



Bethlehem 21 Project
Environmental Sustainability for a Better Life: An Integrated Approach
for Localizing Agenda 21 in the Bethlehem District
LIFE05 TCY/GA/121

Layman's Report

Implementing Institutions:



Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) "Beneficiary"



Centro Regionale d'Intervento per la Cooperazione (CRIC) "Partner"

Funding Institutions:



European Commission - LIFE Third Countries Programme



Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Project Overview and Objectives

The Bethlehem 21 Project "Environmental Sustainability for a Better Life: An Integrated Approach for Localizing Agenda 21 in the Bethlehem District" is a pioneering Palestinian initiative responding to Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 whereby local authorities are called upon to undertake a consultative process to develop and implement a "Local Agenda 21" for and with their communities.

The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ) in cooperation with the Centro Regionale d'Intervento per la Cooperazione (CRIC), started the implementation of Bethlehem 21 Project on the 1st of February 2006 with the support of the European Commission (LIFE Third Countries Programme) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The Bethlehem 21 Project aimed at developing the capacities of the targeted local authorities including *the Municipalities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Za'tara, Al Khader and Ed Doha and the Village Council of Battir*, to reinforce them to enter into dialogue with citizens and local organizations in order to develop local sustainability action strategies or "Local Agendas 21". The adopted participatory approach was in the form of a visioning process that focused on bringing together a broad section of the community with the local authority to develop a shared vision for the sustainability of their community and plan how to achieve it. It is believed that the participation and cooperation of community members with the local authority is a determining factor in bringing about radical changes and promoting sustainable development at a local level because so many of the economical, social and environmental challenges have their roots in local activities.

In addition to its primary objective, the project pursued the following goals:

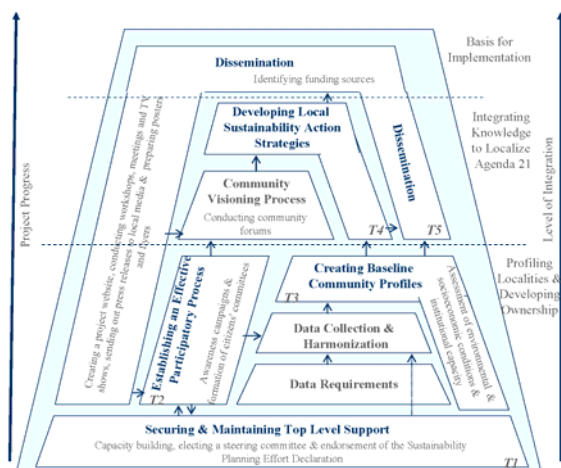
- ✚ To secure and maintain the involvement of the targeted local and national authorities throughout and after the course of project implementation.
- ✚ To establish an effective participatory process that ensures a representative participation of the communities' members with the targeted local and national authorities in the community visioning process.
- ✚ To assess the communities' environmental and socioeconomic conditions as well as the institutional arrangements, structures and practices.
- ✚ To establish a GIS based information system and reinforce the technical capacities of the selected municipalities and rural councils in GIS, database management and environmental monitoring.
- ✚ To formulate shared community vision statements that declare the communities' visions for more sustainable communities and to set sustainability goals, targets and actions
- ✚ To develop local sustainability action strategies "Local Agendas 21" based on the baseline community profiles and the outcomes of the community visioning process.
- ✚ To transfer the gained knowledge to other local authorities in the West Bank and encourage them to carry out similar sustainability initiatives.

Project Actions and Results

Bethlehem 21 Project lasted for 32 months through which the following main tasks were accomplished:

- 1) securing and maintaining the support of local and national authorities;
- 2) establishing an effective participatory process;
- 3) creating baseline community profiles; and
- 4) developing a local sustainability action strategy for each of the targeted communities.

These tasks form the basis of the adopted participatory approach to move towards the sustainability of the targeted communities. A schematic presentation of the relevant working method is shown in the following figure.



A Schematic Presentation of the Working Method "The Project Structure"

Securing and Maintaining Top Level Support

The basis of the work was securing support among the involved local and national authorities in order to maintain their involvement during and after the course of project implementation. The capacities of decision makers (i.e. heads of local councils, councillors, city engineers, representatives of national authorities) in sustainable development and the process of Local Agenda 21 have been developed to ensure successful implementation of the project by means of:

- ✚ Holding thematic group meetings that correspond to five thematic areas; namely socio-economic development, sustainable water resources management, sustainable agriculture, sustainable land management and sustainable solid waste and wastewater management.
- ✚ Organizing a two-day international workshop with the participation of four international delegates from municipalities and institutions that have a commitment to sustainability

and developed Local Agendas 21 including *the Municipality of Rome XI (Italy)*, *the Coordination Body of Italian Local Agendas 21 (Italy)*, *the University of Malta (Malta)* and *the Democracy and Local Development Network of Ecuador (Ecuador)*.

The involved local authorities issued "*Bethlehem 21 Declaration*" in which they declared their commitment to participate in the project activities actively and to proceed with the sustainability initiative after the project duration. The declaration was endorsed by the involved national authorities including the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority, the Palestinian Water Authority, Bethlehem Governorate and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, a *steering committee* composed of 25 members from the involved local and national authorities was formed in order to oversee the implementation process.



The Third Thematic Group Meeting Organized on 10.05.2006



The Two-Day International Workshop "Bethlehem 21 Workshop" Organized on 28 and 29 June 2006

Establishing an Effective Participatory Process

Securing broad public participation of community members with local and national authorities in the Local Agenda 21 process was essential to ensure their effective contribution towards the formulation of local Agenda 21 policies and actions. This was achieved by organizing community awareness campaigns in the form of information and awareness sessions targeting community-based organizations. These resulted in:

- ✚ Identifying public perceptions on the exiting environmental and socioeconomic conditions as well as their desires and needs through an in-depth dialogue.
- ✚ Raising the participants' level of awareness and education in respect to sustainable development concepts, Agenda 21 objectives and the links between personal lifestyle habits and the improvement in the quality of the environment.
- ✚ Forming a *citizens' committee* composed of 5-7 members in each locality to involve community members with the project's steering committee in overseeing project implementation.



The Community Awareness Campaigns organized during November 2006 and January 2007

Creating Baseline Community Profiles

The communities' environmental and socioeconomic conditions as well as the institutional arrangements and structures were assessed using the pressure, state, current practice framework. The Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques were also applied for the management of groundwater pollution and for domestic water vulnerability mapping in order to assess the impacts of the environmentally unsound management of solid waste and wastewater on groundwater.

The data identified for the assessment was collected, harmonized and integrated into a GIS based information system through the *on-job training* provided to selected employees from the involved local authorities. The training resulted in reinforcing the human and technical capacities of local authorities in GIS, database management and environmental monitoring. The computers and the ArcGIS 9.2 software utilized during the training as well as the developed GIS based information systems were transferred to local authorities to allow consequent updates and improve the provision of services, monitoring and planning.



Photo Courtesy of ARIJ

The On-Job Training Conducted During the Period from November 2006 till May 2007

Moreover, the generated information was synthesized into *Baseline Community Profiles* that characterize the environmental and socio-economic conditions on one hand and the driving forces and actions that have led to the current unsustainable situation on the other hand.

Developing Local Sustainability Action Strategies “Local Agendas 21”

Community visioning forums were organized in each targeted locality during July and August 2008. The forums aimed at empowering local communities through participation with decision makers in envisioning the future they want and planning how to achieve it. Each forum resulted in:

- ✚ developing a shared community vision statement for a more sustainable community 20 years from now and establishing key area task forces;
- ✚ identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the community (SWOT Analysis);
- ✚ defining sustainability goals, targets and actions that correspond with the direction set by the shared vision statement for the period from 2009 to 2019; and
- ✚ prioritizing the actions and developing an implementation mechanism for the high priority actions and projects.

Building upon the outcomes of the community visioning process and the findings of the community baseline profile, a *Local Agenda 21* was developed for each community.



The Community Visioning Forums Organized During July and August 2008

A publicity campaign preceded the community visioning forums to attract the community members to participate. TV interviews were organized, posters and flyers were created and press releases were sent out to local media.



A poster presenting the public perceptions on the existing conditions, the major findings of the baseline profile, and the structure of the community visioning process

Dissemination

Dissemination of project findings and results was mainly achieved by:

- ✚ Creating a *project website* that has served as a project information centre and is accessed at: <http://bethlehem21.arij.org>
- ✚ Publishing the outcomes of the community visioning processes in two forms: a leaflet prepared in Arabic and a booklet prepared in English.



- ✚ Publishing the developed Local Agendas 21 in the form of a book.
- ✚ Organizing the *final national conference* "Local Sustainable Development in the Bethlehem Governorate" on 25.10.2008 under the auspices and participation of H.E. the Prime Minister and with the participation of the Minister of Local Government and the Bethlehem Governor.



The Final National Conference

The project resulted in:

- ✚ Creating strong advocates for the sustainability initiative among the local and national authorities.
- ✚ Securing broad public participation of community members and raising their awareness level with respect to localizing Agenda 21.
- ✚ Fostering trust in local and national authorities among the community members.
- ✚ Strengthening the technical capacities of the targeted local authorities in GIS, database management and environmental monitoring.
- ✚ Establishing a comprehensive GIS based information system for each local authority.
- ✚ Producing baseline community profiles providing an assessment of the communities' environmental and socioeconomic conditions.
- ✚ Understanding peoples' perceptions of their environmental futures and social well being.

- ✚ Disseminating the resulting information, extracted knowledge, strategies and actions to the national and local authorities as well as the international funding agencies.
- ✚ Adoption of the recommended actions and strategies defined in the Local Agendas 21 by the local and national authorities.

Assessment of the Socioeconomic and Environmental Impacts

The implementation of the project resulted in several benefits including:

- ✚ Developing the capacities of the targeted local and national authorities in the field of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 process.
- ✚ Developing the human and technical capacities of the targeted local authorities in GIS, database management and environmental monitoring. This enabled some of them from improving the provision of services and planning.

Bethlehem Municipality established a GIS department following the completion of the on-job training. The department is involved in generating geospatial data that is needed to support decision making for urban planning and management at the municipality level including the building and construction licensing, land settlement and taxation systems. It also supports the Water Supply and Sewage Authority in the provision of data required for sanitation and water infrastructure.

- ✚ Providing local authorities with tools that will contribute to advancing their communities towards sustainability, which are:
 - 1) the reliable and up-to-date environmental data and information harmonized in GIS based information systems; and

- 2) the Local Agendas 21 that were developed by decision makers in partnership with the communities' members.

The Local Agenda 21 is a 'living document' which can be effectively used in the strategic and corporate planning processes of the local authority. It will enable the local authority to interact with donors, funding agencies and implementing institutions with clear needs and priorities especially that it was developed in partnership with local community. This gives it power and legitimacy and promotes the sense of ownership and responsibility among the citizens leading to environmental, social and economical sustainability and public benefit.

- Empowering the citizens in defining their future goals and designing the plans and actions towards achieving these goals. They were supported with knowledge and scientific information that helped them choose between options that would improve the environmental situation and maximize their net social benefits.

Citizens' and decision makers called for a future in which environmental, social and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life. This is reflected in the shared community vision statements and the sustainability goals.

BEIT JALA MUNICIPALITY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE

THE SHARED COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

We, the citizens of *Beit Jala City*, envision that in 2028 our city will be.....
 “A city that is safe, free and open to everyone, a place where residents enjoy social, economical, and environmental wellbeing with a just law and united efforts at the Governorate level.”

THE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

- Goal 1: Vitalize the City and its Citizens Economically
- Goal 2: Develop the Domestic and Inbound Tourism
- Goal 3: Develop and Empower Local Community
- Goal 4: Develop the Infrastructure
- Goal 5: Protect the Environment and Human Health

- Resourcing the projects identified in the Local Agendas 21 in order to move from agenda to action, realize the sustainability goals and targets, and consequently ensure an accelerated implementation of sustainable development at the local level.

On the Ground Actions

Beit Jala Municipality:

- The Islamic Development Bank through the Ministry of Local Government provided the municipality with a fund to develop and expand the lights crafts industrial zone in the City, which is one the projects to meet Goals 1& 2.
- The KFW through the Municipal Development and Lending Fund supported the construction and paving of new roads in the city which is one the projects to meet Goal 4.

The municipality is in the process of preparing the necessary bids so that the implementation will take place next year.

On the Ground Actions

ARIJ, through its main programs of sustainable agriculture and natural resources management, has supported the targeted local authorities in the implementation of several projects:

Al Khader Municipality and Battir Village Council

- Installing small scale wastewater treatment plants to replace the existing cesspits that contribute in contaminating the groundwater.

Local Agenda 21 Goals:

Al Khader – Goal 1 "Provide a Healthy Clean Living Environment"

Battir – Goal 2 "Protect the Environment and Human Health"

ARIJ's Project Title:

Introducing Small Scale Activated Sludge Filtration System for Wastewater Treatment in the Rural Areas of the Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates

Funding agency:

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Beit Sahour and Al Khader Municipalities

- Rehabilitating domestic rainwater harvesting cisterns, building home gardens and providing farmers with field crops.

Local Agenda 21 Goals:

Al Khader – Goal 1 "Provide a Healthy Clean Living Environment
Goal 3 "Improve the Quality of Life, Socially and Economically"

Beit Sahour – Goal 4 "Develop the Infrastructure and Protect the Urban Environment"

ARIJ's Project Title:

Enhancing Food Security in Marginalized Rural Areas of Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates

Funding Agency:

The Spanish Cooperation

Transferability of Project Results

The Bethlehem 21 Project has contributed in cultivating a new concept of development ownership in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: this concept reflects the determination of the Palestinian people to remain on their land and continue to pursue their livelihoods, not succumbing to the pressures placed upon them by the Israeli Occupation. It is also a concept that refers to the transition from unviable development under Occupation to development for endurance and survival.

Bethlehem 21 Project and the other Palestinian sustainability initiatives that apply an integrated participatory approach to policy making involving all relevant stakeholders, highly contribute to strengthening the development process in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, mainly as such initiatives correspond to the national development planning process.

The preparation of the Local Agenda 21, which is a local strategic development plan, falls within the increased interest of the Ministry of Local Government in strategic development planning based on community participation. Such an approach allows for enhancing the capacities of local authorities to lead and run the development process in partnership with civil society organizations. Furthermore, the Local Agenda 21 is expected to feed into the regional and national development plans with respect to determining the development priorities and the intervention areas required to meet citizens' needs at the local and regional levels. The goals, targets and projects included in the Local Agendas 21 developed in the framework of Bethlehem 21 Project correspond to the reform and development programs of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) 2008-2010, which was adopted by the government last year.

The process of linking the local development plans with the PRDP will ensure that such plan contribute to the

fundraising and implementation of the identified projects without wasting resources. In this context, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Local Government recommended the formation of a committee from all relevant stakeholders to study and analyze the actions and projects identified in the Local Agendas 21 and come out with a list of the most vital projects that are in line with the PRDP programs and should be urgently implemented. This will contribute to securing funding for the implementation of specific projects.

Moreover, the Bethlehem 21 Project serves as a demonstration model for other localities in the West Bank as it provides a general methodology for implementing Agenda 21 in developing countries and therefore it can be thought of as a pilot project. The gained knowledge was transferred to other local authorities during the course of project implementation. Several local authorities including Al 'Ebeidiyyeh and Dura Municipalities in the Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates, respectively, showed their interest to be engaged in a "Local Agenda 21" process for the following benefits:

- ✚ Strategic planning to define the road map to the future they want in partnership with community members.
- ✚ Enhanced capacity to meet community needs.
- ✚ Integrated decision making which takes all foreseeable economic, social and environmental considerations into account.
- ✚ Greater community cohesion.
- ✚ Stronger community and local authority partnership.
- ✚ Enhanced individual's behavior towards sustainability through education and awareness raising as local authorities are the level of government closest to citizens on a day-to-day basis.

Information

For further information about Bethlehem 21 Project, please visit the project website <http://bethlehem21.arij.org>.

The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ) welcomes any comments or suggestions regarding the material published herein.

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