

Capacity Assessment and Reflection on Pilot Project: ARIJ

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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.



Applied Research Institute Jerusalem

Pilot title:	"A model eco-friendly park"
Location:	Al Jab'a Village, Bethlehem Governorate
Thematic area:	Environmental and Climate practices
Gender and Advocacy Officer:	Bisan Abuaita



Project overview

Problem: The village council has been granted 6 dunums of land (in a “safe” part of Area C) on which to establish a community park for villages surrounded by aggressive illegal settlements. A grant was received from the PA to build a meeting room and canteen. A request was made to ARIJ to help set up the park’s landscaping and water system: a garden is being established, with shaded picnic tables, and a children’s playground provides space for youngsters to play on weekends. Site construction is close to completion but the garden was not yet fully operational at the time of the week-day field visit.

Piloted solution: ARIJ has installed a small grid-tied solar system with no storage (batteries) which will run the canteen. There is a grey water recycling system and an irrigation system for the garden. ARIJ will support the full planting of the garden. The installed systems are intended to 1) generate energy to run the park’s canteen during daylight hours when most activities take place; 2) use water wisely in both gardens and hamams for the public; 3) provide a pleasant, shaded rest area for visitors.

Added value: ARIJ has designed and installed a comprehensive system designed to make the park pleasant and sustainable.

Immediate social impact:

- The canteen is not open yet, but the solar system should meet its energy needs
- The greywater recycling and irrigation systems are in place and ready for visitors
- The centre was in use on the field visit day: there was an activity inside the building and small groups of visitors were already using the shaded park benches
- Families have already begun to use the park on weekends



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 suitable for an unserved site in a remote location.

The pilot has been well-designed. It is comprehensive. It supports the council’s vision of a pleasant community space where villagers can find relief from the relentless presence of illegal settlers.



Added value: ARIJ’s technical team have offered a comprehensive solution appropriate for the park’s location and intended users, and within the sustainability vision of the ECJP.

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

Yes. The design of the technologies is appropriate for the site.

And no. Without a commitment to build it differently, the park will not be accessible to people who use a mobility device or have any other disability: the hill is steep, there are a lot of stairs. The railings are not well-built and a child could easily fall and be injured. These concerns should be addressed as the garden development goes forward.



And **no**: the council has received *three different technologies* (solar, irrigation, grey water), all of which need to be maintained and kept up, in harsh weather conditions. These systems will receive a lot of usage if the expected large crowds start to use the garden and will need to be well-cared for. What are we going to see when we go back to the garden in a few months' time?

3) Is the pilot sustainable?

No. "Sustainable" technology can only be given that name if it is well-cared for, so that it lasts for a long time

- Only a few weeks after installation, we saw signs of equipment failing:
 - there was a bad leak in the irrigation system and no effort had been made to fix it, or to safeguard the precious water. Always anticipate that technologies will break! At a minimum, a channel should have been dug to guide the water that was pooling on the ground to a place where it could sink into the ground or water a new plant
 - there was garbage in the garden; the garden itself was untidy and existing plants were not being looked after
 - the solar panels were so thick with dust they cannot have functioned optimally. They require daily cleaning to work well



How to change this No to a Yes

- ARIJ is offered an important opportunity to learn about sustainability from this pilot
- Is it wise and useful to install so much technology at once? We saw that the council member in charge of the garden is already overwhelmed and not doing his job of caring for the equipment
 - SLOW DOWN! Consider a smaller, more incremental approach when a project assessment indicates that new technologies might be useful
 - Consider that the installed technology is the **beginning** of a relationship with its new owner, **not the end** of the pilot
 - **Before** installing the next system, support the caretaker to gain new skills and to show both that he understands what he needs to do, and that he is committed to care for each technology
 - Monitor, mentor and support partners at each stage of technology-driven projects
- Devise an adequate follow-up process: design a practical short- and long-term project management plan
- A single training on maintenance is **not enough**: it is clear that necessary skills have not been transferred to the park manager
 - He does not seem committed to/ does not understand that maintenance work needs to be undertaken regularly (daily and weekly)
 - He does not appear to be taking any initiative of his own to manage the equipment in his care, or to report faults to ARIJ. This indicates either a lack of commitment or a lack of communication between him and the ARIJ technical team
- 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 (assuming, for example, that a solar system can last 15-20 years; similarly, what does the grey water system need to function effectively for many years?)

Challenge to address

- At this stage of the pilot, the installed system's need for care and maintenance has been made invisible. There is no clear plan to mentor a nominated counterpart on regular (e.g. cleaning, checking connections) and long-term maintenance of the system
- This is a **missed opportunity** for ARIJ 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 community gardens

Recommendations:

- Installing a technological 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 and ARIJ sees evidence that the council member counterpart is doing his work of maintain the installation
- Ask what else is needed to ensure that the technological equipment installed will be maintained at optimal efficiency for its full multi-year life?

4) Can and should the pilot be scaled up?

Potentially. If a strong monitoring and evaluation process is set up for the pilot, including assessment of skills transfer for maintenance of installations, this project should be replicable in other community gardens.

Before opting for technology, first find out what other options exist to build skills, capacities and commitment to build a thriving, beautiful and sustainable space.



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 places for relaxation and recreation with rights-holders across Palestine.

6) Is the project politically pragmatic?

Possibly. Palestinian villagers near illegal settlements are in serious need of beautiful places to relax: the question is, how practical and sustainable is the vision of establishing such gardens when there are many accounts of existing efforts being destroyed when they become too well-used?

Has ARIJ designed an installation that will escape detection by not offering “too much” that is “too visible”? What **realistic** protection strategies can be envisaged to help safeguard the installation from external harm?



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

Yes. The garden seems welcoming to both women and men at present. A small group of young women was enjoying a peaceful time at a picnic table when we undertook the field visit. We were told that families enjoy the space on weekends.

And no. Only male technicians worked on the project, and they only worked with male leadership in the village council. In the pilot design, everyone from ARIJ and the village council equated “technology” with “masculinity.” Their shared stereotypes meant no-one thought beyond the exciting idea of installing “new and sustainable technologies”. Did anyone **ask** whether installing technology is the real priority for this space? Did anyone ask if this is the best way to enable a long-lasting park to be set up?

In a community that over-associates “caring” (caring = maintenance) with “women’s work”, assuming but not asking who will take care of equipment seems to be a key factor in why there are no clear plans to ensure that the garden and technological equipment will be well-maintained. Already we can see that a commitment to long-term care is missing from the project. The installation is already degrading because it is not being looked after.

Would it have made a difference to ensure both women and men know how to care for the installed equipment? ARIJ should urgently find out.

I asked a couple of Palestinian organisations who already use solar: who does the boring daily work of cleaning the panels? The answer was always – the women caretaker staff. While I do not want to imply that only women should do cleaning work, it is realistic and appropriate to understand what social stereotypes might enable – or prevent – achieving the project’s aim to be sustainable. Include women in the park’s management and see what changes?

It matters who ARIJ talks to when conceptualising a new project, especially a pilot. If technical staff only speak to men, they **risk reinforcing** existing societal limitations and beliefs and compromising the ECJP goals.

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

There appears to be **an idea** that local women can make and sell food in the canteen, but no evidence was offered that this potential income-generating activity has been properly planned yet. ARIJ could **add value** by co-designing a small-scale business plan to make sure the canteen is well-used and a source of income for the garden and the council. If women feel attached to the garden, and know how things work and how to maintain them, this may improve the chances that existing equipment will last a long time. This could contribute to the maintenance of the space and attract visitors.

Over time, a well-designed **advocacy strategy** can open up possibilities for women in the village to learn the hands-on capacities needed to keep the technical installation working well. This is highly advisable to achieve regular and committed maintenance.

Unfortunately, in Palestine as in the rest of the world, “caring for” is over-associated with femininity. If only men are equipped to work with technologies, they easily walk away from maintaining them. There is global evidence that when women are involved in technical teams and are empowered to take charge of technologies that require maintenance and care, this work 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.

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



9) Capacity-strengthening needs

ARIJ 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 that strongly try to tackle gendered exclusions. Internally, ARIJ could commit to reflecting on why overlooking gendered inequalities **undermines** and **prevents** inclusive projects for all potential rights-bearers, and **betrays the hopes of sustainability**.

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

10) What small, doable actions are possible?

1) Stay connected to the pilot projects.

In their FGD, ARIJ’s staff requested more training on how to incorporate social inclusion and climate justice into their work. This assessment reveals why the pilot project is a rich site for internal ARIJ learning; and for PAIC learning as a whole. This ESIA can help ARIJ re-commit to devising a long-term management plan to promote more social inclusion in your work.

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

- a. Keep supporting the garden manager so the investment you have made is sustainable
- b. Devise advocacy efforts to tell the stories of how Palestinians use and continue to improve the garden. What realistic dreams for its ongoing growth can you support?
- c. What small-scale projects could you establish to build the garden's reputation as an "ecological" space:
 - i. composting from food waste?
 - ii. Planting a heritage garden that preserves rare Native trees and plants?
 - iii. Showcasing sustainable heritage gardening practices?
- d. Support the village Council to gain the skills and commitment to maintain their new technical installations. This has two positive outcomes:
 - i. the systems will keep the garden attractive and useful for a long time.
 - ii. The garden can become an example to the wider community of the long Palestinian heritage of sustainable practices, wise water management, composting and soil regeneration, heritage planting, and so on – encouraging and maintain a connection to the land even under the constraints of military occupation
- e. Maintain a relationship of care with the garden: what are its ongoing needs and how can they be met? What resources are necessary and where will they come from?
- f. Proactively look for new project ideas for the garden and the community centre. What achievable and affordable new ideas can you bring to the space, especially to prove and promote the idea that women can learn about, benefit from and otherwise support projects using sustainable technologies

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

- a. What happens when ARIJ focuses more on technology than thinking broadly about social inclusion?
- b. What beliefs and habits had already pre-shaped the pilot design before its implementation?
- c. How did these beliefs shape the pilot's delivery?
- d. What assumptions were made about "sustainability"? (is technical equipment, on its own, sustainable? What supporting structures does it need to make sure it lasts and is well-used?
- e. What opportunities might have been missed?
- f. Who could have helped navigate around the blind spots?
- g. How can teams communicate better across the technical/social divide inside ARIJ?

3) Question internal siloes in ARIJ

- a. Whose additional technical expertise could have been included in the pilot design at inception? Even asking the question, "have we considered every potential rights-holder in this project?" will change the inception and the outcome
- b. Conduct a short internal review of how ARIJ recruits and assigns its project teams. This can reveal the extent to which the technology=masculine stereotype may be shaping the work ARIJ undertakes with communities, shaping any intervention in a particular direction even before the first community consultation is held.

4) Devise an internal project design process or checklist

- a. If men are found to be over-associated with technology, 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 male champions be encouraged to ask a new 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 ARIJ's work, what training can be offered to help them understand technologies ARIJ uses – without needing them 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 is being implemented.
- b. The first question to ask is: is a technological solution the best one? Is it likely to reach and benefit the widest number of rights-bearers?
- c. Then ask: if yes, how do we find ways to design for all? 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

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



The PAIC field visit to the new garden supported by ARIJ, 10 August 2022.