

Capacity Assessment and Reflection on Pilot Project: PARC

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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.



Palestinian Agricultural Research Centre

Pilot title: "Treated waste water forest irrigation project"

Location: Beit Dajan and Beit Furik (Tulkarm/Nablus area)

Thematic area: Environmental and Climate practices

Gender and Advocacy Officer: Sireen Barghouthi



Project overview

Problem: A stream of treated wastewater flows, unused, at the foot of a hillside on which a forest (planted in the 1960s with the support of the King of Jordan) is dying of a lack of rain water.

Piloted solution: At the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, and with local Governorate, private sector and community support, PARC has been requested to bring the water to the trees. The proposed solution is to pump the water uphill using solar energy, constructing a small reservoir to store it, and establishing an irrigation system to water the trees.

The project has faced difficulties related to procurement of the necessary technical components. The field site visit was not to an existing project, but to meet community members, see the trees in the planted forest and view the treated waste water flow.



Pilot Project ESIA

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

No evidence available. A needs assessment has been conducted at the site and the technical components have been designed, but not constructed or delivered.



However, the image above, of the treated waste water stream, illustrates a key challenge in the site where PARC's intervention will take place. The area around the stream, and all the way up to the trees, is heavily littered with what looks like years of trash and discarded items. To the right of the forest is a private-sector owned children's playground which is in a severe state of neglect, with poorly-maintained infrastructure including the bathrooms. Just below the tree line are the littered remains of smashed concrete picnic tables. No aspect of the site, at present, indicates the presence of a caring or engaged community. This ESIA takes the neglected state of the site as the baseline for analysis.

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

No evidence available. From verbal descriptions, the proposed pump and storage system for the treated water will use technologies that are considered “sustainable.”

3) Is the pilot sustainable?

No evidence available: but, the overall neglect and lack of maintenance of existing infrastructure on the site, including the privately-owned playground, makes it highly questionable that a new installation of technology will receive the care and maintenance needed to make a project sustainable and durable.

- Why has no preparation work been undertaken to ensure that a reliable counterpart is already working to upgrade the site in readiness for the irrigation system? While the field visit seems to have been an occasion for media and plenty of speeches about the importance of the trees, there was no material evidence of interest in looking after what is already in place on the site.
- The crowd of dignitaries and stakeholders who gathered under the trees for the field visit seemed unaware of the filthy and neglected state of the site. More than this, people ate and drank the provided snacks and many dropped their litter on the ground without any apparent thought for where it would end up
- Several male leaders spoke about the preciousness of the trees: the Governor, a local businessman, male stakeholders; and one or two women (an academic and a Ministry of Agriculture representative) echoed their words. Yet at no point was it made clear who would take responsibility for the proposed new irrigation equipment and its maintenance
- What evidence does PARC have that the same indifference will not result in the immediate deterioration and destruction of the irrigation equipment it proposes to install?
- Even if delivery of technical equipment has been delayed, there is no evidence that PARC has engaged the community to help them develop a sense of what an ecologically-sustainable intervention is. There is no sign of site preparation, awareness-raising of the need to clean and maintain the site, community engagement to change social attitudes to the site
- There is no short- or long-term project management plan
- Without evidence of care, why does PARC think the proposed installation will receive proper maintenance?
- There are already several **missed opportunities** for PARC to establish the conditions for a sustainable intervention to be delivered

Recommendations:

- Installing an irrigation system is a beginning, not an end: the pilot project should not be started without building community interest in, and commitment to, upgrading and caring for the site as a whole
- Advocacy and awareness-raising can begin immediately without any technical equipment on the site; and this is an urgent priority to change hearts and minds and establish a basis of care for the proposed investment
- PARC should devise an appropriate monitoring and management plan before undertaking any further work
- What else is needed to ensure that the technological equipment installed will be maintained at optimal efficiency for many years?

4) Can and should the pilot proceed?

Potentially. If a strong preparatory phase begins immediately, to clean the site, remove broken picnic tables and other rubble, clean the stream bed, and generally establish the basis for an eco-project to be built, there is a chance that this intervention might make a lasting difference.

While waiting for technical equipment, PARC can work with the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure a monitoring and evaluation process is set up for the pilot, including assessment of skills transfer for maintenance of irrigation installation.



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

Not at present. As it stands, the site is an embarrassment to the community. There was no evidence that the community understood anything about sustainable forestry or land management. PARC should urgently work to address community indifference and alienation from the natural environment. High-minded words mean nothing without on-the-ground action to preserve the site.

6) Is the project politically pragmatic?

No. The project is not in an area attacked by illegal settlers. The danger to this project's sustainability appears to come from the indifference and alienation of the community itself. At present there appears to be no realistic protection strategy that would help safeguard the installation from neglect or other harm.

Possible Advocacy Actions:

- a) PARC should transfer knowledge from successful existing efforts to clean up degraded and neglected areas before proceeding with any technical installation.
- b) PAIC to design advocacy strategies to clean up Palestine



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

No evidence. Both women and men spoke about the trees. Neither women nor men showed any real understand or commitment to the conservation of the site.

There was a lot of enthusiasm on display from men about the proposed installation of new technology.

There was no evidence that anyone, male or female, planned to care for the new installation or the site itself.

As it stands, the site will be inaccessible to anyone with physical disabilities.

8) How could a gender analysis in the project's design phase have anticipated and addressed these limiting beliefs?

PARC is positioned to proactively look for social inclusion opportunities as this project is still in the design phase. Could a cross-sectoral, mixed sex, multi-age community greening committee be established to ensure that community members begin to engage differently with the site as a green space?

A well-designed **advocacy strategy** is urgently needed to establish the basis to ensure that the need for future maintenance and care for the site work is understood, planned for, and actually gets done.

Decades of evidence show that arguing with individuals about “gender equality” makes the problem of women’s exclusion worse, not better. In communities that struggle to address social stereotypes, the best way to proceed is to look for ways to open up new spaces and possibilities that we have not seen before.



How will the many words that were spoken be translated into action on the ground?



9) Capacity-strengthening needs

PARC is not a gender justice organisation. This is not the focus of its work and to date, it has not prioritised gaining strong technical skills in devising and delivering socially just environmental projects. Internally, PARC could commit to reflecting on the purpose and conceptualisation of this proposed project. Has a community been identified that shows signs of readiness to work on a sustainable ecological project? The evidence does not support this: what can be done now to change the situation and help this community care for this site?

As this community awareness-building proceeds, PARC should identify gendered inequalities that are likely to **undermine** and **prevent** this from becoming an inclusive project for all potential rights-bearers. What can PARC support that will change community attitudes and help realise **the hope of sustainability**?

Realistic and measured changes can be made to PARC’s community and government-liaison work; but it is neither possible nor desirable to build expectations that PARC or any PAIC member will become “gender justice” experts overnight.

10) What small, doable actions are possible?

1) Connect differently to the proposed pilot project site

In their FGD, PARC's staff requested more training on how to incorporate social inclusion and climate justice into their work. This assessment reveals why the proposed pilot project is a rich site for internal PARC learning and for PAIC as a whole. This ESIA can help PARC re-think how it engages with communities when it embarks on planning for a sustainable project.

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

- a. Revise the project delivery outcome: instead of focusing on the hoped-for technology as a solution to the crisis of the forest, focus on the existing reality of an alienated and indifferent community. Why is the forest so dirty and neglected? What can change attitudes and lead to a better cared-for site – even before water is moved to the trees?
- b. Devise advocacy efforts to tell the story of how the community is approached and the changes brought about when they learn to rethink the forest as a place to be proud of and enjoy
- c. Support the community to gain the skills and commitment they need to maintain their forest
- d. Maintain a relationship of care with the community: what ongoing needs will they have to change their attitude to their natural surroundings? and how can these needs be met? What resources are necessary and where will they come from?
- e. Proactively look for new project ideas for the area surrounding the forest and the community who say they value it. Examples could be a litter clean-up day, encouraging the private sector/businessman and governor to remove rubble and litter from the site; engaging the neighbour with the playground to help him rehabilitate it so it becomes an attractive site for visitors, etc.

2) Hold an internal reflection on what social inclusion and sustainability can mean for PARC

- a. What happens when PARC does not properly examine a proposed field intervention site?
- b. Why did no-one inside PARC see the depth of the community's disengagement from this site? Why was there so much focus on installing irrigation that the likelihood of this installation making a lasting change was overlooked?
- c. If PARC thinks broadly about social inclusion, who else from the surrounding community might become advocates and carers for the forest and its surroundings?
- d. What opportunities were initially missed to turn this into an eco-project?
- e. Who could have helped navigate around the blind spots – the litter, trash and general neglect of the site?
- f. Why has the treated waste water remained unused since it was first produced in 2004? What has happened to this community to prevent them from seeing or caring about their surroundings? What messages and actions can change their minds?
- g. How can teams communicate better across the technical/social divide inside PARC?

3) Question internal siloes in PARC

- a. Whose technical expertise should have been included in the pilot design at inception? Whose eyes might have seen the bigger problem this community presents to PARC as a partner promoting sustainability?

- b. Even asking the question, “have we considered the existing mind set and capacities of the potential rights-holder in this project?” will change the inception and the outcome
- c. Conduct a short internal review of how PARC recruits and assigns its project teams. This can reveal the extent to which male technicians may be working alone and focusing on technology (the effects of the technology=masculine stereotype) as a single solution – and ignoring the realities of attitudes and commitment to care in communities that are likely to undermine and prevent the realisation of sustainability as a goal

4) Devise an internal project design process or checklist

- a. If men are found to be over-associated with technological interventions as singular solutions, what tool can remind male technical staff to think beyond the technology, to ask who will use it, who will benefit from it, who will care for it, and who can be included as project beneficiaries.
- b. How can male champions be encouraged to ask a new sustainability question: who will care for and maintain this project once it’s delivered?
- c. Are women over-associated with the social development aspects of PARC’s work? Is this why no attention has been given to the state of the community who live near to the forest?
- d. If yes, what training can be offered to help PARC’s socially-focused staff understand technologies as a site of relationship with a receiving community. How can they learn to ask bigger questions about the community’s state of preparation for a new technology, without needing to become “experts” in those technologies?

5) Examine stereotypes and internalised beliefs, especially about the promise of “green” technologies

- a. This is particularly important if a new technology, such as an irrigation system, is being implemented
- b. The first question to ask is: is a technological solution the first and best issue to focus on, in this particular site?
- c. Are rights-bearers ready for more infrastructure when they can’t take care of what they already have? If not, what can PARC do to change the community’s attitude and overcome their lack of care?
- d. What can PARC change now about their approach to reach and benefit the widest number of rights-bearers?
- e. What can be changed now to design the forest to become more accessible to more people, and to be seen as an important site of care for as many rights-bearers as possible?
- f. How do we prevent the excitement of a promised technology from blinding us to the community’s attitudes and responses?
- g. Who will look after/maintain the irrigation system once it has been built? To whom will these skills be transferred?
- h. Then devise a long-term maintenance plan for the planned system. What resources do you need?

6) Budget for inclusion and sustainability

- 1) Is the finance officer aware of their responsibility to include a targeted budget for women’s inclusion in the advocacy strategy that should urgently be designed for this community?

- 2) Are earmarked resources available for use?
- 3) Can this inclusion budget be deployed now, at *inception* stage, before delivery of the irrigation system?
- 4) How will maintenance and repair be funded?