

Hebron-Negev-Gaza

Challenges and Opportunities of Water Management from Gender Perspective

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The Study was conducted in framework of Hebron-Negev-Gaza Basin
Field Project coordinated by Shlomit Tamari (PhD).

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A. Women & Water - Project Description

Introduction

The following report is a summary of the meetings held from November 2017 to March 2018 within the framework of Ecopeace's Hebron-Gaza-Negev Project.

A gender focused questionnaire gathered data from participating women on their specific water-related concerns and needs. Data collected from the questionnaire and meetings held with participating women will be used to inform the social media campaign as well as EcoPeace's endeavors in the basin and will be integrated into a comprehensive report discussing the challenges and opportunities in the watershed.

The report presents the key findings of the questionnaires, and examines the responses of the participants in the meetings from a gender perspective, in prism of challenges and opportunities. The report includes a number of recommendations for action, both within the framework of the current project, and beyond the scope of the project period as a future project to advance women's engagement in regional decision-making processes.

What is Gender Sensitivity?

In this section we decided to start with a quote from a UN publication, *Women 2000 and beyond: Women and Water* (2005).¹ Later, we will explain how such definition of gender sensitivity is implemented in Israel and why we decided that in relation to water, gender sensitivity should be studied in a much broader approach. Here is the UN definition:

"Gender-sensitive approaches to water resources management are desirable for achieving efficiency, social equality and gender-equality goals. Targets relating to water are unlikely to be achieved unless gender perspectives are integrated into planning and implementation activities. However social and economic targets, such as eliminating poverty, furthering empowerment of marginalized groups, supporting the resilience of the vulnerable and ensuring resources are appropriately managed by those who use

¹For the full quotation see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/W2000andBeyond.html>,

them, will only be achieved by a wider focus on social and power relations. Adopting gender sensitive approaches therefore means rethinking water development in a number of ways.

Firstly, it is critical to recognize the need for intersectional cooperation. People's livelihoods are not divided into subsectors and imposing artificial boundaries on the management of water for different uses is unlikely to yield result. A gender-sensitive approach helps to overcome some of the artificial sub-sectoral divisions in water as it involves looking at women and men's lives as a whole and how they are shaped through gender norms and practices.

Secondly, gender sensitivity necessitates a flexible learning approach to development interventions. Just as natural conditions and the uses of water vary from place to place, so gender expectations and norms differ according to context. Blueprint approaches to project planning and management cannot reflect this, so development agencies need to pay attention to training and capacity-building which allows for a reflective and flexible approach to water resources management at the local level. Gender relations can and do change over time, and, by adopting participatory learning approaches, it is possible for agencies to support and facilitate such changes in progressive ways.

Thirdly, gender relations also impact development institutions, which need to pay attention to the way that such relations impact on the functioning of their own work, as well as on water resources management at the local level. This involves consideration of the type of data collected, the gender balance of staff and the need for gender awareness training within an organization. "

As a good example of how gender sensitivity encourage change in the long-term planning of infrastructure, public transportation can be considered. According to various researchers in Israel, more women use public transportation than men. Ignoring this gender aspect has hindered social mobility as it hampered women's ability to work. Thus, empirical study of the subject allowed planners to include gender sensitivity in the national planning of these infrastructures, which were particularly lacking in the Arab communities in Israel². This example shows that gender sensitivity does not mean exclusive attention to women, but it is assumed that social, economic, and political disparities must be addressed to women's disadvantage, while "looking at women and men's lives as a whole"

². Keinan, Tamar, Dorit Bar and Tigrid AlHahmad (2006) [Mobility of Arab Women in Israel](#), KAYAN Association (Hebrew).

In the context of water, the situation is different. A study by the Association for Environmental Justice (AEJI, 2015) examined the state of the environment, in 200 local authorities in Israel according to five environmental categories, including water quality. The water quality was determined according to a microbiological test data from the Ministry of Health. The findings revealed that the highest abnormalities were found in the Northern District (0.233%) and in the South the lowest (0.023%), i.e. the quality of the water in the South is the best.³ Given that the water sector in Israel is highly developed, women in Israel enjoy cheap, fast and safe access to water, hence gender sensitivity is considered less applicable to Israel's water infrastructure, certainly less than in areas lacking infrastructure where women and girls are forced to dedicate a large part of their time to bringing water, and to cleaning, cooking, watering and the like. In fact, the problem we identified in Israel, especially in the agricultural areas of the Negev, is that women are almost absent from the water sector.⁴ Our assumption is that if women refrain from entering the professional water market – e.g. In areas such as engineering, technicians, economic and water policy -- they will also be excluded from the political aspects of water and therefore also from joint peace talks and conflict resolution.

Let us say it again. WASH-related gender sensitivity is mainly associated with areas where the absence of basic infrastructure may hurt women's access to schools and workplaces and later to the fields of management and politics. Studies in the area of gender sensitivity usually deal with the identification of such situations, in methods of collecting empirical data and, later, in making recommendations that can be formulated for planning future infrastructures

³. Levy, Roe, and Carmit Lubanov (2015), *Environmental Justice Indicators in Municipalities in Israel*, The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI).

⁴. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2017 the percentage of engineering students among all students was 24.7% for men and 7.2% for women. <https://www.hayadan.org.il/engineering-studies-at-the-universities-and-academic-colleges-2008-to-2015>

(UNICEF, 2017).⁵ This is not the case in Israel. Although Israel is a developed country, most of the population is unaware of the challenges it faces in the water sector whether the need to build a desalination plant every three years, or lack of magnesium in desalinated water people drink daily. Hence, in order to understand the best way to amplify women's voices regarding the situation of water in the basin and encourage cooperation to promote water and sewage projects, we decided to focus on women's knowledge of regional understanding of the basin and the central water issues. We also wanted to examine women's willingness to take action on promoting a cleaner and safer environment. For this purpose, we chose to use a questionnaire that enabled us to reach women across the basin, young and older women, Jews and Muslims, educated and less educated, not necessarily those who are working in the water sector, but those who can encourage their daughters and granddaughters, family and friends, to get involved and speak out for the importance of water in our region. Below we explain the socio-economic characteristics of the region and the characteristics of the selected groups who answered the questionnaire.

Socio-economic and environmental background

Hebron-Negev-Gaza basin is the largest of the coastal rivers of Israel and crosses two separation fences. The first part of the basin stretches from the Southern Hebron hills to the Negev and the second part of the basin surrounds the Gaza Strip to the Mediterranean Sea. Since 70% of the Negev population lives in the Be'er Sheva Valley, where the stream passes, many Negev residents cross the stream and its tributaries on their way to Be'er Sheva. Ecopeace's Negev coordinators have been monitoring the polluted stream since the early 2000's and indicate that the local press often deals with the issue, partly due to the mayor of Be'er Sheva initiative to turn the river banks into an urban park.

⁵. See for example:
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Gaza_WASH_HH_report_July2017_final.pdf

The socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the groups participating in the meetings held by EcoPeace were varied. One of the groups who filled out the questionnaires were from Hura, a Bedouin town, ranked 102nd among local authorities in Israel, and in the lowest socio-economic cluster (1 of 10), according to the Ministry of Interior ranking. The average wage of employees is about two-thirds of the national average wage. A second group was from Sderot, a town that is located in proximity to the Northeastern edge of the Gaza Strip. Founded in the early 1950s, it has been absorbing immigration over the years and is ranked 80th in the ranking of local authorities in Israel, and in socio-economic cluster 4 (of 10). The average wage of employees is about three quarters (77%) of the national average wage.⁶

In Hura, the town hall format meeting was held for a group of Bedouin women who are taking part in an educational enrichment program for women.

In Sderot, three activities took place. The first activity took place at the Elderly Community Center and the second was a lecture at Amit high school for religious girls, as part of an initiative to bring together the academic community and the local community. The third activity was a town hall meeting in Sapir Academic College for residents from across the Gaza Envelope.

Another group responded to a shorter questionnaire published on the internet. The members of this group lives in the Negev and in the center of the country and identified as social and peace activists. According to the research we conducted, these are women who are familiar with the water issues in terms of current issues (sewage corporations, prices) and are determined to promote regional cooperation. In addition, an analysis of their positions reflects suitability with active involvement in environmental issues.

⁶ . Local Authorities in Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015:
http://www.cbs.gov.il/webpub/pub/text_page.html?publ=58&CYear=2015&CMonth=1#2a

The last group was a class of female students of Social Work at Sapir College, located very close to Sderot.

98 questionnaires were filled in total.

Date	Group	No. questionnaires	Comments
On going	Internet	33	Full questionnaires- Shorter Version. 5
22.11.17	Sapir Academic College Conference	2	One full questionnaire and one partial
13.12.17	Amit High School	14	An earlier version of the questionnaires that did not include all the questions about cross-border issues. 3 questions have identical answers across the board.
22.12.17	Hura	14	9 questionnaires were partial
27.12.17	Sderot Community Center	12	
5.3.18	Social work students from Sapir College	23	Only a few questionnaires were partial
		98	

B. The Questionnaire

Methodological Procedure and Limitations

The questionnaire was chosen as a methodological tool to reach a wide range of women from all over the region. Many of the questions did not include gender reference, but the fact that most of the respondents were women helped to diagnose differences between groups. The gender reference was based, among

other things, on individual statements that were included as answers to questionnaires in writing and verbally, based on the assumption that they reflected broader population groups and should be taken into consideration.

One of the limitations of this study was that the groups chosen to fill out the questionnaire did not reflect the entire population of the region, but groups that had been integrated into EcoPeace's project. Each group received an explanation of EcoPeace's vision, the water situation in the region and the need to collaborate on the issue of water, and immediately afterwards the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire. Thus, despite the desire to include a variety of groups that reflect the Negev region entirely, the results obtained do not represent the entire population. Hence, this study should be viewed as a preliminary survey only.

In addition, an analysis of the questionnaires filled by the Sapir College of Social Work students presents a picture that can be construed as an internal contradiction between answers to questionnaires (much more than any other group) or requires an explanation and a more in-depth acquaintance with the group of respondents and the positions they presented. For example, respondents expressed the importance of the ability of residents to influence, but most of them were not prepared to get personally active. Their response were not included in the analysis but as was proven in previous research among Arab women (AEJI, to be published),⁷ when women are more educated they tend to be more environmentally active. The current time span of the research didn't allow us to follow up with the students.

Goals & Structure

As mentioned above, the questionnaire was intended to assist in characterizing priorities and needs among specific and distinct population groups. Questionnaires are a common work tool for characterizing the public's positions and gathering data (qualitative and quantitative). The questionnaire used for this

⁷ Lubanov, Carmit et al. (to be published). "Public opinions on environment and community engagement among the Arab Society in Israel." The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI) .

project was intended to assist Ecopeace to characterize the water-related concerns and needs of women in the communities surrounding the Gaza Strip on the personal and the community level. Since in the Negev there are no differences in water infrastructure and availability of water, except in the unrecognized Arab Bedouin communities, which were not included in this study, we decided to focus mainly on aspects of knowledge, information and willingness to act on water issues in the basin.

The findings of questionnaires can support formulating long-term action plans based on mapping the needs of the respondents and the region. In addition, the identification of the local positions can help with capacity training for women, which will further support EcoPeace advocacy activities.

Questionnaire structure

The structure of the questionnaire includes questions, which are divided according to the following subjects:

Part A: Personal data

Part B: Personal position regarding water (mapping of needs). A large number of questionnaires were partially answered in this section. All of the questionnaires expressed in writing, even partially, were included in the data analysis.

Part C1: Assessment of knowledge on water issues, clean environment, relevancy of different factors that might affect water / environmental management (finance, education, legal act, personal responsibility, and personal involvement).

Part C2: Willingness to take action in order to live in a clean environment, without water pollution.

Part D: Knowledge and positions on environmental issues, in particular about transboundary water issues.

C. The Evaluation of the Study

This section includes two parts, a quantitative analysis of the questionnaires, and narrative references. The findings of the questionnaires analysis do not constitute a representative sample of Israeli society and they are intended to support the project, and not other general conclusions and comparisons. The data was processed relative to the total number of questionnaires, while reducing the questionnaires of the Internet group and Sapir College of Social Work students.

Quantitative Analysis

1. *Personal Hygiene* - 86% of the respondents unequivocally believed that they can contribute to hygienic and safe environment through personal behavior ("very supportive" or "supportive"). An analysis of related questions indicated a similar trend. For example, 62% expressed clear support for a statement linking personal hygiene and information accessibility to a clean living environment.
2. *Education* - 76% of the respondents believe that establishing and encouraging environment/water educational projects from a young age can improve quality of life and health in their local community.
3. *Engaged civil Society* - more than two thirds (69%) of the respondents believe that the involvement of residents in water and environmental projects can improve the environment and quality of life in the community.
4. *Participation of women in decision making processes* –64% of Respondents agreed that women's participation in water and environmental decision-making would help promote environmental and health quality in their community or in the area of Southern Israel, West Bank and Gaza.
5. *Willingness to act* - In this section, the water sector received the greatest support, both in terms of the willingness to report to the authorities about a water problem in a domestic system (64% responded either 'always willing to report' or 'willing-dependent'). Similarly, many showed willingness to save water in their homes (76%). These rates are significantly higher than the willingness to recycle (40%), or preference for using green products (35%). ('always willing' and 'willing-dependent').

Narrative references

In the meetings as well as in the questionnaire, a number of personal positions were presented by local residents. Those views are qualitative arguments that are relevant for examining the gender aspects of water management in a broad socio-geopolitical context.

Personal Connection to Water and Water Use

The issue of food in the context of the use of personal water appears prominently in the responses of participants in the Hura group. This can be attributed to the fact that a large group of the participants works in a local catering company. The awareness of the great use of water for the preparation of food, or the central part of the preparation of household food is prevalent among households in the Arab society. In addition, one of the women in the Hura group referred nostalgically, when she had to carry water for her family from a remote well for the family's needs.

Security

A woman from Hura claimed we should not help the Palestinians ("Let them stay there, and we'll stay here") which indicates the alienation to the other side, while some women were very curious about the water situation in Gaza and asked questions. Some even mentioned it's important for them to learn more about the regional water situation because they should inform their children.

The responses of participants to the questionnaire in the Sderot community center can be identified with national needs of water such as agriculture and industry. This position can be explained in light of the fact that the participants were part of the city's pioneers ('national ethos'), or because of the long-standing struggle with rounds of military escalation and the security tension, including direct hit of Hamas rockets in Sderot. **That is to say, the national dimension seemed to overshadow personal needs and preferences.**

This attitude also explains the personal feeling that a number of participants raised during the meeting in Sderot following EcoPeace's presentation targeting the need to connect sewage infrastructures to a power grid. They objected to assisting the Palestinians to develop proper infrastructure as they believe the Palestinians will use the aid for terror. Under the current situation, the local participants demonstrated a preference to remain in the existing situation, that is, a situation in which the state of water pollution threatens the environment and health of Palestinians and Israelis, versus the possibility of financial and logistical support to sustain the infrastructure that according to them will be used against them.

Some of the women who participated in the event in the Sderot community center claimed that the security situation has impacted their daily lives for decades and still today: "We don't see our grandchildren; "The (adult) children do not come to Sderot"; "We will sleep in the shelters again" and examples of shooting rockets that hit relatives and caused disability, were among the statements raised by the local participants. This position is an example of the expression of personal concern (a parent who worries for their children and grandchildren safety) that shaped the position regarding a regional solution. It shows that the women also connect the wider security issues to their personal lives.

Lack of Information

Though, many women did not fill out part B, some of the women who answered online expressed concern about lack of water, ramifications of desalination, water pollution and the water issues between Israelis and Palestinians. They did not mention Gaza specifically. An example of reactions indicating the lack of information was one woman from Kibbutz Reim who is a victim of a terror attack. This woman participated in a conference at Sapir College, November 22, and was later interviewed by Shlomit Tamari. First she expressed her concern that only leftists came to EcoPeace meeting. Then she said she was shocked by the presentation about the transboundary water situation and its impact on Israel and that there is not enough information about it. A similar response about lack of information and media attention was seen by a teenage girl in Amit high school.

D. Recommendations for further study and action regarding gender issues

The women who participated in our research were not very familiar with current water issues, especially not transboundary issues, despite the risk posed by the water crisis in Gaza. Yet, both in the questionnaire and in the discussion, they showed great interest, willingness to act and change with an emphasis on two key factors: education and health. This also correlates to the central role of women in running the household even in developed countries.

Moreover, women shared their private stories in the meeting showing a great need to share their life circumstances- whether it was carrying water as a child or how the constant rounds of violence impacted their lives. As it is important to engage more women in the discussion about water issues and to continue and share widely information regarding the water situation and make it a central issue; the information should be presented in a manner that allows people with no previous knowledge of the water sector to understand. In addition, it is important to incorporate the personal narratives and stories of women both to allow them to share and to help them connect to the topic of water on a deeper level. **It is particularly important to incorporate topics that women find relevant such as health, security and education.**

When dealing with the security aspects of the regional water issues in the Hebron-Negev-Gaza basin it is crucial to present the information in a way that addresses concerns regarding use of infrastructure for terror. While women seem to understand the connection between water and security, they need to see how improvement in the infrastructure in Gaza would improve rather than jeopardize their security.

As part of an ongoing research, it is recommended to provide training and capacity building to EcoPeace staff so they can be more familiar with the concept of gender mainstreaming and find engaging ways to incorporate it into their projects even beyond this particular one as well as to activists and professionals in the community.

Examination of attitudes and mapping of gender needs should be carried out in a continuous long-term process that keeps track of the participants' engagement. **Social resilience** is recommended as a key concept in this regard. Social Resilience Index was developed in the area adjacent to the Gaza Strip and is measured annually by students from Sapir College.⁸ The fact that the issue of water is not included in the Social Resilience Index creates a clear bias towards groups that are less involved in water treatment. In principle, issues related to water and sewage treatment are often not reported in the local press, and even if they are reported, few people stop to read. In this framework, it is proposed to integrate aspects of transboundary environmental issues into discussions dealing with social resilience for example in monthly round tables model with the participation of various stakeholders, including women residents of the region and professionals in the field of water management, public health, environmental education (formal and informal), community officials, etc.

⁸ Roset, Uri, et al (2016), *Western Negev Resilience Index* (Hebrew), Sapir Academic College.