



Bethlehem 21 Project

**Environmental Sustainability for a Better Life:
An Integrated Approach for Localizing Agenda 21 in the
Bethlehem District, No: LIFE05 TCY/GA/000121**

Public Perceptions Report "D2.1"

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Introduction

Public participation in the decision making process that leads to the development of a local sustainability action strategy "Local Agenda 21" is extremely crucial and considered as a central part of the local sustainable development policies. It can lead to better decisions. That is, decisions that better meet the needs of people, decisions that last longer and decisions that have more validity. Accordingly, better decisions will lead to improvements in everyone's quality of life. By considering the issue as widely as possible, improvements in social conditions, the economy and the environment can occur at the same time.

Sustainability cannot be achieved, nor significant progress made toward it, without the support and involvement of the whole community. Public involvement should be considered at an early stage in the decision making process related to local sustainability initiatives as it ensures that the public views are heard and taken into account as well as helps to build consensus. Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would acquire from citizens and local organizations the information needed for formulating the best strategies for promoting sustainable development at a local level.

Out of this context, public participation was considered in Bethlehem 21 sustainability initiative at this stage of implementation in order to establish an effective participatory process that will ensure a representative participation of the communities' members with the involved local and national authorities in the community visioning processes that will take place at a later implementation stage (Task 4). The community-based organizations in the targeted communities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Za'tara, Al Khader, Ed Doha and Battir were involved through the community awareness campaigns organized in cooperation with the local councils during the period from November 2006 till January 2007 (Task 2) (Please see **Annex 1** for the list of organizations). The campaigns consisted of three sessions that were held in the local councils' halls in separate meetings over three weeks or in a one-day workshop according to the following schedule:

	1 st session	2 nd Session	3 rd Session	Three Sessions in a One-day Workshop
Beit Jala:	17/11/2006	24/11/2006	01/12/2006	
Bethlehem:	05/12/2006	12/12/2006	19/12/2006	
Beit Sahour:	11/12/2006	14/12/2006	21/12/2006	
Ed Doha:				23/01/2007
Battir				26/01/2007
Al Khader:				27/01/2007
Za'tara:				30/01/2007

The number of organizations and participants that attended the awareness campaigns varied from one community to another as follows:

	Number of Organizations	Number of Participants
Beit Jala:	22	34
Bethlehem:	35	45
Beit Sahour:	25	37
Al Khader:	10	32
Battir:	6	17
Ed Doha:	12	25
Za'tara:	7	40

In the first session of the campaign, the participants had the opportunity to express their concerns about the prevailing social, economic and environmental conditions and state their opinions about the role and effectiveness of the Local Councils in managing the various aspects in

their communities. The brainstorming approach was applied in this session in order to motivate the participants. The following sections outline public perceptions that were revealed during this session.

It is believed that this session highly contributed to the successful implementation of the second session that resulted in raising the level of education among the participants about sustainable development concepts, Agenda 21 objectives and the links between personal lifestyle habits and the improvement in the quality of the environment as well as of the third session that led to the formation of citizens' committees.

Public Perceptions on the Existing Socioeconomic Conditions

The following outlines public concerns about the prevailing socioeconomic conditions in their communities and the relevant needs.

Common Concerns and Needs

- ✚ The participants expressed a great concern that the unstable political situation, lack of sovereignty over the Palestinian land and the geographical discontinuity between the Palestinian localities and districts have undermined the process of development and jeopardized the efforts of establishing economically productive projects.
- ✚ The participants reached a consensus that the main obstacle hindering the process of development in the targeted localities and Bethlehem District as well is the lack of security induced by the continuous Israeli military incursions and infringements.
- ✚ The participants indicated that the absence of good governance is among the major obstacles against moving the Palestinian communities in general towards sustainable development.
- ✚ The participants expressed a great concern about the high living standard, the low level of income, the high unemployment rate, lack of job opportunities and poverty due the deteriorated economic situation. These concerns are considered among the major challenges facing the community members. The participants from Al Khader and Battir indicated that a high percentage of the citizens used to work inside Israel, but can't do this anymore due to the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians and the construction of the Segregation Wall.

In this context, the participants suggested:

- 1) halting the dependence on the financial support from the international donor communities as they impose their agendas on the national and local authorities and provide funds for infrastructure and emergency relief projects rather than for development projects to improve and sustain the quality of life;
 - 2) activating the role of Palestinian immigrants by motivating them to implement development projects that create job opportunities and improve the deteriorating economical situation in their home country/city; and
 - 3) activating the role of private sector.
- ✚ The participants expressed concern about several issues including:
- 1) the weakness of the executive bodies and the legal system to enforce the legislations and to support the execution of laws (i.e. lack of law enforcement), respectively. This is considered the main reason behind the existing violations at the municipal level and the escalation of the violent actions among the citizens mainly the youth;

- 2) the lack of active citizenship among a wide sector of the community members which is highly observed in Ed Doha where the participants suggested forming neighborhood associations to promote active citizenship;
- 3) the weakness in family ties that has been noticed lately in the three main cities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour;
- 4) the migration of a high number of citizens mainly among the young educated people that seek job opportunities abroad, which has been highly observed in Beit Jala City. This has resulted in a great loss in the human resources that may highly contribute to local development;
- 5) the lack of efficient and satisfactory health and social insurances for the elderly people;
- 6) the early marriage, and
- 7) the Israeli control over the Palestinian land and the problems of land registration and land stealing. Most of the lands in the municipal jurisdiction are privately owned. This makes it harder for local governmental bodies to implement large scale projects, unless they buy pieces of lands, which in turn would increase the costs of the projects.

✚ The participants highlighted the need of:

- 1) empowering youth organizations and centers to advance the role of youth and actively involve them in decision making processes related to the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development;
- 2) providing and/or expanding extracurricular youth activities; and
- 3) forming popular movements against the Israeli occupation practices including land confiscation, uprooting of trees, house demolition, construction of Israeli settlements, bypass roads, military bases and the construction of the Segregation Wall.

Community Specific Concerns and Needs

✚ The participants from Beit Jala and Bethlehem cities:

- 1) complained from the high trade tariffs of the commercial sector due to the marketing monopoly of some of the products. They proposed privatizing some of the projects under the supervision of local authorities/councils;
- 2) expressed concern about the collapse of the tourism sector that has negatively influenced the economic conditions of a wide sector of the community members. They indicated that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in general and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in particular, contributed to the collapse of this sector as they haven't worked towards the activation of the internal tourism and the rehabilitation of the old city cultural and religious centers to absorb the tourists during the high seasons;
- 3) expressed concern about the tension in relationships between the rich and poor community segments; and
- 4) emphasized the need of promoting equity among community members, the involvement of marginalized members in social activities and the importance of fostering trust in local and national authorities and organizations among community members.

✚ The participants from Beit Sahour City:

- 1) expressed concern about the challenges facing the mother-of-pearl and olivewood handicrafts sector after the outbreak of the second Intifada, mainly the marketing of products which has been reduced resulting in bad revenues. This has influenced the economic conditions of people working in this sector; and
- 2) stated that there should be more governmental schools in the city to absorb the high number of students. They also complained about the inappropriate timing of street lightening.

✚ The participants from Ed Doha City expressed concern about:

- 1) the fact that local organizations are facing financial problems as regards to covering their running costs due to the deteriorated economic situation;
- 2) the high illiteracy among the citizens and the lack of a typical school for girls;
- 3) the low number of health care centers;
- 4) the lack of public parks for the children;
- 5) the lack of childcare institutions mainly for children with special learning needs;
- 6) the fact that local organizations do not have a pivotal role in the community; and
- 7) the low level of awareness among the community members.

✚ The participants from Battir village expressed concern about:

- 1) the need of providing local producers with financial and technical assistance to protect local products;
- 2) the need of having more schools in the village;
- 3) the high cancer incidents among the villagers; and
- 4) the lack of vocational centers and youth organizations.

✚ The participants from Al Khader expressed concern about:

- 1) the challenges facing local farmers including: (a) the marketing of their products: within the surrounding local market because of the Israeli agricultural products available in such market at lower prices; and to the local markets outside Bethlehem District because of the strict restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians within the West Bank as well as the high transport costs; and (b) the confiscation of their agricultural lands by the Israeli Occupation Forces, thus losing their source of income;
- 2) the weakness of elementary education in schools and health care services;
- 3) the high cost of higher education in universities;
- 4) the lack of childcare institutions and children clubs;
- 5) the conflict among local organizations which impedes cooperation among them; and
- 6) the low level of awareness and education among the community members.

✚ The participants from Za'tara village expressed concern about:

- 1) the challenges facing local farmers including the high cost of fodder and emphasized the need of providing the farmers with technical and financial support by implementing local development projects;
- 2) the high cost of higher education; and
- 3) the marginalization of community members with special needs.

Public Perceptions on the Existing Environmental Conditions

The following outlines public concerns about the prevailing environmental problems in their communities and the relevant needs.

Common Concerns and Needs

✚ The participants expressed concern about:

- 1) water shortage in both the summer and winter seasons due to the Israeli strict control over the Palestinian groundwater resources, and the high water losses because of the physical losses in the water network, the inefficient maintenance by the responsible authority and the unregistered connections;
- 2) the disposal of the collected solid waste due to lack of a sanitary landfill that serves the whole area;
- 3) the discharge of the collected wastewater that flows untreated in Wadi En Nar due to lack of a central wastewater treatment plant that serves the whole area;
- 4) the fact that no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies has been applied to the projects taking place in the municipalities;
- 5) urban growth that is not directed in a specific direction, largely because it has become difficult to maintain protected areas under the current constraints and shortage of land; and
- 6) the weakness of environmental education among the children, youth and adults as well.

✚ The participants emphasized the need of:

- 1) organizing public awareness programs on environmental sustainability;
- 2) expanding the environmental education curricula to include education on sustainable development;
- 3) facilitating public access to information related to the environment; and
- 4) promoting public participation in decision making processes related to the environment as well as the sustainability of the community.

Community Specific Concerns and Needs

✚ The participants from Beit Jala City expressed concern about:

- 1) air pollution problems resulting from the increase in the number of operating vehicles using the main road that connects the city or Bethlehem area with Hebron and Jerusalem because of the closure of other roads by the Israeli Occupation Forces and the strict restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians;
 - 2) the solid waste transfer station that is located within a residential area;
 - 3) the intensive use of pesticides and fertilizers; and
 - 4) the deterioration of wildlife resources and biodiversity due to overgrazing.
- ✚ The participants from Beit Jala and Beit Sahour cities complained about the stormwater drainage system which is limited to certain areas and inefficient.
- ✚ The participants from Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Ed Doha expressed concern about the improper practices of some citizens as regards to the disposal of solid waste in the wastewater manholes resulting in the flood of wastewater in the streets which causes health problems. They emphasized the need of intensive monitoring to such practices by the responsible authority.
- ✚ The participants from Ed Doha expressed concern about the large number of stone cutting facilities within residential areas and the pressure added on the environment from the generated solid waste, wastewater and air born pollutants.
- ✚ The participants from Battir expressed concern about:
- 1) the lack of sewage network and the use of cesspits to dispose of the generated wastewater;
 - 2) the flooding of wastewater collected in cesspits into the streets especially during the winter season;
 - 3) the pollution of springs due to the improper management of wastewater;
 - 4) the random dumping of scrap cars;
 - 5) the inefficient solid waste collection service due to the availability of one solid waste vehicle; and
 - 6) the existing dumping sites that receive solid waste generated inside Israeli or the Israeli settlements mainly construction waste (it is worth mentioning that some of the participants highlighted the fact that the composition of the dumped waste is unknown).
- ✚ The participants from Al Khader expressed concern about:
- 1) the wastewater cesspits that are used to dispose of the generated wastewater from the houses that are not served by the existing sewage network as most of them are left unlined so that wastewater infiltrates into the earth layers and the owners avoid using the expensive service of vacuum tankers to empty them (i.e. this practice results in the contamination of groundwater and the deterioration of its quality) ;
 - 2) the flooding of wastewater collected in cesspits into the streets;
 - 3) the accumulation of solid waste in the streets and outside the containers due to the availability of one solid waste vehicle to collect the generated waste;
 - 4) the pollution of spring water;

- 5) the intensive use of pesticides; and
- 6) the stone cutting facilities and the disposal of the generated waste into the streets and nearby agricultural lands.

✚ The participants from Za'tara expressed concern about:

- 1) the deterioration of agricultural lands;
- 2) desertification and loss of biodiversity;
- 3) the pollution of soil and groundwater due to wastewater collection in cesspits; and
- 4) the need to rehabilitate the greywater treatment units available in the village.

Public Perceptions on the Role and Effectiveness of Local Councils

The following outlines public perceptions on the role and effectiveness of their local councils in managing the various aspects in their communities.

✚ In general the majority of participants indicated that the level of public services provided to citizens by their local councils is considered good in light of the following:

- 1) the deficiencies in their budgets;
- 2) the allocated budget to the municipalities does not cover the expenses and there is a problem of fees/taxes collection due to lack of commitment from citizens in paying the fees/taxes; and
- 3) the absence of rule of law;

However, they indicated that the work of local councils should not be limited to providing services as they are responsible for providing the community members with an environmentally sound, economically productive and socially just community. Accordingly they emphasized the need of:

- 1) supporting the implementation of development projects that create sustainable job opportunities and contribute to improving and sustaining the quality of life; and
- 2) promoting public participation in decision making processes as well as facilitating public access to information;

✚ Finally, the participants highlighted the fact that local initiatives of coordination between the municipalities are directed towards service provision and not planning or development.

Annex 1: List of Local Organizations that Participated in the Community Awareness Campaigns Organized in the Targeted Communities

	Organization Type	Organization
Beit Jala		
1	Agriculture	Beit Jala Farmers' Society
2	Charitable Organizations	Arab Orthodox Benevolent Society
3		Society of Orthodox Churches Deputies
4		St. Mansour Charitable Society
5		St. Nicolas Home Charitable Society for the Elderly
6		The Elderly's House
7		Patients' Friends (Benevolent) Society
8		Cultural Centers
9	Education	Girls' High School - Beit Jala
10		Jerusalem School
11		Latin Patriarchate School
12		Wadi's Di'mis School
13	Environment & Water	Environmental Education Center
14		Water Supply & Sewerage Authority
15	Women's Organizations	Women's Society for Childcare
16		Palestinian Child's Club
17		The Society of Palestine Greeks
18	Youth Organizations & clubs	Al Malha Youth Club
19		Krimzan Club
20		St. Nicolas Youth
21		Talitha Kumi Scout and Girl Guides
22		The Scouts of Beit Jala Latin Church
Bethlehem		
1	Associations & Unions	Engineers' Association
2		Agricultural Engineers' Association
3		Pharmaceutical Association
4	Chambers of Commerce	Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce & Industry
5	Charitable Organizations	Al-Malha Charitable Society
6		The Ibrahimi Benevolent Society
7		Al-Karkafeh Charitable Society
8		Islamic Charitable Society - Bethlehem
9		Palestine Red Crescent Society
10		Patients' Friends (Benevolent) Society
11		Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association
12		The Holy Cross Institute
13		Hamilat At-Tib Orthodox Benevolent Society
14		The Charitable Antwanian Society
15	St. Aphrem Charitable Society	
16	Hope for Creative Financing	
17	Cultural Centers	International Center of Bethlehem (Dar An-Nadweh Ad-Duwaliyeh)
18		Dar Al-Kalima Health and Wellness Center
19	Democracy, Peace & Community Development Centers	Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center (WIAM)
20	Education	St. Joseph's Girls School

21		Freres College for Boys
22	Media & Press	Al-Quds Newspaper
23	Neighborhood Associations	Al-Farahieh Neighborhood (Street)
24		Al-Fawaghreh Neighborhood
25		Al-Saf Neighborhood (Street)
26		Wadi Al-Ma'ali Neighborhood
27	Non-Governmental Organizations	Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF)
28	Palestinian Authority Agencies & Institutions	WAFA Palestine News Agency
29	Religious Forums & Centers	Islamic Waqf Department
30		The Greek Catholic Church
31	Women's Organizations	Arab Women's Union
32		General Union of Palestinian Women
33	Youth Organizations & Clubs	Bethlehem Islamic Sports Club
34		The Syrian Club
35		Orthodox Scout - Bethlehem
Beit Sahour		
1	Associations & Unions	Engineers' Association
2		Greek-Orthodox Housing Society
3		Al-Beida Housing Cooperative
4	Charitable Organizations	Islamic Charitable Society
5		Society of Orthodox Churches Deputies
6		Family Development Charitable Society
7		Arab Orthodox Benevolent Society
8		The Arab Orthodox Club
9		Beit Sahour Center for the Elderly
10	Education	Shepherds' High School
11		Latin Patriarchate School
12		Boys' Secondary School
13		Boys' Middle School (Al Ta'achy)
14		Boys' Primary School (Al Tassamoh)
15		Shepherds' Field Nursery and Pre-School
16		Annourciation Pre-School for Holy Land
17	Health	Health Work Committees
18		Beit Sahour Medical Center
19		Beit Sahour Cooperative Society for Health Assurance
20	Training & Vocational Centers	Fashion & Textile Institute
21	Women's Organizations	Woman Committee
22	Youth Organizations & Clubs	Young Men's Christian Association
23		The Cultural Youth Club
24		Shepherds' Scout
25		Al Awda Center
Ed Doha		
1	Charitable Organizations	Al-Amal Charitable Society
2	Education	Al-Naqa' Islamic School
3		Girls' High School - Ed Doha
4		Al-Wa'd Pre-School
5		Bara'im Al-Firdos Pre-School
6		Nur Al-Bara'h Speech & Language Therapy (Special Education)

7	Health	Ed Doha Physiotherapy Center
8	Women's Organizations	Ayat Women's Center
9	Youth Organizations & clubs	Ed Doha Sports Club
10	Cultural Centers	Dalal Cultural Center
11		Ed Doha Children's Cultural Center
12		Cultural Municipal Center
Battir		
1	Agriculture	Battir Agricultural Committee
2	Charitable Organizations	Battir Charitable Society
3	Women's Organizations	Battir Center for Woman and Child
4		Union of Palestinian Women Committees
5	Youth Organizations & clubs	Battir Sports Club
6	Cultural Centers	Bethlehem Cultural Center
Al Khader		
	Organization Type	Organization
1	Agriculture	Al Khader Agricultural Cooperative
2		Al Khader Society for Production and Marketing of Grapes
3	Charitable Organizations	Al-Ahliyah Benevolent Society
4		Zakat Committee for Al Khader
5		Charitable Child Care Society
6		Palestine Red Crescent Society
7	Women's Organizations	Al Khader Women's Club
8		Al Khader Women's Society
9	Youth Organizations & clubs	Al Khader Sports Club
10	Cultural Centers	Cultural Forum for Development (Methak)
Za'tara		
	Organization Type	Organization
1	Agriculture	Za'tara Livestock Cooperative
2	Charitable Organizations	Za'tara Al Ta'amra Benevolent Society
3	Education	'Ibad Al-Rahman School for Boys
4	Women's Organizations	Za'tara Women Center
5		Za'tara Women Club
6	Youth Organizations & clubs	Za'tara Youth Sport Club
7	Cultural Centers	Social Activity Center