

TRACK II ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

NEWS BRIEF

JULY 2023

The Track II Forum for Environmental Diplomacy, a partnership between the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies and Damour for Community Development, was initiated in 2016 to enable key civil society organizations and individuals representing both state and non-state actors to discuss and develop cross-border strategies to facilitate formal and informal environmental agreements between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. The concept underlying the Track II Forum is a departure from traditional peace-building efforts (Track I) in the region, which have aimed to establish over-arching peace agreements. We believe that by promoting initiatives taken at the professional level, we can catalyze positive change on the ground and in the political arena.

ECOFUTURE PROGRESS



Tahani Abu Daqqa, David Lehrer, Nader Al Khatib and Ashraf Ajrami at the Al Auja Community Environmental Education and Research Center.

In April 2023, the Arava Institute and Damour for Community Development along with 7 other Palestinian, Jordanian, and Israeli partners launched the program “EcoFuture: A socio-ecological approach to combat desertification for a sustainable future.” The main goal of this European Union funded program is to establish 3 pilot demonstration sites in the Jordan Valley in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan which will model integrative, sustainable solutions to the challenges of the water, energy, food security and environmental (WEFE) nexus . EcoFuture will then utilize the experience and data gained from the pilot demonstrations to create a set of policy proposals for governments to adopt for regional resilience in the face of climate change. As part of the design process 3 “Living Labs” will be established in each jurisdiction to accompany the development of the design of the pilot demonstrations, and oversee the installation and the operation of the pilots. The Living Labs are a type of stakeholder forum consisting of local farmers (or beneficiaries), local and national government representatives, representatives of non-governmental organizations, academics, and professionals. The national Living Labs will meet 3 or 4 times a year separately. A meeting of the trans-national Living Lab (representatives from each National Living Lab) will convene at least yearly to exchange views and lessons learned.

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The Palestinian demonstration site will be in the Al Auja Community Environmental Education and Research Center (run by Damour and its partner Water Environment Development Organization (WEDO)). The focus of this pilot will be to demonstrate wastewater treatment and reuse technology, brackish water desalination, and climate-controlled agriculture (green house). The Israeli demonstration site will be in the Valley of the Springs regional council where 80% of Israel's fish industry is located. The research subject of the pilot demonstration will be the WEF nexus as it applies to fish farming, specifically, in dealing with the wastewater produced by fish farms. The fishing industry in Israel is under serious threat from climate change, competition from imports, and stricter environmental standards. The Jordanian pilot demonstration will also focus on wastewater treatment and reuse. Large amounts of wastewater produced by urban centers in the mountains of Jordan flow down to the Jordan Valley, the main agricultural region of Jordan.

Over the past month, the partners have been working in coordination to establish the Living Labs in all three jurisdictions. In Israel, the establishment of the Israeli Living Lab coincides with the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture's decision to establish a strategic plan for the future of the fish industry in Israel, offering an opportunity to have a direct impact on Israeli agricultural policy. In Palestine, the establishment of the pilot demonstration in Al Auja offers an opportunity to provide a real solution to the community's lack of sewage treatment systems and facilities. In Jordan, if an economically feasible solution to the production of tertiary treated wastewater can be found, the Jordanian farmers in the valley would benefit from large quantities of currently scarce agricultural water.

