

River Vjosa in Albania is one of the few undammed rivers in Europe and it makes it last free-flowing river in Europe as environmentalists say. It is also one of the longest transboundary rivers in the Balkans and it has the second-largest river basin in Albania, at 681,000 hectares. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO launched a project for the effective and improved management of Vjosa valley's natural resources and expressed determination to support farmers and authorities through sustainable development.

FAO pursues Sustainable Development Goals

The endeavor is aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goals concerning life on land and climate action, the UN agency said. The SDG Acceleration Fund provided the funding, with contributions by the government of Norway. FAO started the activities under its region-wide umbrella programme on managing natural resources sustainably, under a changing climate.

Because the waterway has not been subjected to large damming or channeling schemes, it is considered one of the rare remaining natural flow regimes in Europe, giving the Vjosa not only national, but also international importance, the announcement adds.

Agrotourism, product promotion complement agricultural solutions

New approaches for the management of natural resources will be introduced with a strong focus on sustainable land use, improved soil fertility and combating land and soil pollution and degradation, FAO revealed and said it would allow farmers, extension services and institutions to better cope with the climate change impact on agriculture and disaster events.

To support agrotourism and sustainable production and consumption in target areas, traditional local, organic and geographical indications products will be identified and promoted through climate-smart agriculture and integrated pest management, depending on the pandemic situation in Albania, according to project goals.

Climate-friendly approach

"Besides the above-mentioned activities, FAO will also collaborate with other United Nations agencies, under the lead of the United Nations Development Programme," said Raimund Jehle, FAO Representative in Albania. "These will support environment and climate-friendly initiatives in agrobiodiversity and rural tourism in Vjosa valley - Zagori, among others, through knowledge sharing with similar successful initiatives implemented from other areas of Albania."

The project will contribute to the implementation of Albania's national strategy for the sustainable development of tourism 2019-2023, where Vjosa valley and Zagori is one of the priority areas. It will also enhance the Integrated Rural Development Program - 100 Village Program, which coordinates multisectoral developmental interventions in 100 selected villages with a high potential for socio-economic and rural development and agrotourism and the focus is also on the environment and nature as well as cultural heritage. It is also aligned with the United Nations Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017-2021.

Dam projects threaten Vjosa

The Vjosa or Aoös originates in northwestern Greece near Metsovo. Cities and towns including Ersekë, Përmet, Gjirokastër, Tepelenë, Mallakastër, Fier and Vlorë are located in the Vjosa catchment in Albania.

Environmentalists refer to the Vjosa as the last free-flowing river in Europe. It is threatened by a large dam project and plans to install dozens of hydropower plants on the river and its tributaries. Nongovernmental organizations are running a massive campaign to abandon them, within a regional initiative to prevent such threats.

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