



FoEME Briefing Paper

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Health Crises in the Making Protecting water resources requires cooperation with the Palestinian Authority

Summary

- Israel and the West Bank are inseparable as far as water and sewage are concerned.
- Protecting and using water resources necessitate cooperation between the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority.
- Adequate treatment of wastewater and of solid waste is a basic humanitarian requirement, fundamental for the protection of drinking water and the public health of both sides.
- Projects aimed at pollution prevention of the Mountain Aquifer, particularly in the West Bank, must continue under any political scenario.
- In the absence of serious attempts to continue environmental projects, pollution will be unstoppable, and over \$230 million in *designated aid* will be lost.
- Without progress on this issue, a vacuum will be created and pollution will continue for years to come, risking public health, scarce water resources and possibly creating a humanitarian disaster.

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Background

One of the unintended consequences of cutting off cooperation with the Hamas-led PA is likely to do Israel more harm than good. No political separation will stop the flow of pollution from the West Bank to Israel, above and beneath the ground. Without cooperation on solving the problem, valuable water from the best available sources in the region will be lost by pollution.

For West Bank Palestinians, the international community has committed over \$230 million for wastewater infrastructure alone. However, these funds are under threat: should Israel and the international community fail to find a way to implement these projects despite the rise of Hamas. *Funding that was already committed will be withdrawn*, and detailed plans, studies and negotiations will go to waste. In its current state, the Palestinian economy cannot afford pollution prevention without international assistance.

The outbreak of Avian Flu forced Israel to coordinate preventive activities with the Palestinians, irrespective of the Hamas government. The prevention of water pollution is no less important or urgent, and should be promoted regardless, and despite of political developments.

The problem

The Mountain Aquifer, the most important source of water for Israelis and Palestinians alike, is located under both Israel and the West Bank. It provides all the drinking water for West Bank Palestinians and most of the water for major Israeli cities including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Be'er Sheva and other localities in the center of Israel.

The aquifer's recharge area, located mainly in the West Bank, is highly vulnerable to pollution. The majority of the Palestinian population in that area has no sanitation services or adequate solid waste management infrastructure, leading to continued groundwater pollution of the shared aquifer.

In some cases, Palestinian sewage is treated by Israel after crossing the Green Line. In others, the international community has provided funds for several projects of sewage and solid waste treatment. Most of them are not yet built. These projects, which necessitate cooperation by Israel or other countries with the Palestinian side, are listed below.

Many of the local sources of water in the West Bank are already polluted, forcing poor Palestinian communities to pay high prices for trucked freshwater, and inflicting water related diseases on their population. Without further development on wastewater and solid waste infrastructure, pollution will spread to more areas and greater depths of groundwater. The continued implementation of pollution prevention projects is crucial to prevent a humanitarian disaster due to water pollution in the West Bank, for maintaining vital water supply to both peoples, and for preventing pollution of major streams.

For the purpose of projects implementation, cooperation with the Palestinian side is required in two areas. First, financial assistance from the donor community, which is currently under review following the rise of Hamas in the Palestinian government.¹ Second, negotiations over projects with Israeli authorities are necessary, as Israeli approval is required, according to the Oslo Accords, for all water projects in the West Bank and for the planning of infrastructure projects in areas B and C in the West Bank.

¹ Following the Palestinian elections, the international quartet stated that "it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap." The US has recently stopped all assistance to the PA, including for its wastewater project in Hebron.

Policy recommendations

1. **Israel and the West Bank are inseparable as far as water and sewage are concerned. Protecting and using water resources necessitate cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian institutions.** The most important water sources for both people are shared by Israelis and Palestinians. The natural flow of streams, groundwater and sewage does not correspond with political divides.
2. **Adequate treatment of wastewater and of solid waste is a basic humanitarian requirement, fundamental for the protection of drinking water of both sides.** Without it, both sides are likely to lose vital water resources, with many communities already suffering from water shortage and health hazards due to water pollution.
3. **Projects aimed at pollution prevention of the Mountain Aquifer, particularly in the West Bank, must continue under any political scenario.** The international community, Israel and the Palestinian Authority cannot afford the humanitarian, economic and political consequences of water loss in this magnitude.
4. **In the absence of serious attempts to continue environmental projects, pollution will be unstoppable, and over \$230 in *designated aid* will go to waste.** Current arrangements will collapse and existing plans will not materialize. As a result, the only source of water for West Bank Palestinians and the most significant source of freshwater for Israel may be lost, and sewage pollution could reach cities inside Israel, affecting the lives of 1.25 million people.
5. **Current practices of donor agencies already prevent misuse of funds** and donor country representatives are closely involved in all stages of projects. Cooperation may also take place with local municipalities, NGO's and the private sector.
6. **Without progress on this issue, a vacuum will be created and pollution will continue for years to come.** It has taken many years to reach the current (imperfect) level of cooperation and financial commitments on Palestinian environmental projects. If the current momentum stops, it will be much more difficult to start over such cooperation in the future. Instead, we will be facing decades of pollution and guaranteed loss of groundwater resources.

Pollution prevention projects under threat:

Implementation or continuation of the following projects and arrangements are likely to stop in the absence of cooperation with the Palestinian Authority:

1. **Nablus West and Tul Karem wastewater** are currently treated in an Israeli facility in Yad Hana (Emek Hefer). Plans for a Palestinian plant are underway, funded by Germany. Non cooperation could lead to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer and risk to sensitive water drilling sites.
 - b. Pollution of the Alexander stream, which has been rehabilitated, creating health hazards for 30,000 people in the Emek Hefer region.
 - c. Jeopardizing of plans already underway and loss of \$75 million worth of investment in the Palestinian wastewater sector.
2. **Hebron wastewater** problem was to be solved by a US funded facility, however funding for this project was recently frozen, following the success of Hamas in the Palestinian elections. Withdrawal from this project would lead to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer and risk to sensitive water drilling sites.
 - b. Continued pollution of the Hebron stream, and continued health hazards and environmental nuisance for over 190,000 people inside Israel (Meitar, Beduin villages, and Beer Sheva).
 - c. Jeopardizing of existing plans, result of years of negotiations, and of over \$50 million worth of investment.
3. **Qalqiliya's wastewater** is currently treated in the Israeli facility in Nir Eliyahu. Non cooperation could lead to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer and risk to sensitive water drilling sites.

- b. significant pollution of the Yarkon Stream, creating health hazards in the center of Israel and affecting *over a million people* in Kfar Saba, Petach Tikva, Tel Aviv, and other cities.
- 4. **Salfit wastewater**, originating from 10,000 people, currently pollutes the Shilo Stream. Wastewater in this stream enters the groundwater of the Mountain Aquifer, and what is left reaches Israel, eventually polluting the Yarkon Stream. A German funded wastewater treatment project is ready to be implemented in Salfit. However, non-cooperation would lead to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer and of the Shilo stream.
 - b. Jeopardizing of plans already underway and loss of \$13 million worth of investment in the Palestinian wastewater sector.
- 5. **Jenin landfill**: Project under implementation (World Bank funding). Near completion, solving waste problems for 250,000 people. Non cooperation would Prevent the completion of this project, leading to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer (northern basin) from solid waste of the entire Jenin governorate.
 - b. Jeopardize a \$15.5 million investment by the World Bank, the EC and the Palestinian Authority in the Palestinian solid waste sector.
- 6. **Dir Dibwan landfill**: Project caters for the entire Ramallah governorate (270,000 people). Currently used dump sites (Ramallah and El Bireh) pollute groundwater and are running out of space as is. Non cooperation would lead to:
 - a. Continued pollution of the Mountain Aquifer (western and eastern basins).
 - b. Jeopardizing of existing plans and investment worth 14 million Euro
 - c. Jeopardizing of proposed investment in additional solid waste projects in the West Bank (Hebron or Bethlehem).
- 7. **Additional projects** in the wastewater sector are in the pipeline for Palestinian localities such as Jenin and Ramallah. Non cooperation would lead to withdrawal of plans, negotiations and jeopardizing investment of additional \$60 million.

About FoEME

Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME), is a unique organizations that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists. Our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region.

FoEME works out of 3 offices in Amman, Bethlehem and Tel-Aviv. FoEME is a member of Friends of the Earth International, the largest grassroots environmental organization in the world. For more information visit our website at www.foeme.org and subscribe to our several email bulletins and receipt of printed publications.