# Impact of Large Hydro Power Plants on Population in Upper Svaneti – Presentation of the Research Findings

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On July 18, EWMI ACCESS Grantee – Human Rights Monitoring and Education Center (EMC) presented preliminary findings of the study on the impact of construction of the Khudoni and Nenskra Hydro-Power Plants (HPP) on the population in Upper Svaneti. The study reviews legal documents related to construction of these HPPs and reveals major flaws and challenges of the Georgian energy policy. The study also provides in-depth analysis of the impact of these projects on human and social rights of the local population, including the property rights and the right to adequate housing, the right to public space, freedom of expression and others.

The study found the following drawbacks:

- There is no strategic approach/policy for planning and constructing large HPPs in Georgia.
- The process of planning and signing agreements with investors is closed to public.
- There are no transparent criteria for setting tariffs.
- Certain investors enjoy more benefits and support from the government than others (e.g. the Georgian government ensures all potential risks related to construction of the Nenskra HPP and grants the investor tax benefits).
- There are no clear and strict criteria for selection of investors – little is known about the founders and the track record of the "Trans Electrica Ltd" – company

registered in British Virgin Islands, responsible for construction of the Khudoni HPP (one of the main strategic projects, as stated by the government).
- The government does not follow unified standards when drafting terms and conditions for hydro-power projects: e.g. the Nenskra HPP project was redesigned in 2019, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia exempted the renewed project from the obligation of conducting a new Environmental Impact Assessment.

According to EMC, the Nenskra and Khudoni HPP projects will significantly affect local population, as they will no longer be able to use public resources (forests, pastureland). The government does not recognize the notion of traditional, communal property which is deeply rooted in the Svaneti region. Another problem is related to resettlement of population residing in the construction-affected area. Distributing compensations is the sole responsibility of the investor. The government cannot provide any guarantee due absence of relevant laws and regulations.

The study also found challenging to obtain public information about the HPP projects. Major parts of the agreements between the investor and the Government of Georgia are trade secrets and closed for public. People do not have full picture of the planned activities.

Based on the study findings, EMC drafted policy recommendations and submitted them to relevant policy-makers.

*From January 2019, EWMI ACCESS supports Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC) and Green Alternative's joint project in Upper Svaneti to protect citizen's interests during construction of the large Hydro Power Plants. EMC provides legal assistance to interested citizens and conducts legal analysis of the HPP projects taking place in the area. Green Alternative provides informational support to affected citizens and explores opportunities for developing sustainable initiatives to improve well-being of the target communities.*

*Earlier this year, EMC and Green Alternative, on behalf of the local population, filed a lawsuit with the Tbilisi City Court against the Nenskra Hydro-Power Plant (HPP) project. The dispute concerns the construction of hydro power plant with the installed capacity of 280 MW on the territory of Chuberi and Nakra villages in Svaneti. In the lawsuit EMC and Green Alternative demand the annulment of a decision of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, exempting the renewed Nenskra HPP project from the obligation of conducting a new environmental impact assessment.*