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EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) is a unique regional organization bringing together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists to promote sustainable development, especially in the field of water, and to advance peace efforts in the Middle East. FoEME has offices in Amman, Bethlehem, and Tel-Aviv, and is a member of Friends of the Earth International, the largest grassroots environmental organization in the world.

Since the establishment of EcoPeace/FoEME in 1994, the organization has worked tirelessly on environmental and water projects, with the goal of furthering sustainable development, environmental security for nature and people, and peace in the region.

FoEME utilizes both a “bottom-up” and “top-down” approach, successfully functioning both as a grass-roots organization and as a policy advocate.

FoEME's unique innovation is the development of a shared regional vision to respond to the demise of the Middle East region’s trans-boundary natural ecosystems, with the central theme being water. These include the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, the Mountain and Coastal Aquifers, and the effects of Climate Change on the water resources in the region. The shared vision is followed through with advocacy of the same vision in the different communities, with the Amman office leading the required change in Jordan, the Bethlehem office in Palestine and the Tel-Aviv office for Israel. What sets FoEME apart is that it is the same vision espoused for all three countries but tailored to the appropriate cultural context in each country.

Major projects and research are being undertaken by FoEME, focusing on the issues of shared water crisis of Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians. Through the development and implementation of numerous projects and scientific research initiatives, FoEME has successfully demonstrated the willingness of peoples to work together to protect and rehabilitate their natural environments upon which their livelihoods depend. The following are major initiatives that are presently being undertaken by FoEME.

- The "Good Water Neighbours" (GWN) project was established by FoEME in 2001 to raise awareness of the shared water problems of Palestinians, Jordanians, and Israelis. The GWN methodology is an original idea based on identifying cross-border communities and utilizing their mutual dependence on shared water resources as a basis for developing dialogue and cooperation on sustainable water management. GWN has created real improvement within the water sector by developing awareness on water and sanitation issues, building trust and understanding that has led to common problem solving and peace building among communities - even in the midst of conflict. Twenty-eight communities currently participate in the GWN project: 11 Palestinian, 8 Jordanian, and 9 Israeli communities – each facilitated by a local FoEME field researcher. Five Memorandums of Understandings have been signed with GWN “partnering mayors” focusing on a specific water issue negatively affecting both communities, promoting their jointly identified solutions, such as waste water treatment networks, peace parks, better agricultural practices / wise water use, and more. GWN now serves as a model for similar peace-building programs around the world.
A component of the GWN project is the creation of “Neighbours Paths.” Their purpose is to show the natural and cultural heritage of each one of the 28 GWN communities and to learn about their water resources, both in the past and in the present. Many trails highlight the rich history found in the region but also reveal degradation and pollution, often “not seen” by local residents themselves and certainly not usually shown to tourists. All community-based tours deal with the issue of the interdependence of the water sources between Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian neighbouring communities. The concept of the Neighbours’ Paths has been designed to achieve a synergetic effect of education, change in people's attitudes and ultimately of sustainable development. To date, more than 23,000 people have participated in these tours.

A Community GIS component into the GWN project was also launched, aiming to give high school students the ability to identify environmental hazards in their local area.

A parallel project, "Protecting Ground Water," trains municipalities to use GIS technology to monitor and alleviate groundwater pollution. These programs introduce advanced GIS technology for the purpose of creating local environmental-hazard maps and to advance cross-border understanding and cooperation over shared water issues.

FoEME is engaged in major efforts to rehabilitate the lower Jordan River. Over 98 percent of the river’s water has been diverted for agriculture and domestic consumption so that now only sewage flows in the riverbed. To revitalize the Lower Jordan River and allow economically and environmentally sustainable development of the Valley, FoEME is building local, regional and international support for restoring the flow of clean water in the river. FoEME’s advocacy has led to the recent construction or planning of wastewater treatment plants in all three jurisdictions and a commitment from Israel to return some 30 MCM of fresh water to the river.

Furthermore, as of 2012, FoEME is leading a new project to create the first joint Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian Integrated Water Resource Management plan for the Jordan River Basin.

Eco-Centers have been established, one in each country, to serve as community and regional focal points to advance environmental education and host national and regional environmental educational activities.

Equitable water allocation between Palestinians and Israelis is an especially important issue for FoEME, being the only regional environmental organization in the Middle East that can tackle this issue with an excellent knowledge base, trust of both sides, and effectiveness in cooperation. FoEME has most recently published an updated version of a "Model Water Agreement" that is based on a dynamic agreement between the sides, and suggests an alternative to the "temporary agreement" in effect since 1995 that has failed to preserve shared water resources, allowing for over-pumping by Israel, pollution of groundwater and surface water originating in the West Bank and continuing into Israel, and the unfair allocation of shared water resources.

**Recent Achievements**

FoEME’s GWN project leveraged $240,000,000 for investment in infrastructure and other improvements in many of the Good Water Neighbours communities during 2009-2011.

FoEME’s work also maintained the leveraging of an additional $145,000,000 in water infrastructure projects in Good Water Neighbours communities.

Approval was granted from the Israeli/Palestinian governmental ‘Joint Water Committee’ for the GWN Memorandum of Understanding signed between two cross-border mayors, leading to the future treatment of the Palestinian community’s wastewater in the neighbouring Israeli community’s Waste Water Treatment Plant.
Receiving approval from this joint committee is no easy task.

FoEME’s pressure has brought the Israeli government to place the rehabilitation of the River Jordan on the regional political agenda, with a pledge to return fresh water to the Lower Jordan River (30 mcm) - for the first time in 60 years.

FoEME held a symposium in Jericho that highlighted the importance of a healthy, clean and rehabilitated Lower Jordan River for the development of the Palestinian economy, and thereafter, received a letter of support from Palestinian Minster of Water, Mr. Shaddad Attilli, endorsing FoEME’s efforts to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River and for work towards more equitable water sharing between Israel and the PA.

FoEME was invited to present the Jordan River Rehabilitation Project to the European Union Parliament that led to the adoption of a historic resolution that directly calls upon leaders in the region to address the state of the Jordan River, and on the European Commission to consider allocation of financial resources to help rehabilitate the river.

* Gidon Bromberg, a lawyer by training, is co-founder of EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East, the only Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian organization that exists - a non-profit focused on water and Middle East peace. The organization uses innovative approaches of bottom-up, community-led cooperation and top-down, national-level advocacy on cross-border water issues. FoEME’s three co-Directors were honored for their unique environmental peacebuilding efforts by TIME Magazine as Environmental Heroes of 2008, were granted the prestigious Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship in 2009 and in 2010 awarded both the Euro-Med Award for Dialogue and the Aristotle Onassis Prize for the Protection of the Environment. FoEME was a 2011 recipient of the ACR International Outstanding Leadership Award.