

## Capacity Assessment and Reflection on Pilot Project: LRC

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### *Purpose of the Assessment*

A field-based Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) was conducted in early August 2022. This review, which is individualised for each partner organization that forms part of the Palestinian Agricultural Institutions Coalition (PAIC), examines how social inclusion and sustainability are understood, and addressed, in the pilot projects designed and implemented through the Environmental and Climate Justice Programme (ECJP) supported by We Effect.

For the purposes of the assessment, each pilot's baseline is the conditions in and around the site on the day of the field visit. The assessment considers variables such as the physical and material conditions of any infrastructure installed in the pilot site, conversations and interactions with the individuals and communities rights-bearers and beneficiaries of each pilot, and on-site discussions with project staff.

This report also draws from field-based interactions and focus group discussions with PAIC gender and advocacy officers, technical staff, and leadership, conducted both before and after the field visits.

A foundational purpose of the assessment is to consider what "sustainability" means in each pilot. Sustainability is not defined as the installation of "green" technologies. Instead, the focus is on the conditions in each site and what these say about how long any technological investment is likely to remain optimally functional.

This report regards the pilot projects as ongoing sites of learning. It offers practical advice on how each PAIC member's external investment into the pilot can realise the promise of sustainability. It also asks what internal conditions in each organisation might need to be rethought in order to advance the vision of implementing long-lasting projects.



**Land Research Centre**

<b>Pilot title:</b>	Sustainable agro-Practices for vulnerable site schools
<b>Location:</b>	As Samou' City, Hebron Governorate
<b>Thematic area:</b>	Environmental and Climate practices
<b>Gender and Advocacy Officer:</b>	Tasneem Al-Janazreh



### *Project overview*

**Problem:** The pilot project responds to a call from Principal teachers of a girls and a boys high school in As Samou' city to support student learning in their "Environment Clubs" – an after-school activity for students in an area that is badly affected by water shortages and illegal settler activities.

**Piloted solution:** To engage students in thinking about water- and waste-wise farming practices, LRC has installed a small-scale greenhouse-based hydroponic system through which students gain hands-on learning experience of eco-friendly, climate-smart composting and growing practices.

**Added value:** In addition, in the girls school, LRC has set up a hands-on soil-testing experiment for science students.

#### *Immediate social impact:*

- Considering different space availability, students of the Environment Clubs at both schools have been given the same opportunity to gain practical knowledge of the different components of solar-driven hydroponic farming, and some skills in organic composting (nutrient cycling)
- Both boys and girls were knowledgeable and excited to show off their learning
- The projects were well-maintained considering we visited in the summer holidays when they are not actively incorporated into the school's learning program



### *Pilot Project ESIA*

- 1) Does the pilot meet the needs of the beneficiary community?

**Yes.** The needs assessment resulted in the development of a project aimed at encouraging and teaching students about sustainable, water-wise farming, and about recycling of discarded organic and inorganic components.

The pilot has been well-designed. It meets the needs of students and uses the capacities of the teachers.



**Added value:** LRC's technical team thought beyond the scope of the assignment, aiming for a multiplier effect of student-to-community engagement, as young learners are gaining the skills to lead their communities in waste-and water-wise practices at household level.

## 2) Does the pilot make good use of technology and infrastructure?

**Yes.** The design of the learnings system is modest and appropriate for both school's needs.

- Both projects offer enough space for students to see a real system in action and to gain hands-on-skills as well as theoretical knowledge
- There are limited technological components; maintenance of the investment is within the scope of each school
- The systems teach students how to make good use of recycled, discarded objects such as barrels, which have been made into composters
- The Environmental Clubs have received a project that makes their work seem serious and real. Students seem highly engaged in their learning process

## 3) Is the pilot sustainable?

**Not yet.**

- No reference was made to a planned follow up or long-term project management plan. What will happen if equipment fails?
- What plans are there to help students (and teachers) remain engaged?
- What additional learning components can be added, especially no- or low-cost initiatives to build student interest in ecological thinking beyond technologies, and to keep the Clubs and the hydroponic learning spaces relevant and exciting?
- Neither school is practicing waste separation or organic composting – yet!
- At the girls' school, there was a high level of awareness and interest in adding additional learning practices to teach skills in nutrient recycling, healthy food, hands-on science and other practices
- There is no indication of how management and maintenance of installed equipment will be funded and monitored in either the immediate or the long term
- The installed system's need for care and maintenance seemed largely invisible. There is no clear plan to mentor a nominated counterpart on regular (e.g. cleaning, checking components and connections) and long-term maintenance of the system
- This is a **missed opportunity** for LRC and the PAIC to keep learning from the pilot to ensure that its promise of sustainability is achievable
- It is also a missed opportunity to understand whether the project, as a pilot, can be replicated in other high schools that have not yet advanced to the stage of establishing Environment Clubs

### **Recommendations:**

- Installing a hydroponic system is a beginning, not an end: the pilot project cannot be considered complete until an appropriate monitoring and management plan has been drawn up, including to evaluate the different levels of commitment to maintaining the projects that may emerge in each school.
- If these differences emerge, LRC needs to understand why, so that future projects can anticipate and prevent maintenance problems
- What else is needed to ensure that the technological equipment installed will be maintained at optimal efficiency for student use in years to come?
- What can LRC do to support both schools to design larger learning initiatives around school sustainability (these do not necessarily have to be expensive)
- How can LRC, using PAIC, ensure that the hoped-for impact of creating young ambassadors for sustainability is realised and moves beyond the schools into student households?

#### 4) Can and should the pilot be scaled up?

**Potentially.** The girls' school, especially, seems to have an exceptionally skilled and dedicated teaching staff. Is it realistic to expect that other schools in the area (or in PAIC focus areas more broadly) will bring the same dedication to a similar installation? LRC should find out before trying to replicate this project.

As the level of commitment to care for the projects did not seem comparable between both schools, I advise designing a strong monitoring and evaluation process for the pilot, including assessment of skills transfer for maintenance of installations, to learn more about how pilot communities learn to sustain a donated intervention. As the schools are strictly segregated by gender, this evaluation will offer strong insights into the gendered implications of PAIC efforts to contribute to sustainability in Palestine.



#### 5) Can the project boost the profile and advocacy of the PAIC?

**Potentially.** The technical proof-of-concept exists. If its sustainability is proven, the PAIC partners can advocate for similar learning programs with rights-holders across Palestine.

#### 6) Is the project politically pragmatic?

**Yes.** Despite where the schools are located, the projects have been designed at a small scale, in schools that appear fairly safe from harm by illegal settlers. This also means that, if the projects fail, it will be difficult for the schools to blame anyone else: their sustainability is fully in Palestinian hands.

### **Possible Advocacy Actions:**

- a) PAIC could devise an advocacy strategy for the Ministry of Education to make environmental learning more prominent in the high school curriculum
- b) LRC can tell a positive story and support young learners to become advocates for a Green Palestine



### 7) Does the pilot meet the criteria of social inclusion, especially gender inclusivity?

**Yes.** No difference was made between students at the boys and girls' schools. Both received the same learning supports and structures.

This seems to be the case because the LRC gender and advocacy officer had been invited to co-design the project. She had already gained the skills to look beyond any stereotypes that boys should gain access to technology but not girls, and avoided this problem by installing identical projects.



I note that the older male council member who attended the field visit seemed determined that there is “nothing the community can do” to address the most pressing environmental problems he identified – the soil is desiccating, and water is scarce.

He and I had an exchange in which he insisted “the Council has no resources to get the community to separate organic waste and make compost.” When I pointed out to him that they are a rural community with a very long history of reusing organic nutrients to enrich soil, he was silent.





I have been thinking about this exchange ever since. I conclude that, in a reversal of our usual practice of labelling women “vulnerable”, it is Palestinian men, not Palestinian women, who are vulnerable in very particular ways, including because they have learned to expect donor support for undertaking even the simplest and most traditional sustainability practices. I encourage the LRC to counter this learned behaviour of helplessness by telling good stories about how ancient practices such as waste separation and reuse are also very “modern” practices. They are practices of care that can overcome the oppression of money, donor aid, and dependency.

Finding our way back to them may be the only path left to lead Palestinians to the future you are urgently called to invite, of a Palestine with healthy soils, clean communities, and an ongoing heritage of sustainability.

#### 8) How could a gender analysis in the project’s design phase have anticipated and addressed self-limiting beliefs?

LRC has a powerful gender and advocacy advocate in Ms Al-Janazreh. Her leadership capacities were clearly on display in the field trips. She is an asset to the PAIC and should be supported to support others to design and implement for social inclusion.

Over time, a well-designed **advocacy strategy** can be designed, showing communities that, when male and female students, even in segregated schools, are offered the same opportunity to learn skills associated with a new technology, social stereotypes about male- and female-segregated labour can be overcome. This will support the next generation to be open to the idea that women and men have equal capacity to contribute to a greener Palestine.

*The analysis presented here can be incorporated into any plans within PHG or across the PAIC to upscale and implement this pilot in other locations.*



#### 9) Capacity-strengthening needs

LRC is not a gender justice organisation, and this is not the focus of its work. Yet it has successfully identified and employed a strong gender officer who supports its goal of delivering socially just environmental projects.

Her presence shows the PAIC that realistic and measured changes can be made within Palestine's agricultural organisations. This does not require each organisation to change its focus or gain "gender justice warrior" status. Instead, it shows that commitment to recruiting an activist-focused project officers can make a real difference, even when she is required to work with difficult and resistant patriarchal leaders. Mabrouk to LRC!

#### 10) What small, doable actions are possible?

##### 1) Stay connected to the pilot projects

In their FGD, LRC staff showed commitment to incorporating social inclusion and climate justice into their work. The pilot project is a rich site for internal LRC learning and for PAIC as a whole. To promote sustainability, this ESIA can help LRC re-commit to devising a long-term management plan for its pilot projects.

LRC is invited to consider the following forward-looking steps:

- a. Support the schools to connect their new hydroponic installation with other environmental activities that the whole school can learn from (beyond students in the Environment Clubs)
- b. Devise advocacy efforts to tell the stories of both girls and boys in the program. These will help Palestinians overcome internalised ideas about who can commit to good environmental protection practices
- c. Support the schools maintain their current skills and commitment to maintain their new learning installations; and at the same time, find opportunities to talk about past good practices that can be revitalised to bring future change
- d. Maintain a relationship of care with the schools: what are their ongoing needs and how can they be met? What resources are necessary and where will they come from?
- e. Proactively look for new project ideas for the schools and the community they serve, especially those that prove and promote the idea that both girls and boys can learn about, design for and otherwise support the introduction of sustainable technologies
- f. Keep working with male counterparts in the local council (including the one who attended the field visit) to keep expectations realistic and self-sustaining. If, in addition to practices involving technology, students also learn low tech greening practices such as composting, this may help revitalise age-old practices of soil care
- g. A green future is also always a way to directly and strongly link to Palestine's ancient agricultural heritage, which has always found ways to protect soils and waters.

##### 2) Hold an internal reflection on the pilot as it supports social inclusion and sustainability in LRC

- a. A strength of the LRC pilot is that it found a path to social inclusion: how does this positive experience encourage even greater efforts inside the organisation?
- b. What beliefs and capacities had positively pre-shaped the pilot design before its implementation? (what skills did LRC already have that it drew on in the design phase?)
- c. How did this shape the pilot's delivery?
- d. Where any opportunities initially missed?

- e. How can LRC's positive experiences of good communication across the technical/social divide support other PAIC members?

### **3) How has LRC overcome internal siloes?**

- a. Whose technical expertise was included in the pilot design at inception? Who initiated the question: "have we considered every potential rights-holder in this project?" This strength changed the inception and the outcome of the pilot and should be regarded as a core strength of the LRC
- b. To improve even more, LRC could conduct a short internal review of its design of job descriptions, its recruitment and its assignment of project teams. Are social inclusion skills evenly distributed, or do they only exist because of Tasneem? Could you continue to do equally good work if she left the LRC?

### **4) Devise an internal project design process or checklist**

- a. Are there any LRC projects that over-associate men with the use of technology? If yes, what tool can remind male technical staff to think beyond the technology, to ask who will use it, who will benefit from it, and who can be included?
- b. How can all LRC staff be encouraged to ask, and answer, a deep sustainability question: who will care for and maintain this project once it's delivered?
- c. If women are over-associated with the social development aspects of LRC's work, what training can be offered to help them understand technologies LRC uses – without needing them to become "experts" in those technologies?

### **5) Examine stereotypes and internalised beliefs about the promise of "green technologies"**

- a. The first question to ask is: is a technological solution the best one?
- b. Then ask: if yes, how do we find ways to design for all? Will this be sustainable and accessible to all project rights-bearers?
- c. How do we prevent existing stereotypes being attached to new ideas?
- d. Then ask: who will look after/maintain the technology? To whom will these skills be transferred?
- e. Then devise a long-term maintenance plan. What resources do you need?

### **6) Budget for inclusion and sustainability**

- a. Is the finance officer aware of their responsibility to include a targeted budget for women's inclusion?
- b. Are earmarked resources available for use?
- c. Can an inclusion budget be deployed at *inception* stage, not only on delivery?
- d. How will maintenance and repair be funded?