have progressed in addressing gender in policies and implementation.
- Provide recommendations for future interventions
- Provide recommendations and inputs for the Gender Equality Nexus Assessment.

Participants

This technical workshop brought together around 50 participants with majority women (84%) coming from different sectors of Nexus, but especially gender institutions, specialists and gender focal points from the institutions, agencies, national and international organizations, donors and civil society, women activists, and gender experts as well as media and academia.

During the workshop proceedings was interesting to note that during the second session and then by the end of the workshop the male participants did not attend the workshop. This is a typical indication that when discussions around gender equality take place they are mainly considered as women's issues and as a result only women shall discuss about them. This mindset is still a challenge which reflects the lack of gender mainstreaming in many strategies and policies but also implementation in day-to-day work. It also indicates that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure a gender transformative approach in these sectors and beyond.

Proceedings of the Workshop

The agenda of the workshop was envisioned approximately 3 hours and divided in three main Sessions:

The first session included the welcoming note as well as three introductory presentations on nexus approach goals and purpose, the gender equality and its relevance to sustainable development in natural resources and a presentation on gender equality progress in Albania and what nexus assessment in nexus sectors will entail.

The second session was focused on opportunities and challenges of mainstreaming gender in nexus sectors. The purpose of this session was to discuss on the actual strategies and policies in the Nexus sectors¹ in relation to gender equality and what challenges or opportunities are in place for Albania to support sustainable development in these areas. The session aimed to provide information on how gender issues were addressed in thematic strategies, opportunities for mainstreaming gender issues and how the role of gender focal points or other actors can be enhanced. Women participation in decision making positions, sector gender data disaggregation and budgeting were some other issues that were discussed during this session. Participants were from the main gender related institutions, UN, some very prominent and active civil society organizations working on gender issues and gender experts.

The last session was focused on some relevant interventions and lessons learned from key actors. The purpose of this session was to share best practices, research and lessons learned from interventions that have been or are being undertaken by different key actors to address gender equality issues in relevance to the Nexus sectors, and to explore options and ideas for further actions. The participants were mainly from international organizations as the main stakeholders in this sector.

The workshop lasted longer than planned due to active and vivid participation.

SESSION I

Gender Equality for sustainable development in Nexus sectors in Albania

Welcoming session

¹ 'Nexus sectors' refer to (i) Water Resources management and Water Supply and Sanitation; (ii) Energy; (iii) Food, Agriculture and Forestry; (iv) Environmental protection

The workshop was opened by Mr. Tassos Krommydas, Senior Project Officer and Project Manager of the project. He guided the participants on the agenda and other technical arrangements to ensure smooth proceedings of the workshop and gave the floor to the representative of ADA.

The Senior Gender and Development Advisor from Austrian Development Agency, Ms. Christina Stummer opened her speech by informing that Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is a long-term key topic on the agenda of the ADA not only because it is a human rights issue, but it is even as important and highly relevant for sustainable development. ADA has also focused since many years in renewable energy, water and sanitation and rural development and has helped country programmes to integrate gender mainstreaming into these thematic areas. Ms. Stummer stated that more efforts shall be made to ensure gender mainstreaming especially in the nexus sectors. She noted that since the nexus approach is already new and challenging per se this might risk losing the focus on gender. Due to these challenges gender mainstreaming starts to become an add on, so it needs special attention in order not to fall under the table in day-to-day management of programs and the development of respective policies.

So, while focusing on coherence between the sectors, gender specific barriers and inequalities need to be tackled so that policies become equally meaningful for women and men, girls and boys including through their meaningful participation. Ms. Stummer recommended to also refer to and use as a guiding tool the EU Gender Action Plan III that specifies objectives and indicators for six thematic focus areas. Amongst them climate change is also an important thematic area in addition to Nexus sectors agriculture, water services/management and environmental management ensuring the realization of economic and social rights of women and girls. Integrating EU Gender Action Plan III targets and indicators might help collecting the relevant data and measure gaps and progress towards gender equality.

The ADA Senior Gender and Development Advisor also recommended to work toward gender transformative approaches to consider and if possible address the underlying causes and barriers for gender inequalities such as the unequal distribution of care work, gender stereotypes reducing women's roles to those related to household duties and men to be the ones and only responsible for generating incomes. This has a direct and negative impact on women's opportunities to moving forward in their careers in maybe non-traditional and more technical sectors and for them to also meaningfully contribute to households incomes to the benefit of all.

After the greeting speech, the Senior Gender Advisor of GWP-Med, Ms. Fiorela Shalsi moderated the workshop. She initially briefed the participants on the context of the project, the agenda and the specific objectives of the technical workshop aiming to bring closer specialists of nexus sectors and gender equality to work together towards sustainable development.

The first presentation was conducted by **Mr. Tassos Krommydas, Senior Project Officer and Project Manager** of the project. He provided a brief overview of the project rationale and focused specifically on the NEXUS approach and what interventions and specific activities are envisioned to be implemented to support the goals of this approach and project overall in Albania. Some details were provided on the objectives and activities of the project and how they are related to gender and why gender is important for this project.

After the project presentation, **the Senior Gender Advisor of GWP-Med, Ms. Fiorela Shalsi** introduced the participants with the main issues of gender in sustainable management of natural resources. Her presentation aimed to inform the participants on the importance of considering the needs of all people, including those who typically have no voice in decision-making for any development effort to be sustainable and effective. The presentation focused on the concepts of sustainable development, SDGs and their interlinkage with gender equality and natural resources. Further she explained the complex and multidimensional relationship between gender equality and natural resource policies by focus on different inequalities between women and men that impact these relationships such as: inequalities in access and control, structural inequalities, cultural and decision-making inequalities that all impact the way women and men protect, use and benefit from natural resources. The presentation made the point that many of the obstacles to effective sustainable management policies are found in old discriminatory social norms and legal systems and that investing in gender equality will support sustainability and progress towards SDGs.

The following presentation delivered from the Senior Gender Advisor of GWP-Med focused on Gender equality and nexus sectors' assessment in Albania. The presentation informed the participants on the overall progress of Albania towards gender equality in the main sectors as per different global reports and indexes. Due to various interventions, Albania has progressed in some specific areas more than in others which also affects its overall progress. The presentation made a point that while there is considerable progress in some areas, progress must be equal and similar in all key areas of development and sectors related to nexus do not specifically show such progress. So, more focus and attention is needed to be provided to these areas in order for progress to be equal and similar. The presentation also informed the participants on the next steps related to gender assessment in nexus sectors in Albania as a first mapping and steps towards a general picture of the situation in these sectors. The participants were informed on the draft structure of such assessment and were invited to provide any inputs on the areas planned to be analyzed.

Opportunities and Challenges of mainstreaming Gender in Nexus Sectors

This session had seven panelists together with the Senior Gender Advisor of GWP-Med. The panelists were mainly from gender related institutions, gender experts and CSOs and they discussed on the actual strategies and policies in the Nexus sectors² in relation to gender equality and what challenges or opportunities are in place for Albania to support sustainable development in these areas. The session shared information and discussed on how gender issues are addressed in thematic strategies and opportunities for mainstreaming gender issues and what are some challenges of gender focal points. Women's participation in decision making positions, gender data disaggregation and budgeting were some other issues that this session discussed and informed the participants.

The presentation on the Gender Equality in the strategies and policies of Nexus sectors aimed at providing a quick outlook on how gender is mainstreamed in the nexus sectors and which sectors have been more attentive and open to consider gender equality issues in their policies and strategies. Ms. Fiorela Shalsi, Senior Gender Advisor, GWP-Med informed that some sectors like the water management, agriculture and environment have little reference to gender issues but there's almost no gender consideration in the sectors of energy. The gender issues are from completely blind to somewhat gender aware or partially gender mainstreamed. This means that a lot still needs to be done in these sectors for gender equality.

The discussion was initiated by **Ms. Brunilda Dervishaj, Director of the Sector of Policies and Strategies for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection**. Ms. Dervishaj emphasized that gender mainstreaming in the nexus sectors is of particular importance, but it must be acknowledged that the work and information in these areas is at very preliminary phase, as a result the efforts to mainstream gender in these sectors are yet difficult and challenging. In its National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) 2021-2030, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) has given for the first time some emphasis to gender issues in environment, climate change, digitalization and green economy which were before considered neutral or gender blind.

The NSGE 2021-2030 is prepared for a 10-year period reflecting also the direct link to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The NSGE has also foreseen actions and measures in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 further specified in its Action Plan for Gender Equality (GAP II). The new Strategy reflects the steps towards fulfillment of standards or obligations deriving from other international documents, among which the most important are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Council of Europe Convention Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

² 'Nexus sectors' refer to (i) Water Resources management and Water Supply and Sanitation; (ii) Energy; (iii) Food, Agriculture and Forestry; (iv) Environmental protection

Further on Ms. Dervishaj detailed specific objectives, actions and measures taken by the new NSGE related to the EU GAP III such as: "Promotion of economic and social rights and empowerment of girls and women", as well as "Addressing challenges and utilizing opportunities emerging because of transition to a green economy, digital transformation, climate change and the environment ". Through detailing of these predicted interventions Ms. Dervishaj noted the focus given by the Strategy to nexus related sectors.

At the end of her discussion, Ms. Dervishaj focused on the institutional structures on Gender Equality. She noted that at the national level the Gender Equality Focal Point post is not a full-time position. The responsible staff typically performs other duties and GE is one of them. Meanwhile, in their job description they have been assigned tasks and responsibilities equal to a gender equality officer in accordance with Gender Equality Law. In addition to the 11 gender focal points in the line ministries, the State Police and INSTAT have also assigned focal points for Gender Equality. At the local level, gender focal points have been appointed in 61 municipalities, but again their position is part time merged with other responsibilities such as coordinator against domestic violence as well as for other vulnerable groups such as children.

For future work Ms. Dervishaj saw as challenging (i) the strengthening of structures working for gender equality, especially at the local level, (ii) the integration of gender equality issues of nexus sectors in sector strategies and (iii) budgets to be able to achieve the intended results towards SDGs.

The second panelist, **Ms. Ardiana Hala, Legal Director at the Commissioner for Protection Against Discrimination** an institution responsible to monitor law enforcement in particular that of Gender Equality and Against Discrimination. She informed that the Commissioner has further increased the capacity to cover broader discrimination forms and issues as well as areas and sectors including intersectoral areas where it exercises its competences. She brought some practical cases of the potential issues faced in nexus related sectors due to discrimination in differentiated use of natural resources from women and men. The objective was to understand how these issues can impact and affect women and men lives differently and how women are more often discriminated in their equal access to these resources. For example, access to land and property regardless that the law demands for both married women and men to have equal rights, due to social norms usually this does not happen, and women are often left without property. Ms. Hala detailed a specific case where the Commissioner adjusted a wrong practice enabling a woman to have her right. Ms. Hala also brought to the attention of the participants several cases from different regions of Albania on the treatment of the 'client in need' from the entities that provide energy and water. She emphasized that these clients are often 'women households with kids' and they have no means to support these services. In some other cases were bigger communities like in Levan, Fier with women, men and children that didn't have access to water. The Commissioner based on related legal framework addressed these cases with specific recommendations which were considered by the entities such as water supply and sewerage, energy supply operator as well as local government.

At the end of her discussion, Ms. Hala noted that these issues need to be closely discussed with the local government given that they are the ones to provide services to the citizens as well as line ministries with their increased focus through programmes as well as coordinated specific interventions. The first support needs to be the dedicated budget allocations, increased positive political will as well as strengthened cooperation amongst different structures and institutions.

The next panelist was **Ms. Ines Xhelili, the representative of the National Council of Gender Equality and Executive Director of Albanian Women Empowerment Network**. She emphasized the timing and importance of the event that is bringing for the first-time attention to gender issues in nexus related sectors in such a coordinated way. There are some separate initiatives but the coordinated efforts to address the gender gap that exists in these areas is very important and unfortunately the relevant attention is not yet given to these areas neither in the National Council of Gender Equality. She emphasized the importance of continuous integration of CSO organizations that work on women issues to be part of different initiative apart from the line ministries due to the importance of the services and attention they give to these issues in the daily basis.

Ms. Xhelili highlighted the importance of increased knowledge sharing and updates in the work conducted in these sectors because this will help increase attention, inclusion and integration of gender issues also in these sectors, which as confirmed are not yet integrated part of the daily work of both institutions and local actors such as CSOs. Of course, this focus needs to be in balance with other areas of the Albanian context such as domestic violence and lack of security that are quite disturbing and extreme, but this shall not prohibit us from empowering women in other sectors. There are some initiatives taken also from AWEN the organization that Ms. Xhelili leads on gender and environment, waste management. However, at the national level and within the agenda of the National Council of Gender Equality, specific discussions on how to integrate gender in nexus sectors have not yet taken place that is why Ms. Xhelili emphasized that it is the right timing to initiate this discussion initially through relevant knowledge and understanding of the key issues and then identifying the necessary interventions.

The next panelist was **Ms. Erisa Çela, Gender Responsive Budgeting Programme Manager at UN Women**. She appreciated the presence in this panel that is bringing focus and giving the relevant importance to the discussion of gender in nexus sectors which has not yet been explored adequately. She noted that as per the discussions it is important to always explore and see if any gendered focus intervention is possible to be accompanied together with its financial invoice as well as benefit. Ms. Çela highlighted that in order to achieve the gender equality commitments as per the Agenda 2030 it is important to understand the possibility of mobilization as well as allocation of the right resources that will contribute towards these commitments. In Albania we aim to achieve this through the gender responsive budgeting as a means to analyze the different impact of public expenditures, taxes and public services in women and men and how they impact the gender equality between men and women.

Ms. Çela informed that Gender Responsive Budgeting has been a tool used already by the Albanian Government since many years now and has proved to improve budgets and how

women and men benefit from them. That is why it is key to use it also in reviewing policies and strategies of the sectors in focus today because as per practice GRB has also influenced the policy making in a number of cases. This needs to be done also in line with revision of all relevant and available data that are sex disaggregated. The structures and focal points between line ministries and INSTAT need to collaborate more closely in this regard for the methodology of data collection so that they can be comparable and usable in different sectors so that the gaps are easily identified and known and as result can guide the relevant investments towards gender equality.

Gender Responsive Budgeting is also a means to evaluate the actual relevance of Albanian Government interventions towards fulfillment of commitments and obligations on human rights and women empowerment. It is also a very useful means to monitor the budget commitments towards Agenda 2030 and gender equality. Even beyond measurement of income and expenditures, budget is a key document that proves how government prioritizes short- or long-term strategies and policies and towards what goals. Therefore, it is key to be utilized in addressing gender gaps and achieve gender equality. Albania has progressed in these terms through several reforms and a legal framework to integrate GRB through the public finances system at the national and local level. And that is why gender equality is integrated as a key principle in the Budget Organic Law of the year 2016 and Local finances Law of 2017 which enables the identification of gender gaps and inequalities that need to be budgeted and the mandate that the institutions now have in defining gender indicators in the way they prepare their budgets.

Albania has now 11 line ministries and two monitoring institutions like Commissioner against discrimination and People's Advocate that have included gender objectives in their budgeting programmes. This is a considerable progress from only two line ministries the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health that were the first two where the work initiated back in 2012. Actually, there are 38 budgeting programmes or 50% of all gender plans at national level that have gender responsive budgeting integrated in the mid-term plans. In general terms Albania has committed 38.5 million ALL or 7.2% of the total budget in gender specific objectives, compared to only 2.3% in 2012. This progress shows the level of understanding as well as commitment towards gender equality and integration in the actual budget programmes. However these are funds that address gender gaps and inequalities in all sectors such as health, education, agriculture etc. This is a good start, but what can be further done is an analysis that how much this budget addresses the real gender gaps in each of the sectors. While we have a good legal and institutional framework to budget for gender equality, a more thorough gender analysis is needed both at national and local level and together with gender focal points to identify those gaps that have the greatest impact and not simply actions that address minor challenges.

A future challenge is the monitoring of expenditures. Albania has progressed in planning for the gender responsive budgeting but has not been able to monitor the actual expenditures before recently and more specifically this year when the Ministry of Finance that leads the work in this sector together with the Ministry of Health have made operational the Albanian Financial

Management Information System. As a result, for the first time the monitoring of the actual expenditure of the 7.2% of the planned budget will be made possible.

At the closure of her presentation, Ms. Çela emphasized that apart from the Gender Responsive Budgeting other key mechanisms are being utilized but need to be strengthened for a more coordinated and meaningful process such as participatory budgeting which is part of the legal framework but needs to be monitored how is implemented. Social audits, public hearings especially at the local level that from one side shall increase the awareness and the empowerment of local communities and especially women and girls to demand accountability on how budgets are distributed and their impact on women and girls and from the other to ensure institutional responsiveness towards these demands. For these mechanisms to be fully functional a number of key actors such as CSOs, monitoring institutions but also the Parliament can be engaged to monitor the real impact of budgets in addressing gender gaps and supporting achievement of gender equality in different sectors.

The key word of the next panelist was focused specifically on the importance of women's participation in decision making. **Ms. Edlira Çepani, the Executive Director of the Equality in Decision Making** NGO, confirmed the progress that Albania has made with reference to women political participation and representations as also captured by different progress reports. She presented a brief history and some statistics with reference to progress of women representation at national level from 2.1 back in 1994 to 30% with the last parliamentary elections, as well as with very low representation before 2003 with 4% to in 43.6% after the 2019 local elections

Ms. Çepani highlighted that it is very important to include in these discussions the local government given that it is there where critical decisions are taken impacting communities and local government is also responsible for natural resources management. She noted that their work is focused a lot at the local level and local governance representatives very often show lack of understanding on why gender equality needs to be integrated also in issues that are related to natural resource management. They still lack understanding that gender equality is closely related to any aspect that involves the quality of life of citizens. Local government representatives still think that gender issues are relevant only for social services and does not have any connection with environment, rural development, local economic development, water management, public security, forests, pastures or similar resources. Women and men are differently impacted by environment, climate change and other issues related to water management. As a result, except for women's participation, it is important to aim for full integration of gender in all aspects related to management of natural resources.

Ms. Çepani emphasized that they work with local government focused exactly on gender integration and help them understand that the way they offer services manage natural resources and how they manage their communities should enable equal access for women and men and create equal opportunities for their voices to be heard on how all these issues shall be addressed. Women and girls process 80% of the food and are thus closely linked to water resource management due to their gender roles. That is why it is critical for them to be part of policy making as well as decision making in these areas. Ms. Çepani informed that they work with 56 Alliances of Women Councilors to support both women empowerment in decision

making as well as gender equality integration in all local strategies and policies including in the management of natural resources. Specific focus shall be given to the situation analysis based on sex disaggregated data to identify causes and the different impact to women and men from the lack of access in natural resources management. We are still far from the needed standard in these aspects, but some work has been done to at least increase awareness on the need to integrate gender in these undertakings from the local government. She reiterated that for these policies and strategies to be effective of course we always need to consider and review budgets to enable their implementation. That is why Equality in Decision Making also monitors the local budgets and plans to identify and integrate gender initiatives. We are still in the first steps but it is important that the need to integrate gender and implement a gender responsive budgeting is being perceived, understood and also implemented at the local level.

Ms. Çepani lastly shared their experience in supporting women participation through different tools from public hearings by encouraging local representatives to have equal participation of women and men to the selection of the team of experts that will work on strategies and policies to have also gender dimension integrated.

The next panelist was **Ms. Mirela Arqimandriti, Executive Director of Gender Alliance for Development**, a very experienced NGO working for more than two decades on gender equality and women empowerment. She emphasized the fact that women especially those from remote or rural areas are still facing numerous challenges due to lack in access to water, energy and how it is consumed as well as lack of dedicated budgets. Ms. Arqimandriti noted that women councilors need to be stronger and have a stronger voice as women are almost no present at the local decision making when it comes to discussions related to water, energy, wood or other natural resources. These impacts also their ability to process and ensure food for their families as a main obligation deriving from their gender roles. While water and energy are very important aspects included in the EU GAP II 2021-2025 and other international instruments like SDGs, Albania is very behind in these sectors for proper gender issues integration.

Ms. Arqimandriti noted that there is a lot to be done in these sectors for gender issues. She recommended that if it would be possible through this project to intervene in all local units and municipalities that are planning interventions in the water or energy sectors to ensure proper and full participation of women in important decisions that are related to local investments. One critical issue for example that Alliances of Women Councilors can do is to advocate at local level for running water in schools and especially building separate and clean restrooms for girls and boys. She also noted that if we are to consider Albania as a touristic country, critical investments are needed for the waste management and sewage discharge. Women have proven to be generally more receptive and sensitive to these issues so their participation is critical.

The last panelist of the first session, **Dr. Ermira Danaj, Gender Equality Expert**, reiterated the importance of all the issues raised by the panelists. She more specifically referred to a recent gender analysis that she and Ms. Arqimandriti have conducted in collaboration with the Albanian government. Ms. Danaj highlighted that the majority of sectorial strategies lack

gender perspective. We are trying to talk about gender mainstreaming, but this doesn't exist in the majority of analyzed sectoral strategies. The expert highlighted that there is still the perception that gender issues are related only to certain topics while we know that there are no topics that are 'immune' to gender perspective. Ms. Danaj brought an example when back in 2005 in a similar analysis all government representatives didn't see the link to gender and budgeting and finances while as it was discussed here today there is quite a connection. The same understanding and maybe resistance we see today for gender in nexus sectors. This understanding impacts the different access, utilization, contribution, and benefits from the natural resources. As a result, we shall not wait until time comes. The time to act is now This is because the administration machinery will need more efforts to understand and reflect gender in these sectors too.

The second session was closed over the predicted time and after a quick coffee break the last session focused on specific interventions.

11:40 – 12:40 SESSION III

Relevant interventions and lessons learned from key actors

This session had four panelists from different international organizations that work in nexus sectors. The purpose was to bring different and positive experiences in integrating gender perspective in projects that work on areas related to nexus sectors.

The first panelist was **Ms. Elvita Kabashi, Programme Analyst, UNDP**. She noted that these topics are quite challenging as they are both intersectoral. While at the beginning of their work they predicted challenges in integrating environment and climate change issues in policy making when they started to work on gender issues within the project, they noted several challenges. Ms. Kabashi emphasized that the basis of the biggest conflicts worldwide is on the management of natural resources especially when we refer to water and its need for all vital sectors. Being part of the sub-region of Western Balkans we are very similar with neighboring countries and our natural resources are very similar they also are very interlinked, interdependent, so we cannot assign them borders. Thus, while working in these areas it is important to view our interventions not only from the local perspective at national and local level, but also from the cross-border management. There are a number of challenges in management of these resources, so UNDP's focus together with GWP has been to establish sustainable structures for the good management of these natural resources. Our experience has been mainly in the sustainable management of two cross-border rivers Drin and Vjosa as two main resources for water, energy and tourism as well as eco-tourism that Albania can gradually offer.

The approach that the programme used was twofold: evaluation of the situation and action plans on one hand and incentives for good practices for the environment protection, natural resources management and climate change on the other. The identification of the gender indicator was challenging. It aimed to identify all the agencies under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism mainly the ones that deal with natural resource management.

Through an evaluation questionnaire but also other methods the objective was to evaluate the gender equality index in these agencies and how gender was integrated in the implementation policies. The result of this work included some recommendations on how to further ensure gender integration. But, was also an eye-opening intervention for everyone working in these sectors. Indicatively, a ratio of 91% men with 9% women represented in these institutions is but one characteristic example of the findings which helped shape other interventions especially the ones focused on youth to advocate for increased inclusion of girls for example in information booths in touristic areas such as in national parks of Dajt, Karaburun Llogara and Divjake Karavasta.

Another area where the programme is focusing is budgeting for climate change where they are trying to understand how they can integrate gender in these actions. They are actually preparing an action plan for climate change and gender integration both at national and local level and aim to support also the implementation. Some good practices that they have identified and have tried to support, and upgrade have a focus on gender inclusion and information on environment, natural and genetical resources. They have identified some women networks and NGOs that have knowledge on monitoring and policy making platforms on issues related to environment and gender and social issues. They have identified these practices in Shkoder, Lezhe, Malesi e Madhe and Puke and wanted to understand the access to environment information as well as knowledge on topics such as good governance and protection of natural resources.

Another area where the project is focused in supporting women engagement is the protection of genetical resources. In different regions of Albania women are in the front line of collecting these genetical resources such as medicinal plant or aromatic plants. As a result, they have supported the whole process not only in utilization but especially in protection and conservation given that these are exhaustible resources.

Another sector where women participate, but their involvement is not visible is fishing and especially artisanal fishing. Given that UNDP promotes and supports artisanal fishing especially in the marine protected areas and the only protected marine natural park that we have Karaburun Sazani. We wanted to understand and promote the role of women and make their work visible so that the challenges they face are known and supported or addressed.

A last example of intervention was related to renewable solar energy. Given this was mainly on the areas that were promoted and exposed as natural tourism, women were the first to be faced with the challenge of offering services where the energy or access to water is lacking through alternative methods that are friendly to environment, we have tried to support many families and specifically women that faced challenges in offering such services.

At the end of her presentation, Ms. Kabashi noted that these are ongoing processes and as such she called on a stronger collaboration and establishing of networks. In their previous work they aimed to include gender focal points from the relevant line ministries, but due to the institutional changes this mechanism didn't function any longer and it was difficult to continue collaborating. At local level they also aimed to promote access in decision making, information

and knowledge of women through their programme targeting local level. She invited all the participants for continuous collaboration through a common agenda that integrates gender issues and natural resource management.

The next panelist was from **GIZ, Ms Irida Haxhi Gender Specialist**, on behalf of Ms. Adela Llatja, Programme Gender Analyst, GIZ. She informed that all GIZ projects have gender mainstreaming component which is also represented by a gender focal point person in each of the projects that are responsible for the gender analysis and reporting. For today's workshop she specifically focused on the project for water management where women play a key role in management and conservation. She introduced some statistics and provided information on how women and men use water and their level of participation in employment in the water sector. She emphasized that the majority of employees in these sectors especially in management are men including in decision making positions. She informed that GIZ has done considerable work in planning at both national and local level for training, PR and business plans and gender sensitive language for this sector. More specifically she briefed on the Gender Action Plan that was prepared focusing specifically in women and girls in the water sector with different components from training, campaigns and legal revisions.

The floor was then given to **Ms. Ms. Julie Jiyong Nam, Climate Change Specialist, FAO**. FAO together with UN Women have just initiated the implementation of a joint project to address Women Farmer issues in the agriculture sector. She noted that women's contribution in agriculture sector is very significant with 54% employed women in this sector but this contribution remains highly invisible due to high levels of informality with 84% being women family workers. They are negatively affected from the existing gender pay gap in agriculture sector, their over representation as unpaid family worker and limited access to agriculture inputs and limited farming opportunities compare to men farmers. The challenges that women face when it comes to establishing their roles in the agri-food value chain and ensuring their economic security beyond the farm area are limited to the lack of financial support, weak access to secure land rights, limited understanding and knowledge on which business are profitable, and limited labor force availability. Women have shown to be more vulnerable than men to climate change impact in agriculture sectors as these changes may reduce the productivity which at the end affects their family wellbeing.

Ms. Nam explained that women and men have different experiences and cope with climate change in a different way. Usually, men tend to migrate to urban areas for higher paid jobs, while women tend to remain in the community because of the high dependance with the family members. Women's access to agricultural services is also very limited in Albania with only 5% and this is related to gender stereotypes related to participation, improper venues, time of the meetings and lack of attention to different concerns that affect women. Women also lack financial support, networking and men domination of information creates barriers for women access to financial and subsidiary schemes of support. They are also considered as 'wife of farm head' instead of being considered as a farmer in their own right. Women depend financially more on men also due to lack or loss of job opportunities compared to men.

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and strengthen their role and contribution to rural development. The project will be implemented in the region of Shkoder, Vlore and Gjirokaster in line with priorities of the Albanian government and the Italian Agency of cooperation that has supported this project. It will contribute to sustainable economic development to rural women and their communities, increase their income and enable them to exercise their economic, social and environmental rights. Support to rural women entrepreneurship can support economic growth of the rural area. That is why favorable environment, support mechanisms, training opportunities and knowledge are important. Ms. Nam also noted the importance of the involvement of CSO in supporting this process.

She closed by noting that this understanding will facilitate sensible gender policies and could help improve sustainable and more inclusive adaptation strategies. For this, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development should be technically supported for gender sensitive policy formulation and implementation. Women entrepreneurship should also be supported by coaching and information to improve their access to finance and capacity of other services. That is why the project has an important component on knowledge production and dissemination. Lessons learned will be shared with the Albanian government as well as development partners.

The final panelist was **Ms. Anila Aliaj, LED project and Gender Advisor for CNVP Albania**. She briefed participants on the work and the NGOs she is working with and the 'big question' they had to address on what these issues and sectors have to do with gender issues. They have been working for more than a decade and have managed to increase women's participation at local meetings and village commissions where they worked from almost zero to 30% or 40%. She noted that as per her experience, the key factor that impacts women is economic empowerment which will support the agenda towards gender equality at all levels. Women participation is not key only in the administration, but also at the local level. Ms. Aliaj shared her experience in the sector of forests which is the area where they are mostly focused together with recently medicinal plants. They have operated in 10 Qarqe and there are more than 250 organization of forest utilization that are key partners to work with on gender issues.

The programme has prepared a number of analyses to understand and evaluate the access of women in participation, in natural resources, in their utilization, what is the role of women in the process of collecting medicinal plants if they are collectors, processors, sellers and what can be some mechanisms that can facilitate their work. She noted that usually women have little awareness on their rights. They also need to have the right authority which is empowered through different trainings and information sharing. This information should be relevant to help the areas of their work such as what type of plants they need to cultivate given that often they produced plants that had no interest for the market. We help to build network and sign contracts with buyers so that their production has a guaranteed market.

Women lack support to mechanize their work. They conduct all the processes themselves and are not organized or do not have any work segments mechanized so that they can process things faster. The project is supporting with this as well as right environment where they can process and conserve medicinal plants.

Finally, she called for greater synergies and collaboration between all the actors that were part of this workshop or broader so that good practices can be exchanged, and positive experiences sustained.

The GWP-Med Senior Gender Advisor, Ms. Shalsi invited participants for questions and comments. One of the things that was noted is the lack of men participants which is typical when the focus of the meeting is on gender regardless of the fact that the main topics were related to nexus sectors as well. Participants noted that more work needs to be done in this direction given that men still do not understand that gender equality is for both genders. Another comment was with reference to GIZ work where women participation had a striking difference between their areas of work. And the reason for this was the dedicated training and project support to increase women's participation.

At the end Ms. Shalsi briefed the participants on the next steps for the Gender Assessment in the nexus sectors and invited all to continue collaboration on these topics in the future.