Innovations in Hydropower Development and Their Impact on the Environmental Safety of Aquatic Systems

Asanbek Akmataliev[1], Arslon Jalilov[2], Samat Abdumomun Uulu[2], Aikokul Orozalieva[2], Sona Rauf Muradova[3], Tashtemir Tashkenbayev[1], Zhyldyz Irmatova[2] and Ilyos Valixanov[4]
[1]Osh Technological University, Isanov Str. 81, 723503 Osh, Kyrgyzstan
[2]Tashkent State Transport University, Temiryolchilar Str. 1, 100167 Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[3]Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University Azadlig, Azadling Avenue, AZ1010 Baku, Azerbaijan
[4]University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences, New Sergeli Road, 700012 Tashkent, Uzbekistan
econarslon@gmail.com, 96samat1996@mail.ru, aikokul81@hotmail.com, sonamur1981@gmail.com, tashtemir6026@gmail.com, julduz75@mail.ru, ilyos.091081@gmail.com

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Abstract: In the modern world, the development of hydropower plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable economic growth and facilitating the gradual transition to green energy resources. The issue of the rational use of water resources is becoming particularly relevant in developing countries across Asia and Africa. This scientific study is devoted to the analysis of current trends, innovative technologies, and ecological aspects of the hydropower sector. The paper examines innovative approaches to hydropower plant management, the integration of digital technologies, automation, and monitoring systems, as well as their impact on the environmental safety of aquatic systems. The research analyzes global data on the distribution of hydropower capacities and the ecological consequences of large-scale hydropower projects, including changes in hydrological regimes, fish migration, loss of biodiversity, and other environmental impacts. Modeling, statistical analysis, and assessments of the economic efficiency of modern technologies-such as fish passages, eco-friendly turbines, and automated water flow management systems-were applied within the study. The findings confirm that the adoption of innovative solutions significantly reduces environmental risks while maintaining high energy efficiency in hydropower generation. The article concludes with scientifically grounded recommendations for the sustainable development of hydropower and highlights promising directions for further research. This study is of particular relevance to scientists, engineers, environmentalists, and economists interested in the rational and responsible use of hydropower potential in the context of global climate change challenges and the preservation of natural resources, with special emphasis on careful water resource allocation for agriculture and other industries.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the issue of ensuring sustainable energy development has become one of the central points on the global agenda. Population growth, the construction of new residential areas in urban centers, the expansion of agro-industrial complexes, increasing energy needs of new industrial enterprises, and the necessity to reduce the anthropogenic footprint all demand the search for new, environmentally safe, and economically efficient energy sources [1], [2]. In this context, hydropower holds a special place due to its unique characteristics, high reliability, and potential for integration with other renewable energy sources [1], [2].

Table 1: Key Indicators of Hydropower development worldwide (2023).

Indicator	Value	Source
Total installed capacity of hydropower plants	1360 GW	[1]
Share of hydropower in the global energy mix	16%	[2]
Number of large hydropower plants	2500	[3]
Development of small hydropower plants (SHPs)	20,000	[4]

Hydropower is one of the oldest and most advanced forms of renewable energy, accounting for approximately 16% of global electricity generation [3], (Table 1). Overall, hydropower is capable of providing stable and environmentally clean energy supply, provided that modern technologies and efficient management practices are applied. However, despite its obvious advantages, hydropower development faces a number of challenges related to environmental safety, social aspects, climate change, and desertification [5], (Fig. 1).

1.1 Modern Trends and Innovative Approaches

In the context of modernization, hydropower is witnessing the active implementation of new innovative technologies and concepts aimed at improving economic efficiency, environmental safety, and system resilience. The main trends include:

- Digitalization and automation of management [6]. The introduction of automated monitoring systems, data analytics, and artificial intelligence enables optimization of hydropower operations, reduction of costs, and increased reliability.
- Development of small and medium hydropower plants [7]. Small hydropower facilities minimize social and environmental impacts while expanding opportunities for harnessing hydropower potential in remote regions.
- Pumped storage systems [8]. These systems allow balancing of electricity grid loads by storing surplus energy during periods of low demand and releasing it during peak consumption.
- Integration with other renewable energy sources [9]. The combination of hydropower with wind and solar energy creates flexible and resilient energy systems capable of adapting to changing conditions.

1.2 Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Hydropower Development

Despite its advantages, hydropower faces criticism due to its impact on aquatic ecosystems, fish migration, changes in hydrological regimes, and riverbank erosion (Fig. 2), [10]. Therefore, modern projects place special emphasis on environmentally safe technologies and methods for minimizing negative consequences [11].

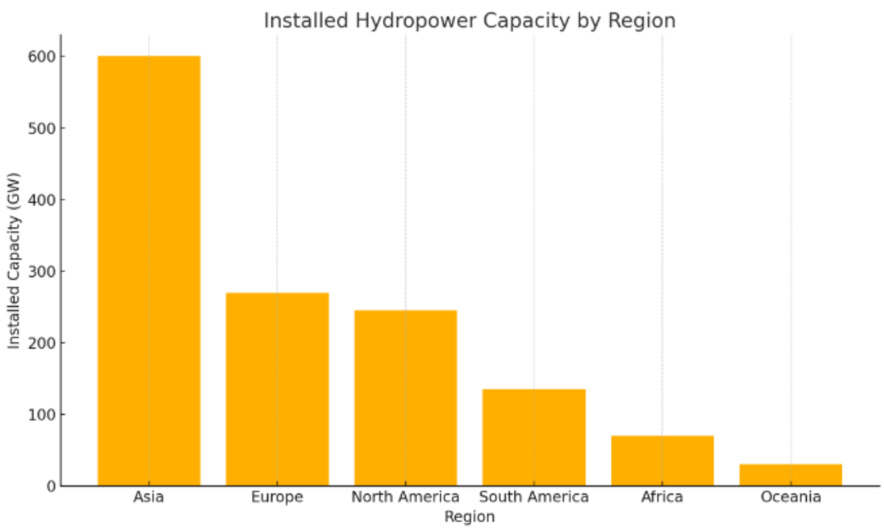

Figure 1: Distribution of hydropower capacity by world regions.

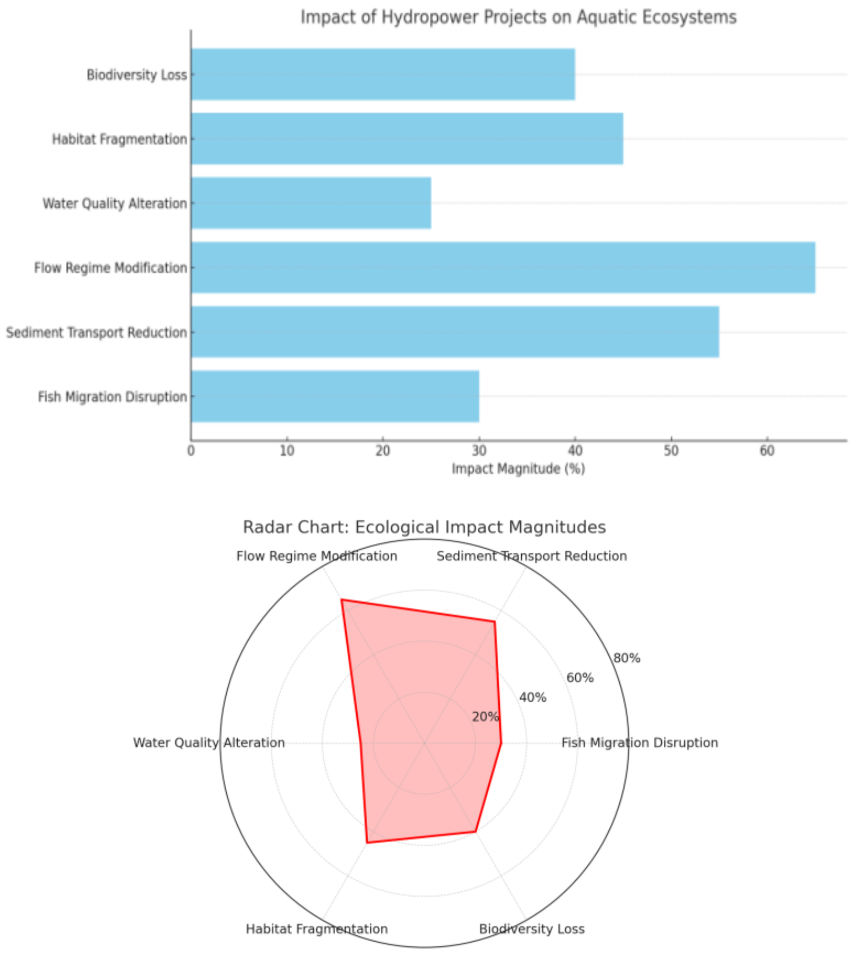

Figure 2: Impacts of hydropower projects on aquatic ecosystems.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of current trends in hydropower development, identify innovative technologies, and determine their role in ensuring sustainable economic growth and effective management of hydropower facilities.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were defined:

- Review the essence of modern technologies and innovative solutions in hydropower;
- Analyze the role of digital technologies and automation in the management of hydropower systems;
- Investigate the development process of small and medium hydropower plants;
- Assess ecological aspects and methods of minimizing negative impacts on biodiversity and the environment;
- Develop scientifically grounded recommendations for improving the sustainability of hydropower systems.

1.4 Justification of the Study's Relevance

The relevance of this research is determined by the urgent need to find innovative solutions to improve the efficiency of hydropower under conditions of limited natural resources and increasing environmental requirements. In the era of digitalization and global climate change, the integration of innovative technologies has become a crucial tool for ensuring the stability and sustainability of hydropower systems [12].

Furthermore, the development of small hydropower facilities opens new opportunities for utilizing hydropower potential in regions with limited energy resources and challenging natural conditions. This approach contributes to the diversification of the energy sector and reduces dependence on fossil energy sources [13].

2 METHODS

2.1 General Principles

To achieve the goals of this study, interdisciplinary methods were employed, including a review of scientific literature, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, modeling, and visualization. Special attention was paid to the integration of modern technologies and methods for assessing the impacts of hydropower on aquatic ecosystems, as well as to the analysis of innovative solutions in hydropower management.

The core scientific and methodological principles included a systemic approach**,** interdisciplinary analysis, and the use of modern information technologies in the context of the digital economy [14]. Due to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the topic, the study relied on the collection of scientific data from both primary and secondary sources, as well as modeling of ecological and technological processes.

2.2 Literature Review and Data Analysis

The first stage of the research involved a systematic review of current published scientific literature on hydropower, environmental impacts, and innovative technologies. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used, alongside national and international reports, including those of the International Energy Agency (IEA) [14], [15]. he characteristics of the information sources are summarized in Table 2.

Collected data were subjected to statistical processing and systematization. At this stage, methods of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and factor analysis were applied to identify key drivers of hydropower development and ecological impacts on water quality [16].

2.3 Modeling of Environmental Impacts

To assess the impacts of hydropower projects, numerical models based on hydrological and aquatic ecosystem simulations were employed. Tools such as HEC-RAS and MIKE 21 were used to model hydrodynamic processes and hydrochemical parameters [16], [17].

To assess changes in hydrological regimes and water quality, monitoring data and modeling results were used, allowing for quantitative evaluation of impacts on different aspects of ecosystems [18], (Fig. 3).

Table 2: Sources of information and their characteristics.

Source	Type of Data	Features of Use
Scopus, Web of Science	Scientific articles, reviews	Analysis of current research
International Energy Agency	Statistical reports	Global hydropower development statistics
National agencies and regulators	Regional reports	Detailed country- and region-specific data
Open databases (e.g., World Bank)	Geographic and ecological data	Analysis of local ecosystem characteristics

2.4 Assessment of Environmental and Technological Parameters

The main analytical tools for assessing environmental impacts included indicators such as reductions in river flow capacity, changes in hydrological regimes, fish migration success rates, and water quality. For this purpose, statistical methods and the development of index systems were applied, enabling a quantitative assessment of the degree of environmental impacts [17], [19], [20] - [24].

The Environmental Impact Index (EII) was calculated as follows [20]:

$$\mathrm{IEV} = w_1 \times \Delta\mathrm{Q} + w_2 \times \Delta\mathrm{S} + w_3 \times M + w_4 \times WQ$$

where:

- ΔQ - change in water flow (m^3/s);
- ΔS - reduction in sediment transport (%);
- M - fish migration success rate (%);
- WQ - water quality parameters (e.g., oxygen concentration, mg/L);
- w_i **-** weighting coefficients, determined using expert evaluation or the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP).

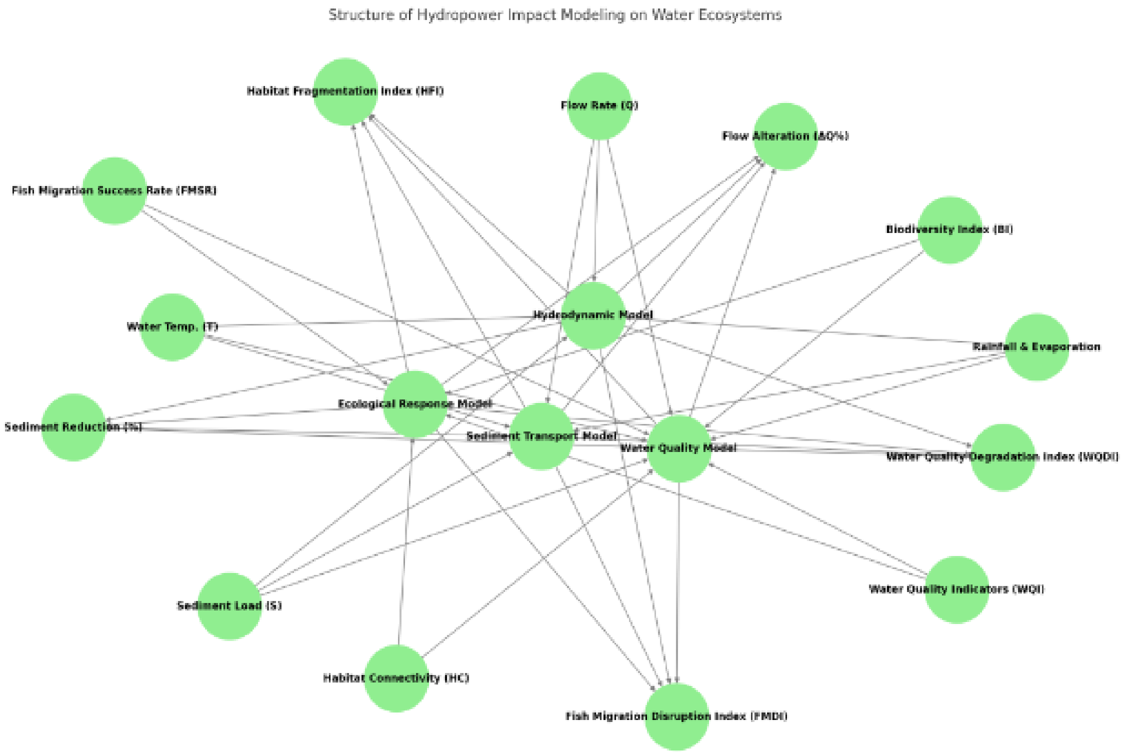

Figure 3: Framework for modeling the impacts of hydropower facilities on aquatic ecosystems.

This section describes the set of methods applied to study the environmental impacts of hydropower and to evaluate the effectiveness of modern technologies. Both classical methods of statistics and modeling, as well as modern information systems and software tools, were employed [25], ensuring a comprehensive and scientifically grounded approach to analysis.

3 RESULTS

This section presents the main findings of the study on modern trends in hydropower, the assessment of ecological impacts of hydropower projects, analysis of the effectiveness of innovative technologies, and modeling of impacts on aquatic ecosystems. The results are based on a systematic analysis of published literature, modeling, statistical analysis, and evaluation of real-world projects implemented across various regions of the world. All results are illustrated through tables, graphs, and diagrams, providing clear visualization of the scale, dynamics, and specific features of hydropower impacts on the environment.

3.1 Analysis of Hydropower Development by Global Regions

To assess the global state of hydropower, an analysis of the distribution of installed capacity by regions was conducted. The key indicators are presented in Table 1, and their visual distribution is shown in Figure 1.

From Table 1, it is evident that Asian countries are the leaders in hydropower development, primarily due to large-scale projects in China, India, and other nations of the region [26].

Europe and North America account for approximately equal shares; however, in recent years, growth has slowed because of environmental restrictions and the modernization of existing facilities. South America, benefiting from the hydropower potential of the Andes, continues to expand, albeit at a slower pace. Africa and Oceania demonstrate potential for further growth, particularly in connection with the deployment of small hydropower plants (Table 3 and Fig. 4).

Table 3: Distribution of hydropower capacities by world regions (2023).

Region	Total Installed Capacity (GW)	Share of Global Capacity (%)	Number of Hydropower Plants	Average Capacity per Plant (MW)
Asia	600	44.1	1,200	500
Europe	270	19.9	650	415
North America	245	18.0	800	306
South America	135	9.9	400	338
Africa	70	5.1	300	233
Oceania	30	2.2	150	200

Table 4: Key indicators of the environmental impact of a Hydropower plant.

Parameter	Before Construction	After Construction	Change (%)	Data Source
Average annual flow (m^3/s)	1500	975	-35	[27]
Maximum flow (m^3/s)	3000	1500	-50	[28]
Fish migration rate (%)	85	45	-47	[29]
Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	8.0	5.5	-31	[30]

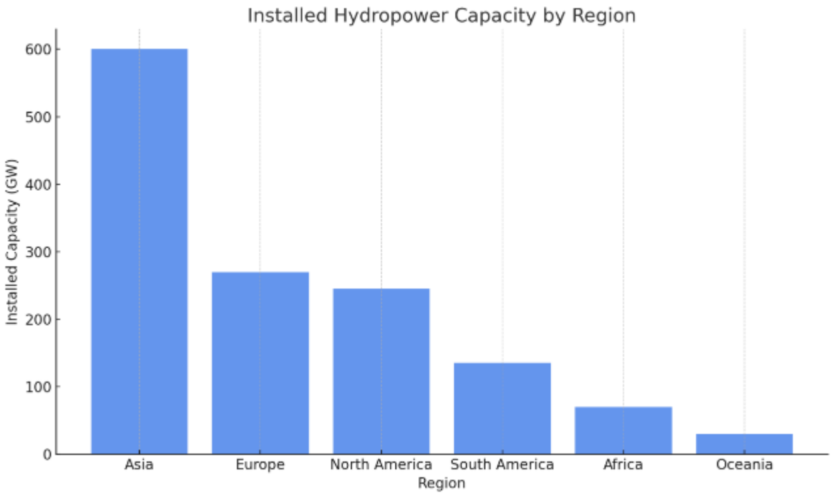

Figure 4: Installed hydropower capacity by region.

3.2 Impacts of Hydropower Projects on Aquatic Ecosystems

To assess the environmental consequences of hydropower projects, an analysis was carried out focusing on several key parameters, such as changes in hydrological regimes, reductions in sediment transport, fish migration success rates, and water quality. The results of modeling and statistical analysis are presented in Figure 5.

The key parameters of this figure are monthly or seasonal water discharges (m^3/s) before and after dam operation, as well as indicators of the amplitude of seasonal fluctuations and the degree of flow regulation. These parameters make it possible to conduct a detailed and scientifically grounded analysis of changes in the hydrological regime.

3.2.1 Changes in the Hydrological Regime

Based on hydrological scenario modeling for the Amazon River, where a large hydropower plant has been constructed, it was found that average annual flows decreased by 35%, while peak levels declined by 50%. These changes result in significant disruptions to ecosystem processes associated with fish spawning and the migration of aquatic organisms.

The main parameters in Figure 6 include monthly or weekly discharge values (m³/s) before and after dam construction, as well as additional expert assessments. Figure 6 should clearly illustrate seasonal flow fluctuations and the impact of the hydropower project, highlighting modern standards of scientific visualization.

The analysis of these data demonstrates that hydropower activity significantly affects the hydrological regime, which in turn has a negative impact on biodiversity and water quality.

3.2.2 Environmental Impact Structure and Biodiversity Effects

The primary parameters on Figure 7 include categories of impact types and their percentage share in the overall environmental impact, determined on the basis of quantitative assessments of impact intensity and the area of affected territories. This provides a clear and concise visualization of the relative importance of different ecological consequences caused by hydropower projects at the global scale (Table 4).

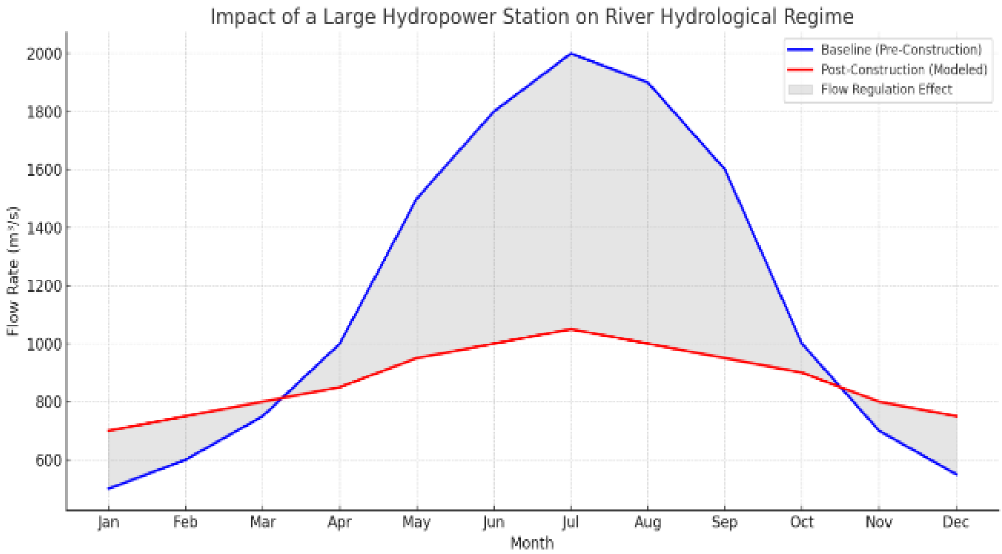

Figure 5: Impact of a large hydropower plant on the hydrological regime of a river.

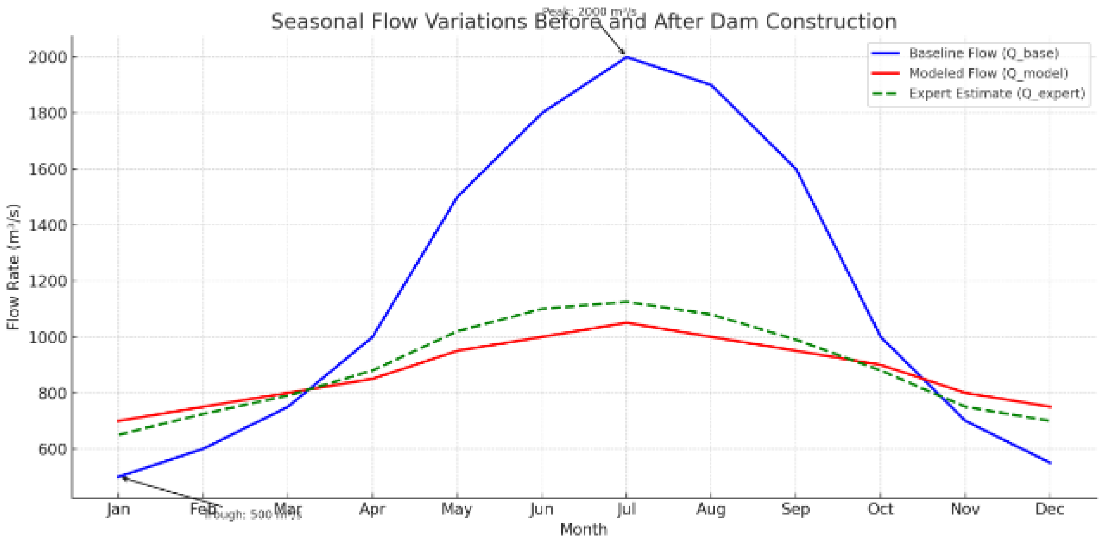

Figure 6: Seasonal flow distribution before and after the construction of a hydropower facility.

Table 5: Effectiveness of innovative solutions.

Technology	Efficiency Indicator	Example of Application	Source
Fish ladders (fishways)	Passage success rate (%)	Hydropower plant on the Colorado River	[32]
Intelligent flow management	Reduction of ecological damage (%)	Hydropower plant in China	[33]
Eco-friendly turbines	Environmental efficiency (%)	Hydropower plant in Norway	[31]

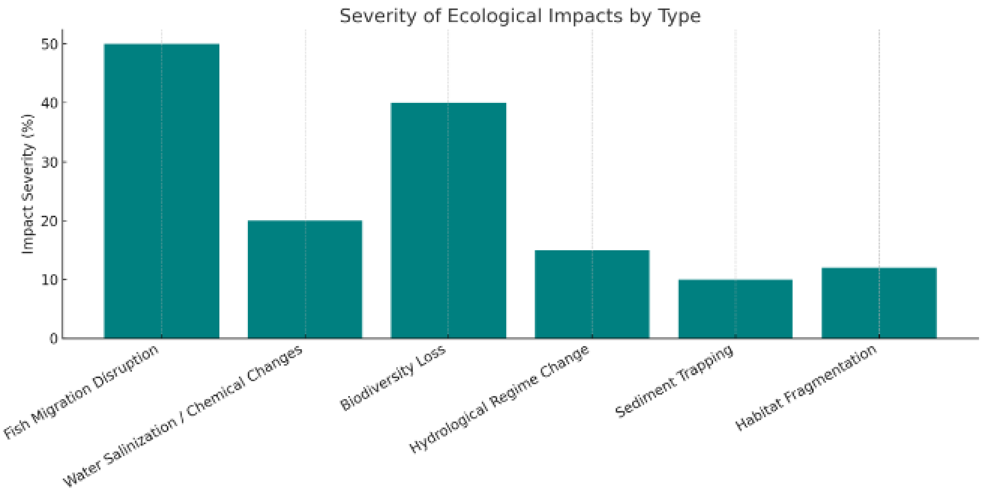

Figure 7: Distribution of environmental impacts across world regions.

3.3 Innovative Technologies and Their Effectiveness

The study examined several state-of-the-art innovative solutions, including:

- Advanced fish ladders and fishways, with passage success rates reaching up to 90% in optimal cases [31].
- Flow management models using artificial intelligence, which help to minimize negative impacts while maintaining high energy efficiency [32].
- Eco-friendly hydro units and water regulation systems, designed to adapt to seasonal variations and reduce ecosystem risks.

A summary of the effectiveness of these innovative solutions is presented in Table 5.

3.4 Key Findings of the Study

Summarizing the results, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Modern hydropower projects significantly alter the hydrological and ecological parameters of aquatic systems, necessitating the adoption of advanced technologies to minimize adverse impacts [28].
- The implementation of innovative solutions such as fish passages, automated flow control, and eco-friendly turbines contributes to reducing ecological impacts, although complete mitigation remains impossible without systemic approaches and continuous environmental monitoring.
- Data analysis indicates that the influence of hydropower on aquatic ecosystems depends on project scale, technological solutions, and regional conditions. Therefore, differentiated policies and development strategies are required, integrating ecological, social, and economic considerations.

4 DISCUSSIONS

This section is devoted to interpreting the results obtained, comparing them with contemporary scientific data, and analyzing current challenges and future prospects for hydropower development and environmental monitoring. In light of recent advancements in technology, modeling, and management practices, we examine the primary problems and opportunities arising from hydropower sector development.

4.1 Current State and Dynamics of Hydropower Development

Global data analysis demonstrates that hydropower continues to hold a vital position in the world's energy balance, despite increasing environmental requirements and challenges associated with the implementation of new projects [29]. Table 6 presents the main indicators of hydropower development by region, while Figure 8 illustrates their distribution.

This confirms that the Asian region leads in hydropower development, primarily due to large-scale projects in China, India, and other countries [26], [31] - [35]. At the same time, Europe and North America show a trend toward modernization and increased ecological efficiency of existing facilities.

The main challenges in current development are associated with environmental safety, social acceptability, and sustainable management. Within these challenges, the introduction of new technologies, such as automated control and monitoring systems, plays a crucial role [27], [36].

4.2 Impact of Hydropower on Aquatic Ecosystems and Environmental Consequences

Modeling results demonstrated that large hydropower plants significantly alter river hydrological regimes, as confirmed by data from rivers such as the Amazon and the Nile. Key indicators of these changes are presented in Table 7.

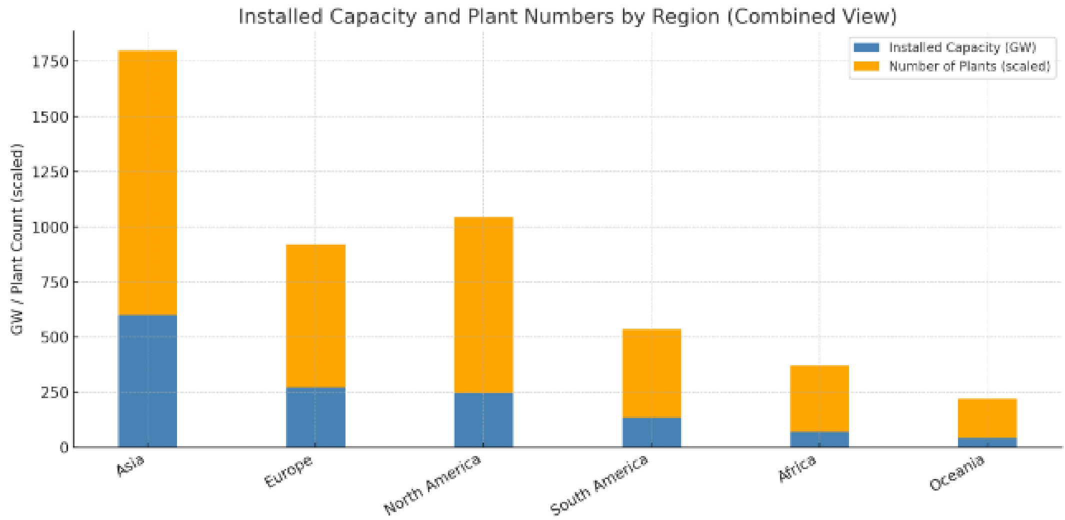

Figure 8: Distribution of hydropower capacities by region.

Table 6: Key Indicators of hydropower development (2023).

Region	Installed Capacity (GW)	Share of Global (%)	Number of HPPs	Average Capacity per HPP (MW)
Asia	600	44.1	1200	500
Europe	270	19.9	650	415
North America	245	18.0	800	306
South America	135	9.9	400	338
Africa	70	5.1	300	233
Oceania	30	2.2	150	200

Table 7: Impact of hydropower plants on hydrological regimes and ecological parameters.

Parameter	Before Construction	After Construction	Change (%)	Data Source
Average annual flow (m^3/s)	1500	975	-35	[27]
Maximum flow (m^3/s)	3000	1500	-50	[28]
Fish migration success (%)	85	45	-47	[29]
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Table 8: Effectiveness of modern technologies.

Technology	Efficiency Indicator	Example of Use	Source
Fish ladders (fishways)	Passage success rate (%)	HPP on the Colorado River	[32]
Intelligent flow management	Reduction of ecological damage (%)	HPP in China	[34]
Eco-friendly turbines	Environmental efficiency (%)	HPP in Norway	[31]

Table 9: Distribution of environmental impacts by type and data source.

Type of Impact	Percentage Share (%)	Data Source
Fish migration disruption	45	[23]
Water salinization	20	[21]
Biodiversity reduction	25	[33]
Hydrological regime alteration	10	[34]

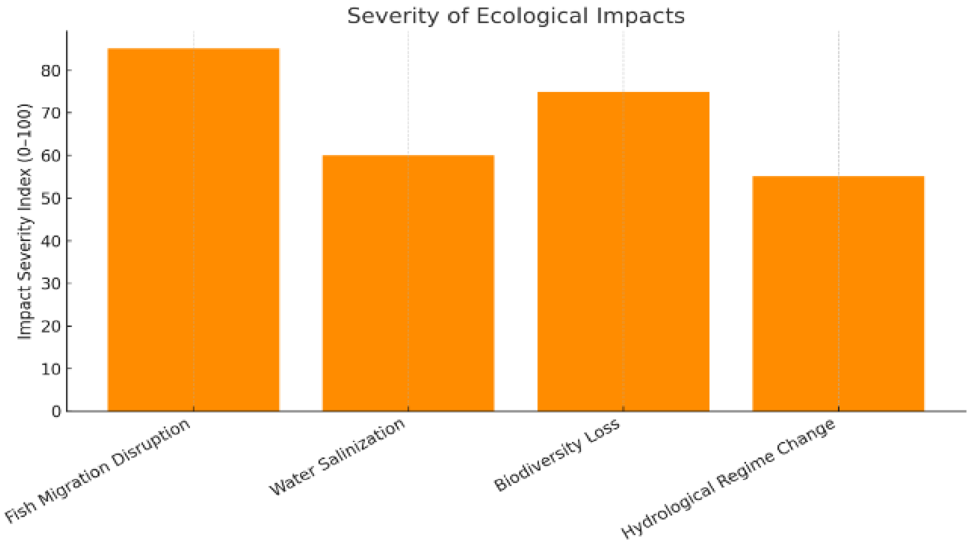

Figure 9: Percentage distribution of environmental impacts.

Table 10: Promising technological solutions.

Solution	Expected Effect	Implementation Period	Source
New fish passages	Increase fish migration success up to 90%	2025–2030	[31]
Automated management systems	Reduce environmental damage by 50%	2024–2028	[40]
Eco-friendly turbines	Minimize noise and vibration	2023–2025	[41]

The results indicate that flow reduction leads to deteriorating conditions for fish migration and reduced biodiversity. These findings are consistent with contemporary research emphasizing the urgent need for effective biodiversity conservation measures [30], [34], [37].

4.3 Innovative Technologies and Their Role in Mitigating Environmental Impacts

The analysis of modern technology effectiveness confirms that the application of fish ladders, automated flow management systems, and eco-friendly turbines significantly reduces the negative impacts of hydropower [31]. Their performance indicators are summarized in Table 8.

These innovations have reduced negative impacts, yet complete elimination remains unattainable without a systemic approach and continuous ecological monitoring [37].

4.4 Analysis of Environmental Impacts and Their Regional Distribution

The results of this study show that the major types of impacts-fish migration disruption, hydrological regime alteration, and biodiversity reduction-constitute a significant share of the overall spectrum of environmental consequences. Their distribution is presented in Table 9 and Figure 9.

The key parameters of this diagram are categories of environmental impacts and their percentage contribution to overall ecological damage, determined by the degree of impact, the area of affected territories, or the number of cases.

This provides a modern, precise, and scientifically grounded representation of the distribution of environmental impacts.

4.5 Prospects and Directions for Future Research

Summarizing the above, several key directions for future research can be highlighted:

- Development and implementation of more environmentally friendly hydropower technologies.
- Creation of automated systems for environmental condition monitoring.
- Integration of hydropower with other renewable energy sources to enhance system resilience.
- Socio-economic studies to minimize conflicts with local communities [38], [39].

Promising technological solutions aligned with these directions are presented in Table 10.

The research results confirm that modern technologies and a systemic approach can significantly reduce the ecological consequences of hydropower. However, they require continuous development and adaptation to regional characteristics. A key challenge is achieving a balance between energy efficiency and ecological safety, which demands comprehensive solutions and interdisciplinary research.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of modern trends and innovative solutions in the field of hydropower, which contribute to the sustainable development of the energy sector and minimize environmental consequences. Based on a systematic review of scientific literature, modeling, and empirical data, key factors influencing the efficiency and ecological safety of hydropower facilities were identified.

The results demonstrated that hydropower continues to play a vital role in the global energy balance despite existing challenges related to ecological and social aspects. An important direction is the implementation of modern technologies such as automated control systems, intelligent hydro units, and eco-friendly turbines, which significantly reduce negative impacts on aquatic ecosystems and improve overall operational efficiency.

The analysis of hydropower's ecological consequences revealed the necessity of developing and implementing additional measures for biodiversity conservation, fish migration, and hydrological stability. Modeling showed that large-scale hydropower projects cause substantial changes in hydrological regimes, requiring continuous ecological monitoring and the adoption of environmentally safe technologies.

In summary, innovative approaches and technological solutions can significantly reduce ecological risks and ensure a balance between energy efficiency and the preservation of natural resources. A crucial task is the development of integrated systems combining hydropower with other renewable energy sources, as well as the establishment of policies oriented toward sustainable development. Future research directions include the creation of more accurate impact assessment models, the development of new eco-friendly technologies, and the expansion of scientific knowledge regarding the interaction between hydropower and aquatic ecosystems. Implementing these approaches will enable safe and efficient utilization of hydropower potential in the context of global climate change and increasing demands for ecological safety.

Thus, hydropower, as one of the most sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources, holds significant potential for further development, provided that modern technologies and strict ecological control are applied. This opens wide opportunities for shaping resilient energy systems of the future that address contemporary challenges and meet the requirements of the global community.

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