

## **Notes from the Second Focus Group Meeting West Bank**

### **1. Introduction:**

The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) organized the second focus group meeting in the West Bank to discuss the water issues in the Dead Sea Basin. The meeting was held on September 6, 2005 at the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC) in Jericho. Attendees were representatives of the local and private farmers. 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.

### **Participants**

Mr. Fadi 'Bedalla  
Mr. Naser Abu Qatam  
Mr. 'Amer Hssain  
Mr. Mousa Abu Qatam  
Mr. Fasial Saeed  
Ms. Myser Solieman  
Mr. Mo'waya  
Ms. Khatam Solieman  
Mr. Mohamed Al- Sheiesh  
Mr. Mos'ab Mohammad  
Mr. Salah Daraghmeh  
Ms. Jane Hilal: Applied Research Institute –Jerusalem (ARIJ)  
Ms. Sandra Ashhab: Applied Research Institute –Jerusalem (ARIJ)  
Mr. Anwar Qabaja: Applied Research Institute –Jerusalem (ARIJ)

### **Discussion Subjects**

#### **2.1 Defining the Problem:**

All the participants believed that there is a water shortage problem in the Dead Sea Basin as well as in the Palestinian Territory as a whole. According to the farmers the main reason of this situation is due to the geopolitical situation as well as the lack of integrated management of the shared water resources. Other reason comes from the fact that the Israelis and the Jordanians are exploiting the Jordan River waters (the diversion of water) which negatively affects the Dead Sea Basin. One of the participants noted further that the Palestinian's water sector is currently facing a crisis which is manifested by the Israelis unilateral management actions. Among those actions that the Israelis had not only been controlled the water resources, but also had restricted regulations concerning the drilling of new wells. Another participant added that the Israelis had been freely developed and drilled deep bore wells (from 300 to 600 metres deep) in the Jordan Valley

and the Dead Sea basin in favor of the Israeli agricultural consumption, where no well could be drilled deeper than 120 metres by the Palestinian farmers according to the Israeli regulations, which would be main and complement to the water supply for the farmers. Already the impact of these well-drilling practices had caused depletion and salinity content of the water in the Palestinian wells. In fact the participants strongly believed that the Israelis are mainly responsible for the reduction of the water in the Dead Sea basin.

*How does the future of the Dead Sea look like in 2025?*

Most farmers were of the opinion that the Dead Sea will disappear in the future because of the fact that there is a lack of water flowing into it. They believed that the main cause of the rapid disappearance of the Dead Sea today is the reduction of the water inflows of the Jordan River and its tributaries into it, construction of dams, and storage reservoirs. The reduction of the flow of the Jordan River is a result of the Israeli National Water Carrier that diverts the water from Lake Tiberias to Negev Desert. One farmer added that the decrease in the amount of the rainfall in the area and storage reservoirs has also contributed to declining in the Dead Sea water level. The participants clearly indicated that the Dead Sea is facing a lack of adequate water supplies necessary to prevent it from drying. Based on these assumptions the farmers believed that if the levels continue to drop, the Dead Sea would experience changes in landscape and biodiversity.

*Level of the Dead Sea and the water lack in the region?*

The availability of water in the Dead Sea has been adversely affected by decreasing discharge from the Jordan River into it. As a result, the participants brought up the fact that the decline in water level of the Dead Sea causes high salinity of groundwater which would affect the water quality need for agriculture use. Also the depletion of springs and the wells is threatening the destruction of all cultivation for the farmers of the Dead Sea Basin. This over-exploiting of the water resources not only would allow the Palestinian farmers to abandon their farmland in order to find alternative means of livelihood. But they had also to continue completely shifting to non water intensive crops. One farmer commented that the lands that were used for agriculture and to cultivate with bananas are used now for other crops than bananas such as vegetables. Moreover, decreasing water resources available for irrigation due to the increased demand for domestic use would affect the crop productivity and the land for agriculture. The farmers explained that through the years they used to farm more than 12 thousands dunums in the Dead Sea area, where today the area decreased to 3-4 dunums. Therefore, the agriculture shares into the economy through the farmers dropped seriously as a result of decline in agricultural output.

## 2.2 New Water Infrastructure

### *Technical Options (Other Sources of Water)?*

Farmers were aware of the new technologies of using treated wastewater and grey-water for irrigation. A couple of farmers expressed concerns about the impacts of using treated wastewater on their crops and soil. This concern appears from the fact that the irrigation water quality would deteriorate as a result of high salinity of the treated wastewater. In such cases, however, farmers do not intend to use the treated wastewater, but often they prefer fresh water, if available.

With regard to desalinated water, the farmers brought up the issue of their ability to purchase it; since the cost of desalinated water is considerably high compared to other sources of water. The farmers also expressed their worries whether the desalination process could keep the needed minerals and salts in the water. However, they agreed that if water was desalinated to certain level they would be fine with using it for irrigation.

As regards to the irrigation technology, the farmers in the Dead Sea Basin adopted the drip irrigation. The farmers believed that the drip irrigation has several advantages; good aid to efficient use of water, reduce the loss of water through runoff and evaporation, and disease control. The farmers explained that they had sometimes a problem with the pumping rate (power) needed for such irrigation technology.

### *The role of the Red- Dead Canal in the Dead Sea Basin?*

Farmers were aware of the Dead-Red project. Participants supported the idea for a canal running downhill from the Red Sea into the southern part of the Dead Sea. However, the farmers expressed their fear about the benefits of such project especially for the Palestinians. The participants emphasized that the Palestinians must have their rights in utilizing the shared water resource. Moreover, one of the participants mentioned that the implementation of the Red-Dead Canal, which supposed to bring water form the Red Sea to recover the fall in the level of the Dead Sea, would destructed and damage their exposed agricultural lands.