



Friends of the Earth Middle East



Economic Benefits of Access to a Healthy Lower Jordan River for the Palestinian Economy

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Introduction

FoEME has undertaken this report to highlight the importance of access to a healthy Lower Jordan River (LJR) for the economic development of Palestinian communities along the river. For the purposes of this report, on a north – south axis, the area in question is from the point that the LJR crosses the 'Green Line' in the north to the mouth of the LJR at the northern head of the Dead Sea. Specifically, tourism in Jericho, the Baptism Site along the western shore of the Lower Jordan River, the Northwestern shores of the Dead Sea, and at specific sites of archaeological interest along the LJR will be considered as rich in potential for further development, albeit in a sustainable and managed fashion. In addition, the trade with Arab neighbors in agricultural goods produced in the Jordan Valley can also act as an economic driver, assuming unhindered transportation flows across the several bridges linking Palestine and Jordan.

In order to allow for diversified economic growth of the Jordan Valley, it must be recognized by all that the LJR is “in urgent need of rehabilitation undertaken by the river’s riparians in accordance with the level of damage caused by each country”¹. The FoEME report *Towards a Living Jordan River: An Environmental Flows Report on the Rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River (2010)* outlines the quantities required for a rehabilitated LJR, and shows this to be economically feasible in the complementary report *Towards A Living Jordan River: An Economic Analysis of Policy Options for Water Conservation in Jordan, Israel and Palestine* at prices lower than the current marginal cost of water².

This report summarizes existing reports and data available to highlight potential Palestinian development options in the Jordan Valley. The options are presented as chapters, and each option could be considered as one piece of a larger plan towards the sustainable development of the entire Palestinian economy. However, the point of departure for this report must be to highlight the necessity of securing fair access and equitable allocation of fresh water resources to Palestine, as stipulated under Oslo II. Without fair allocations of water, development initiatives in Palestine will be severely limited, and economic growth curtailed. This report can serve as guidance to decision makers and the general public with regards to realistic economic and environmental options available for sustained economic growth.

¹ FoEME, “Towards a Living Jordan River: An Environmental Flows Report on the Rehabilitation of the Jordan River”, May 2010. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public117_1.pdf

² FoEME, “Towards a Living Jordan River: An Economic Analysis of Policy Options for Water Conservation in Jordan, Israel and Palestine”, 2010. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public118_1.pdf

Through the identification of a multitude of economic benefits derived from a rehabilitated Lower Jordan River, it is hoped this report will foster the necessary Palestinian political and public support for the rehabilitation of the LJR. A new era of Palestinian economic growth in the Jordan Valley's agricultural, industrial and tourism sectors has the potential to drastically change the economic landscape for Palestine, bringing employment to thousands of people, creating new industries and industrial hubs, and lifting entire communities out of poverty. With this aim, FoEME has undertaken this short report.

Chapter 1: Obtaining Palestinian Riparian Rights to the Waters of the Lower Jordan River

Currently, Palestinian water rights to the Lower Jordan River are denied, despite Palestine being a river riparian, and having historical claims to the waters of the Lower Jordan River. FoEME believes concerted efforts should be directed towards establishing Palestinian water rights, in the recognition of the finite and interconnected nature of the regional water resources.³ Further, water rights must be defined based on a formula of equitable sharing, to ensure the basis for sustained management of these limited water resources.⁴

International legal agreements exist for the equitable and reasonable allocation of freshwater resources between riparians in a river basin.⁵ Such legal agreements could provide a framework in which freshwater is shared between Israel and Palestine in an equitable manner, and which takes into consideration environmental concerns and future water needs. Needless to say, current restrictions on Palestinian water use do not meet the criteria for equitable sharing between riparians of the Jordan River basin.

Further, to enable the equitable distribution of waters from the Lower Jordan River to all riparians including Palestine, the river must see an increase in its flow, as at current rates it is completely over-utilized, with some 98% of its natural flow diverted upstream from Palestinian territory. Rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River to at least a 400 mcm annual flow, and increasing to 600 mcm annual flow, is essential to the longevity of the Lower Jordan River ecosystem, and for the Dead Sea, which relies primarily on the waters of the Jordan River for its inflow.

³ FoEME, "Lower Jordan River Rehabilitation Project Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis Palestine." December 2009. Pg. 43. [http://foeme.org/uploads/12936079411~^\\$^~JR_TDA_Palestine.pdf](http://foeme.org/uploads/12936079411~^$^~JR_TDA_Palestine.pdf)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ The Helsinki Rules, or the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses are two of the most referenced and developed of international legal agreements on the uses of transboundary watercourses.

Chapter 2: Baptism Site along the west side of the Lower Jordan River

Just 9 km southeast of Jericho City lays a site of religious and historical importance for Christians and Jews: the believed site of the baptism of Christ, and where the Israelites crossed over into the Holy Land. The West Bank Baptism Site, located north of the Dead Sea along the west side of Jordan River, is an important destination for religious pilgrims, both locally and from around the world. Unfortunately, it is a heavily armed and mined area, and under the management of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority.⁶ The Israeli Nature and Parks Authority has plans to open the site to international and Israeli visitors,⁷ though Palestinians would not have access to it, nor would they benefit from the opening of the site to tourists, as it is in Area C – land in the West Bank under Israeli administrative control.

Revenue earned from the expansion of tourism in the Jordan Valley to include the baptism site would boost Jericho's tourism and general economy⁸, which itself holds much potential for tourism (see Chapter 3). Further upriver, the Yardenit baptism site in Israel sees on average 500,000 tourists (95% foreign) a year, illustrating just how big of a potential tourist draw the baptism site near Jericho could become.⁹ Last year the Yardenit site had 700,000 visitors in line with record tourist visitation to the area in 2010. Despite health warnings, pilgrims on the Jordanian side (and on the West Bank when open) regularly immerse themselves into the holy baptismal waters of the Jordan River. With increased religious pilgrimages and visits to the baptism site, the return of fresh water towards the river's rehabilitation is of critical importance,¹⁰ not only for the ecological health of the river itself, but to honor the religious significance of site and to the thousands of religious pilgrims who enter into the holy waters, being exposed to dangerous levels of toxins present in the water.



Credit: FoEME

⁶ FoEME, "The Baptism sites on the banks of the Jordan River. Draft paper on the importance on the sites as part of an Action Plan to rehabilitate the River Jordan." http://foeme.org/uploads/IRPP_Baptism_Site_Jordan_River.pdf

⁷ Lazaroff, T. "Jesus's baptism site to open to public after 42 years", *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 Jan. 2011. Available on-line (<http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=202403>)

⁸ FoEME, "The Baptism sites on the banks of the Jordan River. Draft paper on the importance on the sites as part of an Action Plan to rehabilitate the River Jordan." http://foeme.org/uploads/IRPP_Baptism_Site_Jordan_River.pdf

⁹ http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public103_1.pdf - pg. 77

¹⁰ For more information on the FoEME proposal for a rehabilitated Jordan River, see FoEME. "Towards a Living Jordan River: An Environmental Flows Report on Rehabilitation of the lower Jordan River", May 2010, http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public117_1.pdf

Case Study

On the Jordanian side of the Jordan River is the baptism site of 'Al Maghtas', or 'Bethany Beyond the Jordan'. This site is already very well developed, and includes nature trails through the area.¹¹ The number of visitors who visited Al-Maghtas in 2008 was 142,419 (132,587 foreign, 9,832 Jordanian), and in 2009 the number of visitors was 134,172 (122,860 foreign, 11,312 Jordanian).¹² This represents a vast increase over numbers of overall tourists who visited the site in 2005 and 2006, 73,469 and 65,755, respectively.¹³ In 2010 visitors were charged 8 JD for entry to the site per person, generating over 1 million JD in revenue from entrance fees alone.¹⁴

As illustrated on the eastern side of the Jordan River, Palestine has immense potential for an influx of tourists to the baptism site on the western side of the Jordan River, establishing a very solid tourism industry and infrastructure, and justifying the need for a rehabilitated, healthy and accessible Jordan River. Being one of the most venerated sites in Christianity, the location of where it is believed the Israelites crossed over into the



'Bethany Beyond the Jordan' baptism site along the Jordan River Photo Credit: Jesse Baltutis

Holy Land, and its close proximity to Jerusalem and Bethlehem (already popular destinations for tourists), makes the Baptism site ideal for incorporation into established pilgrimage tours.

The Yardenit Baptism site in Israel, and the Al Maghtas site in Jordan (which recently opened a tourist village complete with many gift shops at the entrance to the historical site), offers an example of how revenue can also be generated through the sale of items from gift shops – robes, videos, books, jewelry, holy water from the Jordan River, etc – all of which can contribute to the overall economic benefits of access to the baptism site for the Palestinian tourism sector. FoEME envisions a transboundary park, allowing crossing at the baptism sites, allowing visitors to experience both sides of the Jordan River at this historical location¹⁵.

¹¹ FoEME, "The Baptism sites on the banks of the Jordan River. Draft paper on the importance on the sites as part of an Action Plan to rehabilitate the River Jordan." http://foeme.org/uploads/IRPP_Baptism_Site_Jordan_River.pdf

¹² Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Statistics 2009. http://www.locateme.io/stat2009_4/1/aswE.html

¹³ Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Statistics 2006. Table 5.1. <http://www.locateme.io/stat2006/1/aswE.htm>

¹⁴ 2009 tourist numbers used.

¹⁵ FoEME, "The Baptism sites on the banks of the Jordan River. Draft paper on the importance on the sites as part of an Action Plan to rehabilitate the River Jordan." http://foeme.org/uploads/IRPP_Baptism_Site_Jordan_River.pdf

Chapter 3: Development of Tourism Industry at the Mouth of the LJR as it flows into the Dead Sea

A huge source of tourism for Jordan and Israel, the Dead Sea offers an unprecedented opportunity for growth in the Palestinian tourist sector. The thousands of visitors who visit the Dead Sea each year are drawn to the many historical sites, the reputed therapeutic value of the Dead Sea water, the basin's unique flora, fauna and desert landscape, and the year-round warm climate.¹⁶ However, the tourism industry depends first and foremost on the maintenance of the Dead Sea ecology,¹⁷ without which the tourism industry would dry up. This is not just a concern of the tourism industry and environmental organizations in Jordan, Israel or Palestine, but also to the general public, both local and international, who may cherish the region as a vacation destination and/or simply as a site of historical and environmental importance.¹⁸ Tourism could very well be a 'strategic ally of the preservation of the Dead Sea basin', as there are vested interests in maintaining its natural beauty and re-establishing its pristine environment.¹⁹

Jordan has created a thriving tourism and hotel industry on the northeastern shores of the Dead Sea. According to the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the number of tourists in package tours to the Dead Sea in the first half of 2010 was 64,234, with each visitor staying an average of 2.79 nights.²⁰ In 2009, the number of tourists on package tours to the Dead Sea was 88,519, spending 244,886 nights in total.²¹

The area west of where the mouth of the LJR flows into the Dead Sea, holds tremendous potential for development of the Palestinian tourism sector.²² Assuming potential removal of political obstacles, it is estimated that Palestinians could develop roughly 10,000 rooms, creating 30,000- 40,000 jobs (directly and indirectly) and generate roughly USD\$900 million in revenue a year at a 75% occupancy rate.²³ Compared to the current situation, this development would nearly double the number of hotels and hotel rooms. Currently, there are 100 hotels in Palestine, with 4,552 rooms and 9,815 beds, and an occupancy rate of

¹⁶ FoEME, "Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development." March 2004. Pg. 14.

http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public22_1.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid, Pg. 2

¹⁸ Ibid, Pg. 2

¹⁹ FoEME, "Final Report: Symposium on Promoting an Integrated Sustainable Regional Development Plan for the Dead Sea Basin." 1998. Pg. 14. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public26_1.pdf

²⁰ Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Statistics 2010. Table 3.4.

<http://www.locateme.jo/Stat2010v2/1/aswE.html>

²¹ Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Statistics 2009. Table 3.4. www.locateme.jo/stat2009_4/1/aswE.html

²² FoEME "Final Report: Symposium on Promoting an Integrated Sustainable Regional Development Plan for the Dead Sea Basin." 1998. Pg. 23. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public26_1.pdf

²³ FoEME, "Final Report: Symposium on Promoting an Integrated Sustainable Regional Development Plan for the Dead Sea Basin." 1998. Pg. 14. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public26_1.pdf

32.5%.²⁴ The number of hotel stays has seen a large increase from the start of the last decade, from a low of 51,357 in 2002 to 452,625 in 2009.²⁵ This suggests development in the tourism industry has recovered since the ending of the second intifada, and tourists are starting to return in large numbers. However, it is important to note that Palestinian land along the North West part of the Dead Sea is an ecologically sensitive area. Known as 'Ein Fashka', or 'Einot Zukim' in Israel, the area includes a fresh water steam and beautiful natural landscapes, which might be compromised with the building of a large number of hotels and other tourist developments. Such a unique ecological site would in itself be a draw for tourists, with the challenge being to develop the area without destroying the natural beauty.

One recent development proposal is the *Moonlight Tourism City*, planned on a 7 km strip of the Dead Sea, focusing on tourism, commerce, recreational, residential, therapeutic and cultural nodes.²⁶ Added to this could be a web of nature trails, connecting different hotel zones, allowing visitors to experience the 400-450 species of plants and nearly 150 species of animals in the area, many of which are rare or endemic to the Dead Sea basin and in particular the mouth of the LJR.²⁷



*The Dead Sea water levels have been dropping by over one meter per year
Photo Credit: Jesse Baltutis*

Due to over-exploitation of this unique body of water, the sea level has been dropping by over one meter per year. In order to stem the hemorrhaging of water from the Dead Sea, it is critical that part of the natural flow of the Lower Jordan River (the Dead Sea's natural

²⁴ "PCBS: Hotel industry back at 2000 levels." *Ma'an News Agency*, 28 April 2010. Available on-line (<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=279993>)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ For more information on the Moonlight Tourism City, see: <http://www.pif.ps/index.php?lang=en&page=12742570541521>

²⁷ Becker, Nir and Daiv Katz, "Economic valuation of resuscitating the Dead Sea." *Water Policy*, 8. 2006: 353

water source) is returned with sufficient quantities of clean water. Rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River is essential for the Dead Sea hotel industry, the natural ecology of this body of water, and the development of Jericho as a regional tourism hub (see Chapter 3).

Case Study

The Dead Sea represents a substantial amount of the total tourism revenue in Israel. In 2009, revenue generated from tourist stays (excluding Israeli stays) in hotels along the Dead Sea was USD\$55 million, out of a total of USD\$230.5 million in revenue generated by the hotel industry along the Dead Sea.²⁸ In 2008, the revenue from the Dead Sea hotel industry represented 11% of overall tourist hotel revenue in the country.²⁹ Tourists accounted for 462,000 person-nights in the Dead Sea hotel industry, out of a total of 2,125,000 person-nights in the country as a whole in 2009.³⁰ Although only 15 hotels are situated on the Dead Sea shore in Israel, they represent approximately 4000 rooms, with a 70% room occupancy rate in 2009. Further, the hotel industry on the Dead Sea represented 2,603 jobs in the tourism industry on average per month in 2009.³¹

Chapter 4: Tourism in Jericho City

Situated in a region of natural beauty and historical importance, Jericho currently attracts large quantities of tourists. Located in the Jordan Valley of Palestine, 9km from the baptism site on the Lower Jordan River, and in close proximity to the Dead Sea, the city boasts many tourism attractions, including the Mount of Temptation, along with a number of Monasteries where pilgrims traditionally rested while moving from Jerusalem to the Jordan Valley.³² Further, it is also reputed to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

Taken together, all these attractions make Jericho a natural tourism hub for the region. Working in conjunction with the tourism industry on the shores of the Dead Sea, Jericho could play host to Palestinian tour operators, offering visits to the baptism site along the shores of the Jordan River, day or multi-day excursions to hotels and spa's on the Dead Sea, and connecting visitors with a network of hiking and nature trails in the area, many of which are already well established.

²⁸ Israel Ministry of Tourism, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010. Table 23.11.

http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton61/st23_11.pdf

²⁹ Israel Ministry of Tourism, Central Bureau of Statistics, "Hotels 2008".

http://www1.cbs.gov.il/www/statistical/hotels2008_e.pdf

³⁰ Israel Ministry of Tourism, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010. Table 23.11.

http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton61/st23_11.pdf

³¹ Ibid

³² FoEME, "The Baptism sites on the banks of the Jordan River. Draft paper on the importance on the sites as part of an Action Plan to rehabilitate the River Jordan." http://foeme.org/uploads/IRPP_Baptism_Site_Jordan_River.pdf

As both foreign and Palestinian tourists continue to visit Jericho and the surrounding area in increasing numbers, there will be increased urgency for the rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River, to maintain many of the natural attractions in the region which act as a draw for people from around the region and around the world.

Chapter 5: Eco-Tourism in the Jordan Valley

Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing trend in global tourism, with yearly growth between 20-34% per year since 1990.³³ Eco-tourism in the Jordan Valley has great potential to be established in many areas, such as the Auja Environment Center and the Jordan River Peace Park (see Case Study below). The Auja Environment Center, located 12 km north of Jericho City in the Palestinian village of Auja, next to the Auja Springs, which attracts thousands of visitors a year to the oasis created by the springs, and where an estimated 9 mcm of water flows annually out of the desert rocks.³⁴ The center is the first in a proposed FoEME network of Palestinian Environmental Education Centers, with two more proposed in the North and Center of the Palestinian Jordan Valley, and offers a number of environmental activities geared towards educating visitors and students about the Jordan River, and the Jordan Valley as a whole and all based on promoting overnight stays and ecotourism in the valley.

The planned Jordan River Peace Park, at the confluence of the Yarmouk and Lower Jordan River, is proposed to combine two adjacent areas: Al Bakoora/Naharayim, where a small



Auja Environment Center, West Bank. Photo Credit: Fadi Jueejat



Ottoman Bridge over the Jordan River, and one of the traditional crossing points of the Jordan River. Photo Credit: Mira Edelstein

island was created at the juncture of the Lower Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers, and the Jiser Al Majami/Gesher site, known as the historical crossing point of the Jordan River.³⁵ Despite being located outside of area covered within this report (it is north of the Green Line), it

³³ FoEME, "The Jordan River Peace Park Pre-Feasibility Study." July 2008. Pg. 70.
http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public103_1.pdf

³⁴ FoEME, "Auja Environment Center." http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record_id=174

³⁵ FoEME, "The Jordan River Peace Park - Introduction." http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&project_id=123

nonetheless has the potential to be a model of conservation and cooperation worth emulating.

The Jordan River Peace Park is currently an initiative of FoEME, which proposes to establish the site at the center of one of the most important migratory flyways on the globe, where an estimated 500 million birds from 390 different species migrate twice annually between the Northern and Southern Hemisphere.³⁶ This has the potential to attract some of the 60 million people in Europe, North America and elsewhere who bird watch as a hobby,³⁷ and who could further enjoy other natural attractions in the Jordan Valley.

Despite security and environmental concerns, the Peace Park could act as an effective medium in which to foster cooperation between Israel and Jordan, as well as providing an example of the potential for eco-tourism in the Jordan Valley in which lessons can be learned for Palestinian tour operators and tourism development.

Case Study

The Jordan Valley also offers an abundance of historical cultural heritage sites, such as that found at the Old Gesher site, where three bridges cross the Lower Jordan River at the region's historical overland route. Old Gesher, also called 'Three Bridges', is situated within the proposed Jordan River Peace Park, which also includes the Hydro Electric Power Station. This power station used to supply electricity to Palestine and Jordan, before being abandoned in 1948. As part of the Peace Park plans, the workers' quarters have been proposed as eco-lodges, with magnificent views of the Jordan River, and the old power station to be turned into a visitors center. There is also potential for a nature trail network, which would enable hikers, bikers, and bird watchers to explore the 3-kilometer path of the valley from the Peace Park to the Old Gesher site.³⁸



*Hydro Electric Power Station. Site of the proposed Jordan River Peace Park.
Photo Credit: Mira Edelstein*

³⁶FoEME, "The Jordan River Peace Park Pre-Feasibility Study." July 2008.
http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public103_1.pdf

³⁷ FoEME, "The Jordan River Peace Park - Introduction." http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&project_id=123

³⁸ Ibid

Chapter 6: Facilitating Trade Between Palestinians and Arab Countries in the Region

The Jordan Valley and the Jordan River have traditionally functioned as a crossing point between traders from around the region. Yet, to this day, goods into and out of Palestine face massive delays at border crossings. For a revived, strong economy, it is essential to allow Palestinian products and produce access to international markets (via Jordan). Agriculture plays an important role in the Palestinian economy, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Jericho and the Jordan



Agriculture is an important contributor to the Palestinian economy, most evidently in the Jordan Valley. Photo Credit: Itamar Grinberg

Valley. However, to take full advantage of the agricultural sector in the Jordan Valley, equitable access to the Jordan River for Palestinian agricultural use must be secured, the vast amount of water withdrawn for use in the Israeli settlements (approx. 44 mcm)³⁹ and the agricultural lands they hold (approx. 50% of total arable land in the Jordan Valley)⁴⁰, land reserved for military areas and Israeli declared nature reserves (28% of land in the West Bank)⁴¹, and land restricted from Palestinian use (approx. 38% of the total land in the West Bank)⁴², all must be returned to Palestinian control. Further, the water required for an expanded agricultural sector must be of sufficient quality (salinity levels of no more than 750 ppm in the summer, and 500 ppm in the winter) for use in the production of food products.

Agriculture plays a central role in ensuring Palestinian food security, while at the same time providing employment for a large number of the Palestinian population. In 2007, agriculture contributed 8.2% of the GDP and employed 15.6% of the labour force.⁴³ The Municipality of Jericho currently has 45,607 dunums of land under irrigation, which represents just 16% of land available for irrigation.⁴⁴ This shows the huge potential for the expansion of irrigation in the Jericho area, for both local and international consumption. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Palestinian Investment Fund (PIF)⁴⁵ have both proposed establishment of an eco-friendly development zone in close proximity to Jericho, to expand

³⁹ The World Bank, "West Bank and Gaza: Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development." April 2009. Pg. iv. http://www.phg.org/data/files/publications/general_reports/Reports/2009/worldbank_09.pdf

⁴⁰ Monks, Kiern. "Jordan Valley's potential remains locked under Israeli restrictions." Jerusalem Media & Communication Centre, 5th August 2010. <http://www.imcc.org/news.aspx?id=1452>

⁴¹ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Fast Facts: Occupied Palestinian Territory." <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHAHome/WhereWeWork/oPt/tabid/5999/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁴² The World Bank, "West Bank and Gaza: The Economic Effects of Restricted Access to Land in the West Bank." Pg. 6, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/EconomicEffectsofRestrictedAccessToLandintheWestBankOct.21.08.pdf>

⁴³ FoEME, "Lower Jordan River Rehabilitation Project Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis Palestine." December 2009. Pg. 28. [http://foeme.org/uploads/12936079411~^\\$^~JR_TDA_Palestine.pdf](http://foeme.org/uploads/12936079411~^$^~JR_TDA_Palestine.pdf)

⁴⁴ Ibid, pg. 22

⁴⁵ For more information, see: Palestine Investment Fund, "Developing The Jordan Valley and Dead Sea." <http://www.pif.ps/index.php?lang=en&page=1274256860138>

diverse enterprises (agriculture, industry and tourism), create thousands of new jobs, and attract thousands of tourists to the area. However, development of such proposals hinges on overcoming the Israeli-imposed obstacles to the movement of goods and people across the border with Jordan.

Case Study:

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) developed a 'Feasibility Study on Agro-industrial Park Development in the Jordan River Rift Valley' at the request of the Palestinian National Authority for the development of the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park. The Agro-Industrial Park is planned to provide land for factories, distribution/storage facilities, infrastructure facilities, office buildings and Business Development Services, as well as being supplied with sufficient electricity and water to ensure smooth operations, all within the Jericho Municipality area.⁴⁶ The park would serve as a 'production base' in the Jordan Valley, as well as an export terminal for Palestinian products, with European and Gulf states being the target export market.⁴⁷ The Agro-Industrial Park would bring about positive economic effects to the Palestinian Territories, along the lines of contributing US\$ 41.5 million a year, and employing up to 3,790 persons, once the park has reached its final stage of implementation.⁴⁸ It is envisioned that funding for this project would be either private sector financing and development, or public sector financing with the PNA securing the necessary capital.⁴⁹ The inauguration of the 1.8 km road to the industrial park and the land-breaking preparation for Stage 1 of the project development took place in October 2010⁵⁰ - currently the only known development of this project.

Chapter 7: UNESCO and Palestinian Support for the Jordan Valley / Dead Sea as a World Heritage Site

FoEME has promoted the concept of registration of the entire Jordan Valley / Dead Sea basin as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and/or World Heritage Site.⁵¹ Despite the fact that evaporation of the Dead Sea waters is advantageous to the mineral extraction industry at the Dead Sea⁵², conservation of the Dead Sea has the potential to generate hundreds of

⁴⁶ Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Feasibility Study on Agro-industrial Park Development in the Jordan Rift Valley." May 2009. Pg. S-3. <http://www.jica.go.jp/palestine/english/activities/index.html>

⁴⁷ Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Feasibility Study on Agro-industrial Park Development in the Jordan Rift Valley." May 2009. Pg. S-5. <http://www.jica.go.jp/palestine/english/activities/index.html>

⁴⁸ Ibid, pg. S-7

⁴⁹ Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Feasibility Study on Agro-industrial Park Development in the Jordan Rift Valley." May 2009. Pg. S-22. <http://www.jica.go.jp/palestine/english/activities/index.html>

⁵⁰ Palestinian Industrial Estate Free Zone Authority, "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity." 2010. Pg. 1. <http://www.piefza.org/JAIP-INFO.pdf>

⁵¹ FoEME, "Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development." March 2004. Pg. 2. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public22_1.pdf

⁵² Total average annual revenue from mineral extraction industry at the Dead Sea in Israel and Jordan together is approximately US\$ 143 million – Katz et al., eds. "Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Dead Sea Basin- Broadening the Debate on Economic and Management Issues." *Friends of the Earth Middle East*, 2004.

millions of dollars of revenue per year.⁵³ Further, registration of the Dead Sea as a Biosphere Reserve or World Heritage Site could provide a useful framework for governments to work jointly together to develop and implement a sustainable development plan with designated areas for conservation, on top of serving as a forum for regional cooperation and problem solving.⁵⁴ Palestinian support for the Jordan Valley / Dead Sea as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, or a Man and Biosphere Site, could very well be the framework in which equitable access to the area is established.

Registering the Jordan Valley / Dead Sea as a UNESCO *Man and Biosphere* (MAB) site offers the best opportunity for rehabilitation of the area, for three main reasons:

- MAB is focused on sustainable use, as opposed to strict conservation, meaning that development is allowed as long as it is carried out in a manner compatible with the preservation of the surrounding ecosystems;
- Though Palestine has observer status, it is not a State Party to the World Heritage Convention;
- Biosphere reserves are designed to deal with one of the most important issues the world is facing today: how can we reconcile conservation of the environment and natural resources with sustainable development.⁵⁵



Proposed boundaries of a Dead Sea UNESCO protected site. Credit: IINESCO

Political will and public support is essential in all riparian countries of the area, to promote cooperation on issues of conservation and rehabilitation of this unique body of water, and also to promote development that is not at the expense of the natural environment of the basin – development that is sustainable and compatible with future needs. The Jordan Valley/Dead Sea as a UNESCO MAB or World Heritage Site could offer an excellent opportunity to help ensure the sustainable development of the area.

⁵³ FoEME, "Advancing Conservation and Sustainable Development." March 2004. Pg. 5. http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public22_1.pdf

⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 6

⁵⁵ FoEME, "Final Report: Symposium on Promoting an Integrated Sustainable Regional Development Plan for the Dead Sea Basin," 1998. Pg. 32. Available at: http://foeme.org/uploads/publications_public26_1.pdf

Conclusions and Final Remarks

The Lower Jordan River and its valley are truly sites of unique natural beauty, historical and religious significance, and vast economic potential for Palestine. From the highly symbolic Jordan River for Christians, Muslims and Jews, the therapeutic waters of the Dead Sea, to the agricultural industry in Jericho, the Jordan Valley offers an abundance of options for job creation for Palestinian communities, increased trade with Arab states in the region (via Jordan), and its establishment as a world-renowned eco-tourism destination. It is essential to consider the cumulative impact of all activities on the Jordan River and Dead Sea basin, in order to maintain future water supplies and a healthy aquatic ecosystem. Having sustainable water management as a central tenant of any development plans will benefit users up and down the watershed.

This report attempted to present, in a concise manner, the potential of such benefits in the Jordan Valley amid the urgency for a rehabilitated Lower Jordan River. Currently, the Lower Jordan River has lost 98% of its natural flow, and 50% of its biodiversity.⁵⁶ Often the flow of the river is maintained simply by the unhindered dumping of raw sewage directly into the watercourse by communities on both sides of the river. FoEME calls upon the riparian countries of the Jordan River basin to partner together in a shared effort to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River, and allow water flows of 400-600 mcm annually, including one annual minor flood, to “restore the river’s structure and function, allow biodiversity to recover and achieve a fair to high ecosystem integrity and health.”⁵⁷ FoEME believes that Palestine must be a full partner to this effort but recognizes that Palestinians can only be expected to do so subject to their rights being recognized and clear benefits identified.

⁵⁶ FoEME, “Towards a Living Jordan River: An Environmental Flows Report on the Rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River.” May 2010: pg. 13.

⁵⁷ FoEME, “Towards a Living Jordan River: An Environmental Flows Report on the Rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River.” May 2010: pg. 61

Next Steps

- **Publish study on the economic benefits of a rehabilitated Lower Jordan River**
- **Publish Jordan Valley master plan, which creates framework for regional development initiatives in the Jordan Valley, geared towards the growth of the Palestinian economy;**
- **Publish Model Jordan River Basin Commission study to promote the establishment of a Jordan River Basin Commission to oversee the transboundary rehabilitation and development efforts**
- **Establish Jordan River Council to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to further advocacy efforts to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River.**
- **Further advance regional and international recognition of the critical state of the Lower Jordan River;**
- **Obtain equitable access to the waters of the Lower Jordan River and Jordan basin for Palestinian use;**
- **Work with tourism industry to ensure sustainable development of tourism infrastructure along the north-western shores of the Dead Sea;**
- **Invest in public education programs to promote awareness of water conservation and environment issues in the Jordan Valley.**

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