

Notes from the First Focus Group Meeting West Bank

1. Introduction

The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ) organized the first focus group meeting in the West Bank to discuss alternative management options and their potential future impacts in the Dead Sea Basin. The meeting was held on Wednesday, January 5th, 2005 at Best Eastern Hotel in Al-Bireh. It brought together representatives of the governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the research institutions working in the field of water management as outlined in *Table 1*.

Table 1: List of Participants Who Attended the First Focus Group Meeting

Participant's Name, Institution

Kasim Abdo, Ministry of Agriculture
Azzam Tubaileh, Ministry of Agriculture
Bader Abu Zahra, Ministry of Planning
Musa Abu Gharbiyeh, Environmental Quality Authority
Zaghloul Samhan, Environmental Quality Authority
Aiman Jarrar, Palestinian Water Authority
Yousef Awayes, Palestinian Water Authority
Shaddad Attili, Negotiations Affairs Department
Ayman Rabi, Palestinian Hydrology Group
Muath Abu Sadah, House of Water & Environment
Ziad Mimi, Institute of Water Studies – Birzeit University
Thaer Jalloud, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees
Judeh Jamal, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees
Jad Isaac, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)
Khaldoun Rishmawi, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)
Abeer Safar, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ)

At the beginning of the meeting, the participants were given a brief idea about the objectives and the work plan of the research study as well as a description of the current status of the Dead Sea Basin and the driving forces affecting the future of the Basin.

2. Discussion Subjects

2.1 Defining the Problem

All the participants believed that there is a water shortage problem in the Palestinian Territories as a whole, not only because of their location within the Eastern Mediterranean region that is recognized as one of the driest and most scarce regions in the World but also due to geopolitical reasons, lack of integrated management of the

transboundary and shared water resources, and the inequitable allocation of such resources among the countries of the region. These believed that such facts have exacerbated the water scarcity problem in the region.

With respect to the Dead Sea Basin, one of the participants indicated that water management in the basin is not a technical problem that can be solved through the established conceptual and mathematical models. The unilateral management actions by the Israelis and Jordanians to exploit the Jordan River waters have reduced the flow of the Jordan River and negatively affected the Dead Sea Basin. Among those actions, is the Israeli National Water Carrier that diverts water from Lake Tiberias to Negev Desert. The participants believed that the Israelis are mainly responsible for the reduction in the flow of the Jordan River.

2.2 New Water Infrastructure

- **Red-Dead Canal**

The participants clearly indicated that the Palestinian negotiators in the technical committee that was formed to follow up the issue of the Red-Dead Canal did not sign any agreement that reflect their acceptance to the project. On the contrary the Palestinian negotiators did not reach an agreement with the Israeli and Jordanian negotiators because their requirements were not accepted. These requirements included the following:

- The Dead Sea must not be separated from the Jordan River Basin as it is part of it and any management project relevant to the Dead Sea would highly impact the Jordan River and vice versa. Therefore, all the Red-Dead Canal documents must refer to the Jordan River Basin and not only to the Dead Sea Basin and accordingly all the riparian countries including Lebanon and Syria must be notified about the project.
- The Palestinians must be identified as full riparians in the Jordan River Basin and partners with the Israelis and Jordanians in the Red-Dead Canal.

The Palestinians rejected the project in spite of their attempts to support the Jordanians without affecting their water rights and the final status negotiations with the Israelis. Their rejection was a response to the Israeli position towards considering the Palestinians as beneficiary partners in the project and not as full partners.

The participants believe that the project will not be implemented without the acceptance of the three parties as required by the World Bank which will support the project financially. They also emphasized the need for organizing a national workshop that gathers all the Palestinian governmental and non-governmental organizations to discuss all the issues relevant to the Red-Dead Canal and define the red lines that must not be exceeded in their negotiations as it is a very critical issue.

The participants also expressed their worries about the ability of the residents to purchase the desalinated water because of its high prices. Therefore, people's affordability as well the previously mentioned issues must be highly considered as they would affect the sustainability of the project if it would be implemented.

One of the participants raised the issue of the carrying capacity of the Dead Sea Basin and indicated that any water management project must highly investigate this issue.

Another participant mentioned that the implementation of the Red-Dead Canal will negatively influence the implementation of other small and medium water management projects in the area as all the funding will be devoted to this centralized project.

- **Water Resources Development**

Rainwater harvesting and wastewater treatment and reuse are among the alternative options for developing new water resources in the area. However, the implementation of large scale water harvesting projects would be more or less difficult as the Israelis are controlling that such as in Wadi Al Far'a.

As regards to wastewater treatment, the appropriate technologies must be selected based on the types of crops cultivated in the area in order to ensure its proper reuse.

2.3 Cooperation

The participants indicated that the Dead Sea which is part of the Jordan River Basin must be managed by all the riparian countries in order to promote, coordinate, supervise and control the planning, investigation and implementation of water resources development in the basin. This means that Palestinians must be recognized as full riparians in the Jordan River Basin, have their rights in utilizing this shared water resource and be compensated for denying them the right to utilize all the natural resources in the Dead Sea Basin. Such an integrated management will secure the protection and sustainability of this water resource. Moreover, the participants emphasized that the Jordan Valley must not be referred to as an area for absorbing the returning refugees but must be recognized as a high potential development area for the Palestinians.

As regards to the groundwater resources, the above-mentioned basin wide management must also be applied to the West Bank Aquifer and the Israelis must provide the Palestinians with their equitable water allocation of the shared groundwater basins. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee must be transformed into a "basin wide regional institution" in which all riparian countries be involved to manage the transboundary and shared water resources to ensure their sustainability.