

## **Improving Local Water Governance through Stakeholder Dialogue**

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### **Abstract**

The current water management style in the Middle East Region is characterized by centralized and top down management compounded by lack of stakeholders' involvement, uneasy communication and fragmentation of responsibilities among many actors. This potentially has created some conflict of interests among the different actors. In many cases such conflicts of interest have resulted from the different perception on the same issue. In some certain cases these conflicts of interest can be reasonably dealt with through direct negotiation among competing actors. However, in situations of war or occupation the margins of negotiation are often extremely narrow or non-existent. The context is even different such as the case of Palestine.

The impact of ignoring Palestinian public participation during the previous era, by the occupying power, has developed a large gap and often a distrustful relation between the public service sector which is governed by the occupying power, and the Palestinian public in general. Moreover, it has left a fragmented and not coordinated public service sector including water sector. Water supply management has been characterized by top down management style with little or no room for public participation and no clear division of roles and responsibilities for the different bodies in charge of water management. Yet, the creation of the Palestinian Authority has improved the situation to a certain extent. However, there is still no adequate legal framework that ensures public participation in managing local resources. In the mean time public has not yet overcome the values inherited from the long term impact of occupation about this issue.

Accordingly, public participation requires a major cultural change among public in a way that they act and participate as citizens and that they become aware that it is part of their right to participate in managing their local sources including water. It is also

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<sup>1</sup> Authors biographies are the end of this paper.

important to build on the current voluntary form of participation exist in some areas and see how this can influence the development of a platform or regulatory frame where wide range of actors (i.e., end users together with government officials) can participate to enhance vertical and horizontal linkages, information flows, empowerment and decision making at all levels.

Involving such wide range of different stakeholders at different levels, from national policy makers to end-users in local communities, does not happen by itself and is certainly not an easy job. It will require expertise and capacities to facilitate complex processes that pro-actively involve all these various stakeholders in planning, decision-making and implementation of water related issues. This is even more important where such processes should enable end-users and organizations at the community level to take larger shares and ownership in the management of local water resources.

The current paper will highlight some of the practical experience developed under the EC funded EMPOWERS Partnership to facilitate stakeholder dialogue and ensure end user participation in local water management in three countries (Palestine, Jordan and Egypt). The paper will elaborate on the Palestinian situation in more details. Moreover, it will show how such dialogue could improve good local water governance in that area. The paper will further elaborate on the possibility of institutionalization of facilitation process.

## **Background**

The Middle East is one of the most water-poor and water-stressed regions of the world. While the region is home to 5% of the people of the world, it has less than 1% of its renewable fresh water. Today's annual per capita availability of fresh water in the region is only one third of its 1960 level, falling from an average of 3,300 cubic meters/year per person in 1960 to less than 1,250 cubic meters per person in 1995 (World Bank, 1996). This is the lowest per capita water availability in the world. It is estimated that by 2025, this limited availability is likely to drop to less than half the 1995 level. This average data, low as it is, is moreover misleading. With the possible exception of Iraq, Turkey and Iran, all Middle East countries have average per capita renewable fresh water availability levels even below the average of 1,250 cubic meters. Some of the Arab Gulf countries and the Palestinian West Bank & Gaza have per capita availability averages that are below 10% of the regional average of 1250 cubic meters, and even a country that is considered to be relatively water endowed like Lebanon shows an average of 1,200 cubic meters. Water scarcities are quite different in each country and are affected by many factors. In the three countries where the EMPOWERS Partnership Programme<sup>2</sup> is implemented the situation can be summarized as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Funded by the EuroMed Water Programme and implemented by an alliance of 14 partners led by CARE International (see Table II below).

Jordan and Palestine (West Bank/Gaza) have some of the world's lowest per capita availability of water. According to similar estimates (Arab Countries Vision 2000) water availability in Jordan is 169m<sup>3</sup>/year and in the West Bank is 78 m<sup>3</sup>/year. It is predicted that in Jordan this availability will further fall to 91m<sup>3</sup>/year in 2025 - even if all unconventional water sources are used - due to doubling of the population. At present there is said to be some availability of additional surface water, but most renewable groundwater reserves are fully exploited. Predictions are that by 2025 water supplied will exceed available renewable resources by 33 %. The result is that with increasing competition between rural (irrigation) and urban (drinking water) use, there is increasing focus on unconventional sources such as wastewater re-use and the improvement of demand management.

In the West Bank/Gaza water scarcity is further aggravated by Israel's excessive control over water resources. Moreover, Palestinians have not got a chance to manage their own resources and public affairs over the past nine decades. There has been always a foreign authority in power who was ruling. The most critical one has been the Israeli Occupation. During this time management of public resources including water has been completely within Israeli hands; decisions were made without Palestinian participation, and with minor or no regard for Palestinian need.

This in turn has created a large gap between the ruling power and Palestinian Public. Furthermore, it developed a distrustful, often antagonistic relationship with public authorities. Respect for public goods and public management decisions started to be seen as if it represents acceptance of, or agreement with the ruling power (the Israeli occupation).

This all has left a fragmented and not coordinated public service sector including water sector. Water supply management has been characterized by top down management approach with little or no room for public participation with no clear division of roles and responsibilities of the different bodies. Yet, the creation of the Palestinian Authority has improved the situation to a certain extent. However, there is still no adequate legal framework that ensures public participation in managing local resources. In this context, it is not easy to overcome the values inherited from the long term impact of occupation about this issue. In the mean time it requires a major cultural change among public in a way that they act and participate as citizens and that they become aware that it is part of their right to participate in managing their local sources including water. It is also important to build on the current voluntary form of participation exist in some areas and see how this can influence the development of a platform or regulatory frame where wide range of actors (i.e., end users together with government officials) can participate to enhance vertical and horizontal linkages, information flows, empowerment and decision making at all levels.

Involving such wide range of different stakeholders at different levels, from national policy makers to end-users in local communities, does not happen by itself and is certainly not an easy job. It will require expertise and capacities to facilitate complex processes that pro-actively involve all these various stakeholders in planning, decision-

making and implementation of water related issues. This is even more important where such processes should enable end-users and organizations at the community level to take larger shares and ownership in the management of local water resources.

In Gaza, current water use already exceeds the magnitude of renewable water resources by a factor of two. This requires a critical re-assessment of the current water use patterns and requires the development of proper scenarios to mitigate the current deterioration of the water sources in Gaza.

In the West Bank access to water is limited and carefully controlled by the Israeli Occupation. Although actual groundwater resources would amply satisfy demand of the West Bank itself, more than 80 % of the West Bank renewable water resources is used by Israel.

It is estimated that nearly 15% of the population in the West Bank have no access to piped water supply yet. More than 40% of the villages are not connected despite the fact that many of them demanded to be connected during the occupation period. They were always denied such access. On the contrary, all Israeli colonies in the West Bank are connected to water and many have swimming pools. This disparity in water supply has always been a source of tension. When the Palestinian villagers seeing the pipe that leads to an Israeli Colony passing through their land without supplying the village with water, they will not stay calm. Not only that, sometimes Israeli Army uses water to punish some villages by cutting the supply off for some days.

The situation is not much better in the case of the communities purchasing their water from the Israeli company (Mekorot). During, summer periods, water is reduced by various percentages in each area; it might go up to 70% in some places. Some cities may have water once every week or month even. The same applies for some towns and villages too. This forces people to fetch water from unprotected sources, which leads to increasing public health hazards and an increase in the percentage of communities affected by water born diseases.



**The only water source for the use of marginal communities in Palestine**

On the other hand, **Egypt** has with 920m<sup>3</sup>/year a relatively high per capita availability of water - in comparison to other countries in this region. However, demand reaches or exceeds the amount available because of low irrigation efficiency in most areas. It is not only dependent almost entirely on water originating from outside the country (98%), but also many farmers are dependent on the inefficiencies of others. Moreover, over 25% of water is estimated to be applied twice to land, while 50% of farmers depend to some degree on drainage water (El Zanaty Associates, 2001). Excess application may be targeted as an element requiring attention, but the consequences of improving application efficiency will need careful assessment if downstream drainage users are not to suffer, both from reductions in flow and deterioration of water quality. The additional factors of increased volumes and generally un- or poorly treated industrial and sewage effluents mean that to a large degree the present problems relate as much to water quality as they do to quantity. Demand and quality management are therefore regarded as equally important.

**Table I. Basic features of water resource availability in the three countries**

Country	Proportion of water from within boundaries	Proportion of water from renewable resources	Total amount of available water m <sup>3</sup> per capita/year	Approx. proportion of available resources fully exploited	Special features (eg. water re-use, drainage water re-use, de-salination, fossil water resources)
Egypt	2%	98%	920	94.5%	25% use of drainage water. 2% Nubian s't
Jordan	85%	65%	169	110%	Increased recycling of waste water, plans for brackish desalination, and water demand actions.
Gaza		0%	78*	217% Gaza	Leading to saline intrusion
West Bank	100%	100%	78*		Starting water re-use and rainwater harvesting
Israel	70%		292	155%	Re-use, trickle irrigation, de-salinization

(Source: Laban et al 2005)

## Potential Sources of Conflicts

### 1. Resources Scarcities

Scarcities, if not managed properly, bring conflicts that are not easy to resolve. This is especially so in an institutional environment where centralized and top down management is compounded by lack of stakeholders' involvement, difficult communication and fragmentation of responsibilities among many actors.

### 2. Different Perception and Interests

Conflicts are not necessary related to situations of war; they can also reflect situations in which competing actors have simply different interests they want to defend. In many cases such conflicts of interest have resulted from the different perception on

the same issue. In some certain cases these conflicts of interest can be reasonably dealt with through direct negotiation among competing actors. However, in situations of war or occupation the margins of negotiation are often extremely narrow or non-existent

In the water sector, as in many other domains, apparent conflicts may be resolved by bringing actors with different views together and have them discover the reasons behind each others opinion or even recognize that the other was right. The statement that “farmers are ignorant and have bad habits in water use” is often mirrored by “government officials have no idea what we are talking about”. Women may look to water mainly for its use for her household, while men may give first priority to it for their fields. Such different perceptions are two sides of the same coin. They form a polarity or two extremes of the same subject. Yet, any individual will not see both sides of this same coin or the two extremes of the same subject at the same time without assistance from someone else or without using proper tools.



Therefore, the need for more integrated and co-coordinated approaches towards water allocation, use and management is much more than what are currently practiced. Solutions to current and future water crises will most probably not be found anymore in technological advances or supply oriented approaches alone. The trend now is more toward integrated water management approach which, recognizes the needs to involve all actors at the different levels in a constructive dialogue. Such dialogue needs to be facilitated through the development and/or adaptation of adequate tools that assist them in reaching appropriate compromises.

### **How Stakeholder Dialogue can be facilitated?**

Facilitating “vertical” and “horizontal” communication, coordination between all relevant actors (including local communities), recognizing different perceptions, negotiating conflicting interests, finding win-win solutions, in a specific domain, requires interactive dialogue among all actors. Such dialogue often requires also the skills of a professional mediator with no direct stakes in the issue to be discussed. A person or organization who is able to help others to listen to each other, to help actors to find common ground where

possible; and if not, to come to reasonable compromise. Experience in many situations has shown that good process facilitation can contribute to better planning and implementation of viable and sustainable activities, Engel (97). Process facilitation here refers to mediating and guiding “brokering” processes in planning and decision making between government agencies (officials), local communities (end-users) and other relevant parties.

Process facilitators play a key role in stakeholder dialogue processes that aim to reach common goals and shared action plans. In such processes the different interests, perceptions, preoccupations, assumptions, and judgments among the actors involved, are made explicit. Opportunities are identified to improve the exchange of information, social organization, and decision-making between stakeholders in order to create the proper conditions for innovation and better (water) management. At the same time this may contribute to create awareness with respect to constraints and opportunities that affect the performance of relevant actors. A stakeholder dialogue will identify potential actors who do or could act effectively together to remove constraints and make use of new opportunities. Such a process often enhances institutional and technological innovation through active networking, involving all relevant actors including community members, governments, NGOs, academic institutions, and the private sector.

Moreover, facilitation should pay special attention to the less advantaged and poorer segments of the communities and actors. Every community has its own socio-economic configuration determined by culture, wealth, gender, land tenure, access to resources, etc. In most if not all communities there will be groups that are more vulnerable, have less resources and therefore, less influence in decision-making.

To ensure a balanced and interactive stakeholder dialogue, mediator or facilitator needs to have special skills and capacities. He/she need to make sure that the stakeholder dialogue process is well run and that all parties feel actively involved, without him/herself pursuing own agendas. Experiences elsewhere Engle (97) and Laban et al (99) indicate that in sensitive conflict processes a neutral facilitator has been a key condition for the success of the dialogue. A facilitator should create an environment of trust and respect in which shared visions and goals can be developed. He/she needs to know well the different parties, their relationships, their social, cultural and religious setup as well as the institutional environment of the issue at stake. In addition, s/he needs to be a strategist and have a vision on the possible outcome of a particular meeting. S/he needs to be committed, responsive, encouraging, inclusive, balancing, has the ability to resolve problems, respectful and neutral, (Hemmali, 2003).

### **EMPOWERS, A Practical Example**

EMPOWERS is a four year regional program for local water management in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, funded by the EC MEDA Water Program and CARE International. It allies a Regional Partnership of fourteen organizations to empower local people and to improve long-term access to water by local communities. The main long-term goal of the project is to improve development and management of water resources at the

intermediate and local level by promoting increased participation and representation of stakeholders in planning and decision-making processes. This approach will influence the bottom up planning and will lead to improved local water governance. In the mean time EMPOWERS operates as a Regional Information Program to disseminate information related to local water governance.

EMPOWERS strongly advocates and implements an approach of Stakeholder Dialogue and Concerted Action (SDCA), with the assumption that stakeholder involvement leads to improved use and management of water resources, hence to better local water governance. To this end, the project is developing a participatory planning cycle for Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). This cycle builds on the identification of water-related problems and the development of area specific long-term visions and strategies. This strategizing process is supported by the collection and analysis of relevant information on water resources, infrastructure, demand and access (RIDA) and the validation of this information in semi-quantitative Bayesian Networks (computer software). The aim of this planning cycle is to support stakeholders at local and intermediate levels in making the technical and political decisions to develop and manage their water resources within a commonly agreed future vision.

The EMPOWERS approaches are tested and developed since 2003 in the Governorates of Beni Suef (Egypt), Balqa (Jordan) and Jenin (Palestine) as well as in three selected communities in each Governorate. The EMPOWERS planning cycle for IWRM follows a Project Management Cycle approach, Figure 1. The activities for this planning cycle are firmly embedded in the above mentioned approach of SDCA that makes extensive use of tools for stakeholder analysis such as those developed in the RAAKS Guidelines, Engel et al (94). Furthermore, Table II provides further detail on SDCA and the Planning Cycle.



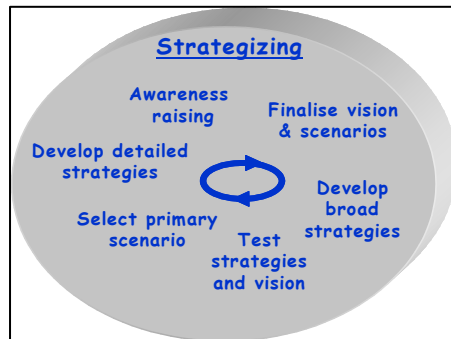
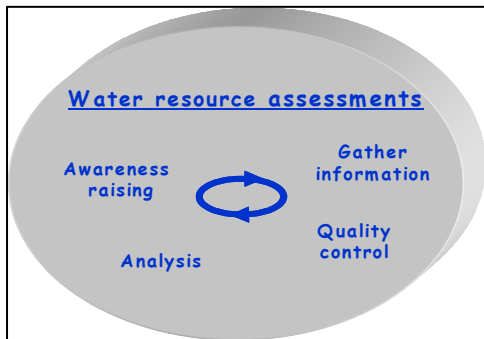
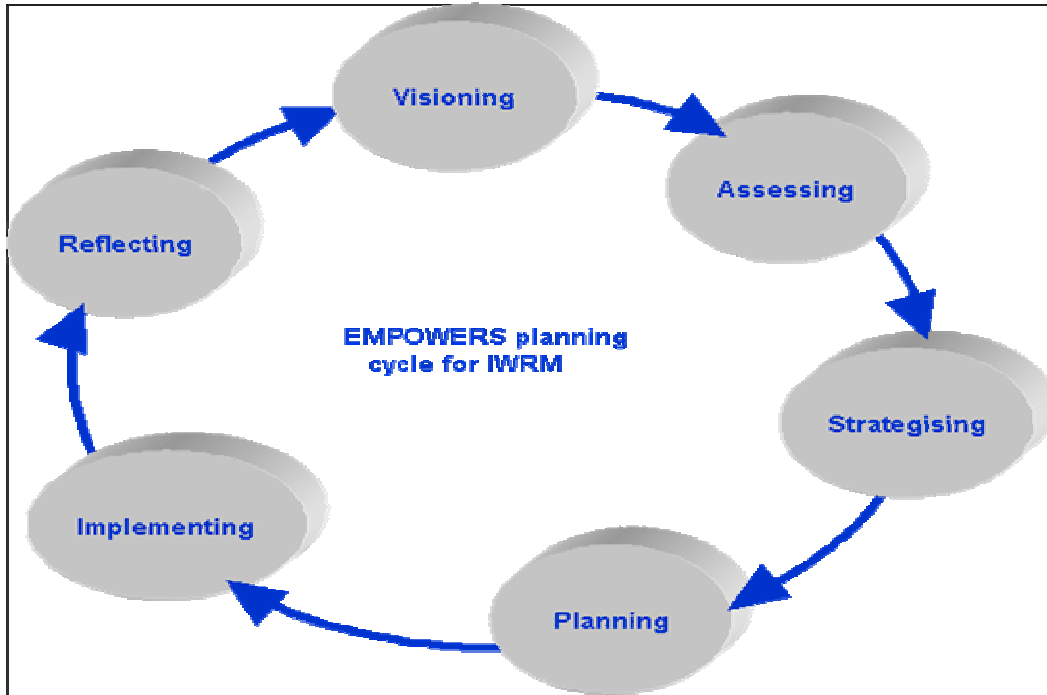


Figure 1: Empowers Project Management Cycle

**Table II. SDCA in the EMPOWERS Planning Cycle**

Step	Objectives	SDCA for planning in IWRM	Outputs
<b>Visioning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stakeholders involved and interested in work</li> <li>▪ Broad scope of work identified and agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Stakeholder identification and analysis</li> <li>✚ Problem analysis</li> <li>✚ Initial visioning and scenario building</li> <li>✚ Identifying priority communities for action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stakeholder platforms</li> <li>▪ Problem trees</li> <li>▪ Initial visions at district or governorate level</li> <li>▪ Initial scenarios</li> </ul>
<b>Assessing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Main causes of water problems identified</li> <li>▪ Agreed and shared information-base developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Stakeholders involved in:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Information collection and analysis</li> <li>✚ Quality control and cross-checking</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ RIDA Analysis</li> <li>▪ Belief Networks</li> <li>▪ Provisional data base</li> </ul>
<b>Strategizing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Previous steps integrated to create shared basis for vertically and horizontally integrated action planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Update visions and scenarios</li> <li>✚ Develop broad strategies</li> <li>✚ Assess &amp; validate scenario/strategy combinations using Bayesian Networks</li> <li>✚ Select key scenario and related strategies</li> <li>✚ Prioritize activities</li> <li>✚ Define decision modalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ WRA reports</li> <li>▪ Community and District Water Fact Sheets</li> <li>▪ “final” visions, scenarios and strategies for IWRM</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Detailed plan(s) for concerted action developed, budgeted and agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Plan community and governorate level activities</li> <li>✚ Identify tasks and responsibilities</li> <li>✚ Define information flows</li> <li>✚ Prepare project proposals</li> <li>✚ Define M&amp;E plans (acquire funding)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Log frames for project proposals</li> <li>▪ <b>Funded IWRM Project Proposals for community, district and governorates</b></li> </ul>
<b>Implementing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activities implemented according to plans within a transparent and high quality approach and in a concerted way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Implement activities</li> <li>✚ Awareness raising</li> <li>✚ Tendering (transparent)</li> <li>✚ Capacity building</li> <li>✚ Information sharing</li> <li>✚ Quality control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Achieved results</li> <li>▪ Capacities build</li> <li>▪ Information basis improved</li> </ul>
<b>Reflecting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementation process documented</li> <li>▪ Achievements monitored</li> <li>▪ Lessons drawn out of preceding planning cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Documenting processes (+ video)</li> <li>✚ M&amp;E</li> <li>✚ Learning and reflecting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Process reports &amp; videos</li> <li>▪ Evaluation reports</li> <li>▪ Conclusions drawn as input for next planning cycle</li> </ul>

For further reference see EMPOWERS/Working Papers 3 and 6 on The EMPOWERS Participatory Planning Cycle for Integrated Water Resource Management, respectively Stakeholder Dialogue and Concerted Action (internal documents – available at [www.empowers.info](http://www.empowers.info))

### **Can Process Facilitation be institutionalized?**

To what extent needs process facilitation be institutionalized and if so how? Facilitation of complex processes, as often the case in the water sector, needs to be done by preference by people that have no direct stake themselves in the process, i.e who have not to gain directly or indirectly from the outcome of such a process. A facilitator needs to be independent from the “institutions” that are involved in the planning, decision and implementation process. With ‘institutions’, reference is made to all those bodies that have something to do with water, and that are relevant for specific issues under discussion at a certain time and place. Institutions may well comprise government agencies, NGOs and private sector at different levels (from national to municipality) as well as different community based organizations. Specific institutions have their own mandate and professional interest, which are often translated in sub-sector agendas that are more narrow than the water sector at large (c.f mandates of drinking water authorities, agricultural departments, or the priorities of specific community groups). External facilitation of “horizontal” and “vertical” communication and coordination among these players may well become then a must, if overall planning and implementation of IWRM is done in an integrated and holistic way. In particular, attention is required to ensure that the often narrow sub-sector agendas of key stakeholders do not come to dominate. Breaking down barriers to horizontal and vertical communication is a key part of a good facilitation process, as is now experienced in the SDCA and Planning Cycle approach developed and tested by the EMPOWERS programme.

In the water sector planning and decision-making are not one-off events. They occur in an iterative way before, during and after implementation of specific activities (see above planning cycle). Facilitation of such an iterative process cannot be restricted to a number of planning workshops at the outset of a programme. The implementation of a planning phase and the resultant activities itself will be confronted with new and often unforeseen constraints, conflicts and opportunities that need to be dealt with and that often need the skills of an outsider to come to the necessary compromise. Matching and “translating” government concerns and policies to the realities on the ground and the priorities of different community groups is not an easy job and go often beyond bureaucratic solutions.

In view of all this, professional facilitation qualities appear to be required to make sure that as much as possible solutions are agreed upon that are acceptable to the widest possible range of “institutions”. Process facilitation seems to be even more important when such solutions should also involve the poorest sections of society. It may well be that for the time to come such professional qualities are best vested and maintained in independent, non-government organizations that have or will develop the experience and capacities to play the role of an independent process facilitator. They obviously need to be given also a clear mandate for this by government authorities and be acceptable and credible to community organizations in order to have the leverage to play such a role. The box below identifies a number of criteria, as suggested by representatives of the wider EMPOWERS Partnership (see Table II), that could serve as a first line of thought when considering the opportunity of an independent water facilitation body.

### **Criteria for identification of facilitation host institutes**

#### **Institutional position**

- Relatively neutral, no specific sector agendas and independent from government
- An existing and well-known non-profit organization
- Indigenous and well-rooted in the country's civil society
- Unconventional and non-bureaucratic
- Wide geographic presence through field offices as well as development programmes in at least 30 -50 rural communities (country-wide in Jordan and Palestine; in at least two governorates in Egypt)
- Accepted by most if not all sectors in civil society and government

#### **Capacities**

- Capacity in facilitating interaction and decreasing gaps between local communities and government agencies
- Experience in working with local communities (community development, capacity building, ....)
- Capable and experience in communicating with government agencies
- Interdisciplinary and diverse staff capacities
- General (but not necessarily very specific) knowledge about the water sector
- Familiar with EMPOWERS approaches (SDCA, RAAKS, PTD, PRA, Participatory Planning framework, RBA...)

(EMPOWERS/Working Paper 6 on Stakeholder Dialogue and Concerted Action – internal document).

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the need for process facilitation in situations of increasing water scarcities, such as those in most of the countries of the Middle East. Also, on the basis of recent experience in the EC funded EMPOWERS Partnership Programme implemented in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, it argues that such facilitation is necessary to come to holistic and sustainable programmes. Facilitation is even more necessary in order to pro-actively involve women and the poorest layers of society in rural communities. It gives an example of how a stakeholder approach for participatory planning can be implemented. Finally, it recommends that on the longer term process facilitation would be trusted to an independent organization that has both the mandate of the government authorities and the credibility among community based organizations.

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