



ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS SERIES

# JUST ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITION AND WATER JUSTICE/GOVERNANCE IN PALESTINE “NO JUSTICE WITH OCCUPATION”

PENGON



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### PENGON

The Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON), also known as Friends of the Earth Palestine, is the leading Palestinian environmental network established in 1996, uniting 40+ member organizations across the West Bank and Gaza. PENGON coordinates advocacy, capacity building, and policy work focusing on water rights, land protection, sustainable agriculture, and environmental justice amid occupation challenges. Its bilingual publications, campaigns, and international partnerships amplify Palestinian environmental voices globally.

## About the study

This report was prepared by PENGON in collaboration with the Arab Reform Initiative under the SIDA-funded project “Strengthening Civil Society Actors and Networks Advocating for a Just Environmental Transition in the Middle East and North Africa”.

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Cover photo: Palestinians fill containers with drinking water in the middle of their destroyed homes in the city of Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip - December 2025

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May 2025

This paper was produced with funding from the European Commission and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency



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## Introduction

The intertwined challenges of just environmental transition (JET) and water justice have emerged as critical global and local concerns, particularly in regions grappling with unique sociopolitical landscapes. In Palestine, these issues are not merely environmental; they are deeply embedded within a complex matrix of political realities, resource scarcity, and historical injustices. The prolonged Israeli occupation of Palestine has further exacerbated the injustices by depriving Palestinians of their right to water and the environment; overexploiting Palestinian resources; and committing violence against the people, their properties, and infrastructure, especially with regards to water and the environment. This is in violation of Israel’s obligation as the occupying power under international law and conventions.

As the world looks to increasingly shift toward low-carbon, sustainable development models, a just transition has become paramount. The principle of just transition asserts that the move toward environmental sustainability must not exacerbate existing inequalities but rather actively contribute to social and economic equity for all. Equally, in a context marked by severe water scarcity and prolonged occupation, the pursuit of environmental and water justice in Palestine presents a multifaceted challenge demanding a comprehensive and integrated approach: one that addresses water justice as well as the actions of the occupation and that seeks to end the occupation as a main step toward justice for Palestinians. There cannot be water justice in Palestine under the continued occupation and the violence being committed by the Israeli state.

This report delves into the perspectives of various Palestinian stakeholders – including governmental bodies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and agricultural associations – on the concepts of JET and water justice. It synthesizes their insights on the adoption of these approaches in national policies, the mechanisms for civil society engagement in decision-making, and the prevailing challenges and opportunities. By analyzing these diverse viewpoints, this report aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved, highlighting commonalities and divergences in

perspectives and offering a robust framework for future action.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, international organizations, and civil society alike. It provides a foundational knowledge base to formulate more effective and sustainable policies and programs that ensure equitable and inclusive development, while acknowledging the unique circumstances and formidable challenges faced by the Palestinian people. This report seeks to foster constructive dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders, paving the way for a more just and sustainable future in Palestine.

The current report is prepared under the Just Transition Green Bridge Project, which is funded by the EU through its civil society facility for the Mediterranean and by Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and implemented by the Arab Reform Initiative through the Palestinian Environmental NGO Network.

## Methodology

The methodology followed includes a desk study, where the authors reviewed and relevant literature on JET and water justice, and fieldwork. The latter involved the identification of the main stakeholders from both government and CSOs related to water and the environment. In total, 30 institutions were interviewed in both the West Bank and Gaza: 16 government institutions (11 in the West Bank and five in the Gaza Strip) and 14 NGOs (10 in the West Bank and four in Gaza). For further details, see Annex 1. A questionnaire was conducted to cover most of the issues related to a JET and water justice. The identified stakeholders were interviewed to elicit and document their opinions on these issues in Palestine, including the core challenges that could affect their realization. The data collected was analyzed and the results were drawn from various stakeholders.

The results of the stakeholder mapping and analysis were also presented to the stakeholders for further consultation and verification during the first stakeholder consultation workshop, and

the feedback obtained fed into a first draft of the report. During a second stakeholder consultation workshop, the first draft of the report and principal results, including feedback from the first workshop, were presented. One last workshop was organized where the results were presented to a wider group of stakeholders including donors and other related actors. The comments from this workshop were integrated into the final report.

## The Concept and Principles of JET and Water Justice

### JET: Definition and concept

The concept of a JET emerged in the US as early as the 1980s in the form of a program to support workers who had lost their jobs due to environmental protection policies.<sup>1</sup> The concept has evolved since, with definitions adopted by several international organizations. The International Labour Organization defines the concept as “greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind”.<sup>2</sup> A broader understanding of the principle is gaining ground. According to the Climate Justice Alliance, a just transition is a vision-led, unifying, and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.<sup>3</sup>

At the global level, the just transition concept has been widened to include other issues such as the protection of biodiversity, improving resilience, ensuring equitable sustainable development, and climate and water justice. Just transition requires

countries to meet their climate commitments, ensuring that poorer countries are not pushed away from emerging markets and products while doing so. Moreover, it requires building a policy space for countries in the global south to develop their productive capacities and intellectual frameworks for the development of clean technologies; expand systems for the payment of ecosystem services; and scale up international cooperation to ensure financing for infrastructure and resilience building.<sup>4</sup>

From the definitions above, it is clear that a just transition implies a shift in the existing policies and governance structure by moving away from domination policies and depletion of resources (especially water and minerals) into more sustainable regenerative policies that adopt conservation of resources and democratic and inclusive decision-making.<sup>5</sup>

In the Palestinian context, a just transition for water and the environment extends beyond mere environmental protection to include interconnected social, economic, and water justice, with a focus on the human rights dimensions. This consensus reached by surveyed Palestinian institutions underscores the importance of ensuring that no segment of society is left behind in the development process, with a particular focus on marginalized communities. It also emphasizes the need for fair and inclusive participation in decision-making, safeguarding biodiversity, and achieving equitable development that distributes benefits and responsibilities justly.

Crucially, this understanding highlights the imperative for ending the occupation and respecting human rights – especially the right to self-determination and the right to water – as an integral component of any imagined just water and environmental transition. The JET concept from Palestinian institutions’ perspectives will only be possible when Palestine becomes an independent sovereign state.

The key steps for realizing a just transition to a green economy are summarized by the Stockholm

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1 “Just Transition – A Report to OECD”, Just Transition Centre, 2017, (“Just Transition”, 2017).

2 International Labour Organization, “Just Transition, Frequently Asked Questions”, 2023, available at <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sections/just-transition-towards-environmentally-sustainable-economies-and-societies>

3 Climate Justice Alliance, “Just Transition: A Framework for Change”, available at <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition-2/> (Climate Justice Alliance, “Just Transition”)

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4 Committee for Development Policy, “Policy Note – A globally just transition, Perspectives from the Committee for Development Policy”, UN (Committee for Development Policy, “Policy Note”).

5 Climate Justice Alliance, “Just Transition”.

Environment Institute as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- Actively encourage decarbonization, including new investments.
- Support affected regions, including diversification support in lower income regions.
- Support workers and communities affected by closure and downscaling.
- Clean up environmental damage using the “polluter pays” principle.
- Address existing economic and social inequalities; and
- Ensure inclusive and transparent planning and policymaking processes.

## Water justice: Definition and concept

The concept of water justice has been subject to extensive research by several scholars and researchers, with many approaching it from different sociopolitical or sociological perspectives. Some argue that there is no universal definition for water justice and that it is best approached in a relational, context-specific manner.<sup>7</sup> Others situate water justice conceptually and politically within the field of political ecology and define it as: “the politics and power relationships that shape human knowledge of and intervention in the water world, leading to forms of governing nature and people, at once and at different scales, to produce particular hydro-social order”.<sup>8</sup>

Water justice involves both the quantity and quality of water; the modes of accessing and distributing it; and the meanings, discourses, and knowledge that

shape its control.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, water justice includes questions about decision-making, authority, and legitimacy, and extend into questions of culture, territory, and identity by considering indigenous rights in postcolonial contexts.<sup>10</sup>

While water justice is often tied to antiprivatization movements, remunicipalization efforts, and ensuring public water for all, water justice activists and scholars have also advocated and mobilized around important concerns such as democratizing water governance, recognizing struggles, and addressing equity and social injustice.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have also promoted the inclusion of water ethics in water governance.<sup>12</sup> Overall, water justice can be understood in relation to other existing conceptual justice frameworks including environmental justice and climate justice, all of which share three components: distributive justice, procedural justice, and recognitional justice.<sup>13</sup>

Distributive justice refers to the equitable distribution of benefits and impacts, which, when applied to water, often centers around questions of water allocation: who gets what water and where, and who benefits and or bears the associated costs, impacts, or hazards.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, distributive justice includes water allocation not only for people but also for nonhumans, such as ecological riverine entities, and includes the impacts on nonhumans and humans.<sup>15</sup> Procedural justice shifts attention to the process by which decisions are made, hinging

6 Stockholm Environment Institute, “Seven Principles to realize a just transition to a low-carbon economy”, Stockholm, 2020.

7 Farhana Sultana, “Water Justice: Why it matters and how to achieve it”. *Water International*, Vol 43, No. 4, 2018, pp. 483-493; R. Boelens, J. Vos, and T. Perreault, *The Multiple Challenges and Layers of Water Justice Struggles*, Cambridge University Press, 2018 (Boelens et al., *The Multiple Challenges and Layers*); A. Ulloa, G. Damonte, C. Quiroga, and D. Navarro, “Water and Climate Change – Sustainable Development”, *Environmental and Policy Issue*, Elsevier, 2022.

8 R. Boelens, “Water Justice in Latin America: The Politics of Difference, Equity, and Indifference”, University of Amsterdam, 2015.

9 M. Zwartveen and R. Boelens, “Defining, researching and struggling for water justice: some conceptual building blocks for research and action”, *Water International*, Vol.39 No.2, 2014, p. 143 (Zwartveen and Boelens, “Defining, researching and struggling”).

10 Boelens et al., *The Multiple Challenges and Layers*.

11 D. McDonald, *Making Public A Privatized World – The struggle for Essential Services*, Z Books, London, 2016; Zwartveen and Boelens, “Defining, researching and struggling”.

12 D. Groenfeldt, *Water and Ethics: A values approach solving the water crisis*, Routledge, New York, 2013.

13 K. Thompson, “Toward a world where we can breathe: Abolitionist environmental justice praxis”, *Annals of the American Association Geographers*, Vol.113 No.7, 2023, pp. 1699-1710 (Thompson, “Toward a world”); M. Mills-Novoa, R. Boelens, and J. Hoogesteger, Chapter 21 in *Water and climate change – Climate Change and Water Justice*, Elsevier, 2022 (Mills-Novoa et al., *Water and climate change*).

14 C. Knudson, A. Cantor, and K. Kay, “Just Water Transition at the end of sugar in Maui, Hawai’i”, *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, Vol.5 No.4, 2022, pp. 2,073-2,097 (Knudson et al., “Just Water Transition”).

15 Boelens et al., *The Multiple Challenges and Layers*.

upon ideas of fairness, equity, transparency, accountability, and participation in decision-making about water.<sup>16</sup> Recognitional justice emphasizes the importance of acknowledging social and cultural differences, noting the undue burdens borne by marginalized communities and respecting the unique rights that stem from particular sociocultural and political identities.<sup>17</sup> It also emphasizes the importance of plurality, acknowledging the diversity of normative and governance frames, and draws attention to the significance of indigenous sovereignty and the need for decolonial or anticolonial approaches to justice. Recognitional justice is closely related to cultural justice and elements of indigenous environmental justice.<sup>18</sup>

Another type of justice worth mentioning is transformative justice, which emerged from the environmental justice movement and is very relevant here. Transformative justice seeks to address existing root causes of harms and inequities on a much larger scale, calling for the dismantling or the fundamental reshaping of systems and power structures understood to produce injustice.<sup>19</sup> It involves transforming unjust political, economic, and social systems and practices. In this regard, transformative justice is closely related to critical environmental justice as well as decolonial and abolitionist environmental justice, which are all arguably transformative approaches to justice focused on changing the system or the set of systems producing injustice globally.<sup>20</sup> In relation to water, these systems may include water laws, overextraction practices, and depletion of water bodies due to extractive economies; the aim is to dismantle the settler and colonial worldviews and

institutions in which these systems and practices are embedded.<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, water justice is based on principles of fairness, equity, participation, and accountability. Importantly, water justice must be “relational, situated, and context sensitive rather than universalistic.”<sup>22</sup>

## Right to water and water justice

In 2010, the UN passed the resolution on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, which recognizes: “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”<sup>23</sup> This resolution was approved in both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. It was not ratified by all countries, but there were no votes against it. This means that there is a universal recognition of the right to water and that this right must be ensured by governments. Guidelines developed for the progressive realization of the right to water included paying attention to water quality and safety, sufficient quantity, reliability, affordability, accessibility, and availability, as well as social acceptance of its sourcing and management. It is important to note that these aspects are not prescriptive and should be identified in each context by each country.<sup>24</sup>

To ensure that more people have daily access to clean, safe water, greater attention to a range of factors is needed: equity, sustainability, rights, fairness, local accountability, democratic process, and addressing people’s different needs. It has become evident over the years that even without national policy support, the discourses around the right to water can open and foster conversations around democracy, citizenship, and development,

16 Knudson et al., “Just Water Transition”.

17 Mills-Novoa et al., Water and climate change.

18 R. Boelens, A. Escobar, and K. Bakker et al., “Riverhood: political ecologies of socioculture commoning and translocal struggles for water justice”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol.50 No.3, 15 November 2022, pp. 1-32; M. Liboiron, R. Liu, E. Earles, and I. Walker-Franklin, “Models of Justice Evoked in Published Scientific Studies of Plastic Pollution”, *Facets*, Vol.8, 2023, pp. 1-34.

19 M. Rodeiro, “Environmental Transformative Justice: Responding to Ecocide”, PhD thesis, CUNY, 2020.

20 D. Pellow, “What is Critical Environmental Justice”, Cambridge: Polity; Lina Álvarez and Brendan Coolsaet, “Decolonizing Environmental Justice Studies: A Latin American Perspective”, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol.31 No.2, pp. 50-69, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2018.1558272>; Thompson, “Toward a world”.

21 S. Borgias, “Navigating Diverse Visions of Water Justice Within Unlikely Alliances”, *Water Alternatives*, Vol.17 No.3, 2024.

22 D. Roth, M. Zwarteveen, K.J Joy, and S Kulkarni, “Water Rights, Conflicts and Justice in South Asia”, *International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, Vol.19 No.9, 2014, pp. 947-953, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2012.752232>

23 UN General Assembly, Resolution 64/292, A/RES/64/292, 28 July 2010, available at <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/64/292>

24 F. Sultana and A. Loftus, “The human right to water: Critique and conditions for possibility”, *Water*, Vol.2 No.2, 2015, pp. 97-105.

often acting as a galvanizing force for the poor and disenfranchised to demand water democracy and citizen participation in water management.<sup>25</sup>

As such, understanding water justice and the right to water helps put into perspective the water-related issues that exist locally and globally, including how water access is entirely about power and control, particularly in the case of Palestine.

## Benefits and Challenges of Adopting a Just Transition

### Benefits

The concept of a just transition arises from the urgent need to establish a policy framework that facilitates the shift toward a sustainable economy that benefits all.<sup>26</sup> These benefits range from generating public support for a green jobs revolution to driving local solutions by developing local visions of a just transition that are participatory and based on a deep understanding of potential socioeconomic impacts of the transition.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, a just transition also holds the potential for deeper social change by reforming existing systems that undermine climate equity and social equality. The International Labour Organization emphasized that transitions to environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a strong driver of job creation, job upgrading, social justice, and poverty eradication if managed well.<sup>28</sup>

Yet there are several challenges facing the adoption of a just transition approach in national policies and strategies worldwide, especially in the global south. These countries face incomparably more challenging circumstances, including greater fiscal constraints, leaving them with limited access to financing and consequently underfunded social security systems. They often suffer higher poverty rates, greater food insecurity, and substantial gaps in providing basic services and infrastructure, including energy. Socially, high rates of under- and unemployment, alongside and high rates of informal services and employment, put many people at risk when it comes to their livelihoods. Constrained development also means limited scientific and technological capacities. Countries of the global south are more vulnerable to external shocks due to their higher rates of dependence on imports, including fossil fuels; this leaves them in greater precarity, including from the potential impacts of climate change. In the context of a just transition, for a global south country with significant gaps in energy access and a negligible contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, the objectives of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services for all and enabling energy consumption commensurate with development needs cannot be secondary to the objective of moving away from fossil fuels as energy sources.<sup>29</sup> Despite the challenges faced by these countries, just transition principles are explicitly cited in 38% of nationally determined contributions and 56% of long-term strategies.<sup>30</sup> Of these, however, only 17% of enhanced nationally determined contributions and 55% of long-term strategies have dedicated sections to just transition. This means that much more remains to be done and reflects the significant pressure facing the global south, including Palestine, to move toward a just transition.<sup>31</sup>

25 L. Mehta, J. Allouche, A. Nicole, and A. Walnycki, “Global environmental justice and the right to water: The case of periurban Cochabamba and Delhi”, *Geoforum*, Vol.54, 2014, pp. 158-166.

26 “Just Transition”, 2017.

27 UN Development Programme, “How Just Transition Can Help Deliver the Paris Agreement”, Report, 4 November 2022, available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/how-just-transition-can-help-deliver-paris-agreement> (UN Development Programme, “How Just Transition Can Help”).

28 International Labour Organization, *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*, 2015.

29 Committee for Development Policy, “Policy Note”.

30 Under the Paris Agreement, nationally determined contributions are what a country sets as its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while long-term strategies are formal documents created by countries to establish their plans for lowering emissions. See: “Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): The Paris Agreement and NDCs”, UN Climate Change, available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>; see “Long-Term Climate Strategies: What is a Long-term Strategy?”, World Resources Institute, available at <https://www.wri.org/climate/long-term-strategies/what-is-long-term-strategy>

31 UN Development Programme, “How Just Transition Can Help”.

## Challenges

On top of the above-mentioned challenges facing countries in the global south in adopting a JET and ensuring water justice, Palestine faces the unique and extreme challenges presented by its prolonged occupation and the war on Gaza started on October 8th, 2023. The current injustices by the Israeli occupation against Palestinians include waging war; murdering civilians; destroying infrastructure; forcibly displacing people from their land and homes; destroying all civil and cultural assets including hospitals, universities, schools, and religious places; and constraining access to water, food, and medicine as collective punishment, not to mention the confiscation of land and water and environmental pollution. Israel’s actions have increased the overall level of injustice in Palestine, including water and environmental injustice, and render any just transition impossible, as the following section shows.

## Right to Water and Water Justice in Palestine

### Water rights and justice in the West Bank

Groundwater is one of the most important sources of renewable water and is the only source of water available to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The volume of renewable groundwater in the West Bank is about 682 million m<sup>3</sup> per year and 40 million m<sup>3</sup> in the Gaza Strip, distributed over four main basins: three in the West Bank and one in Gaza.<sup>32</sup> The only surface water body is the Jordan River, which is completely controlled and used by the occupying power, depriving Palestinians from accessing their rights in the river.

The amount of water use in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 2022 amounted to about 152.3 million m<sup>3</sup> for domestic and industrial purposes, with 56.8

million m<sup>3</sup> in the Gaza Strip and about 95.5 million m<sup>3</sup> in the West Bank. The per capita use of drinking water in the Gaza Strip was about 84.6 liters per capita per day and about 86.4 liters per capita per day in the West Bank for the year 2023.<sup>33</sup> It should be emphasized here that the per capita use in some marginalized communities in the West Bank does not exceed 10 liters per day while the per capita use in the Gaza Strip during the current war is less than 7 liters; this is a consequence of the lack of adequate infrastructure and near total destruction of water infrastructure (over 90%) in the West Bank, and the destruction of most of the wells and desalination plants in the Gaza Strip.

The water situation in the West Bank has deteriorated sharply due to the increased Israeli occupation and settler aggressions against Palestinian people and their properties, especially after 7 October 2023, together with the extremely deteriorated situation in Gaza. From the beginning of 2025, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 2,208 attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank that caused property damage and injured Palestinians. Attacks on people and their properties in the Ramallah Governorate in the West Bank were the largest: 536 attacks with 856 casualties and more than 500 displaced families.<sup>34</sup> In addition, 220 water, sanitation, and hygiene structures have been destroyed in the West Bank together with 389 livelihood and 782 agricultural properties.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, on 5 July 2025, Israeli settlers attacked the groundwater wells and pumping station that supply water to 19 villages in the eastern part of Ramallah Governorate, leaving the Palestinians without water for several days. They repeated this attack on 2 August 2025 and then prevented

32 Palestinian Water Authority, “Water Resources Status Summary Report”, Gaza, 2015.

33 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024, water Tables in Palestine 2023, Ramallah, Palestine available at [https://www.pCBS.gov.ps/Portal/Rainbow/Documents/WaterTables\\_2023.pdf](https://www.pCBS.gov.ps/Portal/Rainbow/Documents/WaterTables_2023.pdf)

34 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “West Bank | Monthly Snapshot: Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement (As of 30 June 2025)”, available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/west-bank-l-monthly-snap-shot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-30-june-2025>

35 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “West Bank | Monthly Snapshot: Casualties, Property Damage and Displacement (As of 30 June 2025)”, available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/west-bank-l-monthly-snap-shot-casualties-property-damage-and-displacement-30-june-2025>

Palestinian water technicians from reaching the site to repair the damage.<sup>36</sup> Settlers have also continued their aggression against natural springs in Palestine and gained control of more than 118 springs – 28 of which are in Ramallah Governorate – that had supplied water to Palestinian communities in the West Bank. The settlers are threatening to take additional 168 springs, of which 100 are in Ramallah Governorate.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation reduces the annual quantity of water sold to Palestinians during the summer in order to prioritize serving the illegal Israeli settlements. In 2025, the reduction varied from 30% to 50%; this seriously affected many cities and communities, which had to rotate water distribution. People were only receiving water once every week or two.<sup>38</sup>

These illegal acts by the Israeli occupation and its illegal settlers further exacerbate the deteriorated water, sanitation, and hygiene situation in the West Bank, especially for marginalized communities, and reduce the per capita water availability to less than 30 liters per capita per day in some areas: significantly below the WHO recommendation of 100 liters per capita per day. These marginalized communities are in turn obliged to purchase water from water trucks at higher prices, where the price per cubic meter might in some cases reach €10, a very high price especially compared to these communities' low-income levels.

## Water rights and justice in Gaza: The impact of the Gaza war

The occupying power has imposed a long siege and launched six wars and destructive aggressions on Gaza since 2008, the most recent being the war that had been waging from 8 October 2023 until the ceasefire was reached on 10 October 2025. All of the

wars and aggressions have cumulatively caused the loss of thousands of civilian lives, including women and children; destroyed major swaths of residential buildings, infrastructure (including water, sewer, energy, and other related sectors), and health services; created massive amounts of rubble, significantly affecting the environment and provision of basic services including water, sanitation, solid waste disposal, and health services for the residents of the Gaza Strip; and caused the contamination of land, groundwater, and seawater.

It is worth mentioning that the latest war waged by Israel on the Gaza Strip has been the most violent, with more than 69,656 dead and more than 170,655 wounded civilians, especially women and children. These numbers are subject to further increases as the Israeli aggression against Palestinian civilians has continued despite the ceasefire. The war destroyed more than 90% of residential buildings and most public buildings and educational institutions. Sixty university buildings and many places of worship have been destroyed and 53% of hospitals have been completely destroyed or put out of service, leaving less than half functioning. There has been major destruction of the water and sanitation infrastructure: approximately 69% of drinking water wells, 71% of pumping stations, 72% of desalination plants, 83% of water reservoirs, and 75% of wastewater treatment plants have been affected.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the war caused severe food insecurity for about 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>40</sup> About 80.8% of agricultural land and crops in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed, and only 4.6% of arable land remains.<sup>41</sup>

The Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been and continue to be subjected to forced internal displacement: more than 1.9 million people have been forced from their homes to live in shelters or out in the open, without the most basic needs.

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36 Jerusalem Water Undertaking website (Arabic), available at <https://www.jwu.org/jwu/?p=3789&lang=ar>

37 Palestinian Water Authority, “Escalated Water Resources Stealing by Israeli Occupation to Foster Colonization and Forced Migration”, Ramallah, 2025.

38 Palestinian Water Authority, “Israeli Violations Against Water: Water Stealing and Using Water as Weapon Against Palestinians”, Ramallah, 2024

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39 Water, sanitation, and hygiene Cluster: State of Palestine, WASH Facilities Impact Snapshot. Ramallah: WASH Cluster, 2025.

40 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Reported Impact Snapshot | Gaza Strip”, 10 September 2025, available at [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/Gaza\\_Reported\\_Impact\\_Snapshot\\_10\\_September\\_2025%20final.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/Gaza_Reported_Impact_Snapshot_10_September_2025%20final.pdf)

41 Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, “Land Availability for Cultivation in the Gaza Strip as of April 2025”, 3 June 2025, Available at <https://www.fao.org/agroinformatics/training-and-resources/datasets/data-set-detail/land-availability-for-cultivation-in-the-gaza-strip-as-of-april-2025/en>

The humanitarian situation has worsened after the humanitarian aid ban of 18 March 2025. During the war, the occupying power illegally cut off water to the Gaza Strip, destroyed its related infrastructure, and prevented the arrival of foreign aid, causing decline in available water by about 94% per capita. People in the Gaza Strip received 4.5 liters per day during the war, which is less than half of the recommended amount for the continuation of life in emergencies.<sup>42</sup>

Israel has violated its obligation and deprived Palestinians from their basic human rights, including the right to live and its associated rights to just water and environment. Even though stakeholders emphasized that there can be no just transition in the presence of occupation, their responses regarding the adoption of a JET approach in national policies and strategies revealed a mixed picture. A significant number of participating institutions (90%) adopted this approach within national frameworks, suggesting governmental and institutional efforts to integrate JET into development plans. However, 9% of institutions indicated a lack of adoption, including 5% that were unaware of its integration. This disparity may point to challenges in practical implementation or a lack of effective communication regarding ongoing efforts. It could also suggest that adoption was partial, indirect, or uneven across different sectors and institutions, necessitating greater coordination and transparency to ensure a unified understanding of the real situation.

## The violation of water rights in Palestine

Israel is violating all of its obligations in Palestine under international law, the Geneva Convention, and international humanitarian law, not to mention other relevant laws including international customary law and belligerent occupation law. According to these laws, the responsibility of the occupying power is to protect the people under occupation, not to deplete their natural resources and nor change the status quo of these resources. Despite that, the occupation has imposed a

number of policies and procedures that have significantly harmed the Palestinian people in their access to their own resources: it confiscated and depleted water resources; confiscated land; and built illegal settlements, moving its own people to these colonies and supplying them with water from the West Bank. Israel also replaced the laws that had been in force before its 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories with military orders that declared control over all water resources and restricted the Palestinians' use and development of these resources. Israel has applied practices that harm the environment in the West Bank and Gaza, including polluting the land by pumping sewage into agricultural lands. It also used water access as a means of punishment and destroyed or seized control of Palestinian water infrastructure. These acts and policies clearly violate Article 54 of the 2004 Berlin Conference, which states:

(1) An occupying State shall administer water resources in an occupied territory in a way that ensures the sustainable use of the water resources and that minimizes environmental harm. (2) An occupying State shall protect water installations and ensure an adequate water supply to the population of an occupied territory

The right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty over their own natural resources, including water, is inalienable under UN resolutions, relevant international laws, and customary law and should not be altered by geopolitical or geographical change imposed by force by any occupying power. This right should also not be altered by the imposition of procedures and policies that limit the right of Palestinian sovereignty over their resources or deprive them of use, partially or in total, of these resources. Palestinians should retain their rights to access all Palestinian water sources, whether surface water – especially the Jordan River basin – or in the aquifers. These rights are retroactive, meaning that the Palestinians should be compensated for the quantities that they were deprived of, and the damage caused as a result of their significant deprivation.

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42 OXFAM, “Water War Crimes: How Israel has weaponized water in its military campaign in Gaza”, 18 July 2024, available at <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/water-war-crimes-how-israel-has-weaponized-water-in-its-military-campaign-in-gaza/>

# Water Governance in Palestine

## Water governance structure

After the 1967 occupation, Israel’s occupation authorities issued military orders replacing the laws that had been in force in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first was Military Order No. 92 of 15 August 1967, the “Order Regarding Powers under Water Regulations”, which “[granted] full authority to control all matters related to water to the Israeli Water Officer”. Military Order No. 158 of 19 November 1967 further “[placed] all wells, springs, and water projects under the direct authority of the Israeli military governor”, and Military Order No. 291 of 19 December 1968 stated: “All water sources in the Palestinian territories have become the property of the state in accordance with Israeli law issued in 1959.” Military Order No. 948 stipulated that every citizen of the Gaza Strip is obliged to obtain the approval of the Israeli military governor to implement any water-related project. With these orders, the occupying power secured full control over water resources in the West Bank and Gaza and prohibited Palestinians from further developing these resources. Moreover, they required Palestinians to obtain permits for any water development or rehabilitation project. Such permits were only rarely granted for small projects and never granted for drilling wells, especially in the Western Aquifer Basin. This in turn has reduced the water quantity available to Palestinians and led to the deterioration of the wells and the water network.

After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, the West Bank was divided into three areas: A, B and C (see Figure 1B, below). Area C, which amounted to about 60% of the West Bank territory, remained under the full control of the occupying power. After it was established in 1995, the Palestinian Authority issued several laws and legislations, with the amended Palestinian Basic Law of 2003 forming the legislative basis in Palestine. The law stipulated various rights, including the right to a clean and balanced environment under Article 33. Accordingly, various Palestinian laws, including water-related laws, have been issued to

regulate the state’s work in protecting these rights, whether directly – such as Water Law No. 3 of 2002 and Presidential Decree No. 14 of 2014 on water – or indirectly – such as the Agriculture Law, the Environment Law, the Local Authorities Law, and the Public Health Law.

In addition to these main laws, many regulations – such as the tariff bylaw and decisions related to the implementation of the laws and regulations of the water sector – have been developed in an appropriate manner. The water tariff bylaw in particular sets the main components of water pricing for local water service providers to follow. It is based on a block tariff that sets an affordable lifeline limit; this enables everyone to get water at minimum price and ensures that no one is deprived of their basic water needs. The price then increases as water use increases above the lifeline limit. The more water is used the higher the price per cubic meter.

Moreover, a water policy for 2012-2032 was developed that emphasizes the Palestinian rights to their water resources, especially those extending beyond the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the right of the Palestinian citizen to obtain sufficient quantities of water of appropriate quality and at affordable prices and access sanitation services. It also stressed the principle of equality in accessing this right for all segments of society, including marginalized groups and women.

Accordingly, the main stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the different laws and policies can be summarized in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1: Roles and responsibilities of water relevant institutions in Palestine**

Institution	Role and responsibility
Palestinian Water Authority	Regulate the water sector; develop and implement regulations, policies, strategies and plans; work to achieve fair distribution and optimal use to ensure the sustainability of resources.
Water Sector Regulatory Council	Monitor water service providers to ensure quality and efficiency of water supply and sanitation services at reasonable prices.
Local authorities and municipalities	Provide water and sanitation services.
Ministry of Local Government	Constitutes the legal reference for local authorities and is responsible for them.
Ministry of Agriculture	Manage and develop agricultural water, including plans and policies for the sector.
Ministry of Health	Responsible for health aspects of drinking water quality and supervise wastewater treatment systems and plants.
Environmental Quality Authority	Determine the necessary standards for reusing or disposing of wastewater consistent with environmental and public health preservation.
Palestine Standards Institution	Prepare specifications and standards for drinking water, treated wastewater, materials, and equipment, and authorize what conforms to the specifications.
Nongovernmental organizations	Work where official institutions do not operate, especially marginalized communities, to ensure equitable access to water for all.
Academic and research institutions	Contribute to scientific research and finding solutions; qualify technical cadres of engineers, specialists, and researchers in the water sector.

The results from the stakeholder analyses and survey showed that CSOs are not fully participating in policymaking, which will be explained further below.

## Civil society engagement in policymaking

As indicated under section 3.1 above, the inclusion of stakeholders in planning and decision-making

is one of the just transition principles (SEI 2020). When stakeholders were asked about their levels of participation in policymaking, their answers were mostly positive: 86% of the institutions surveyed confirmed CSO involvement in policymaking processes related to environmental and water transition. This high percentage indicates established mechanisms for CSO engagement, reflecting a positive trend toward transparency and participatory governance. However, 5% of government and nongovernment institutions

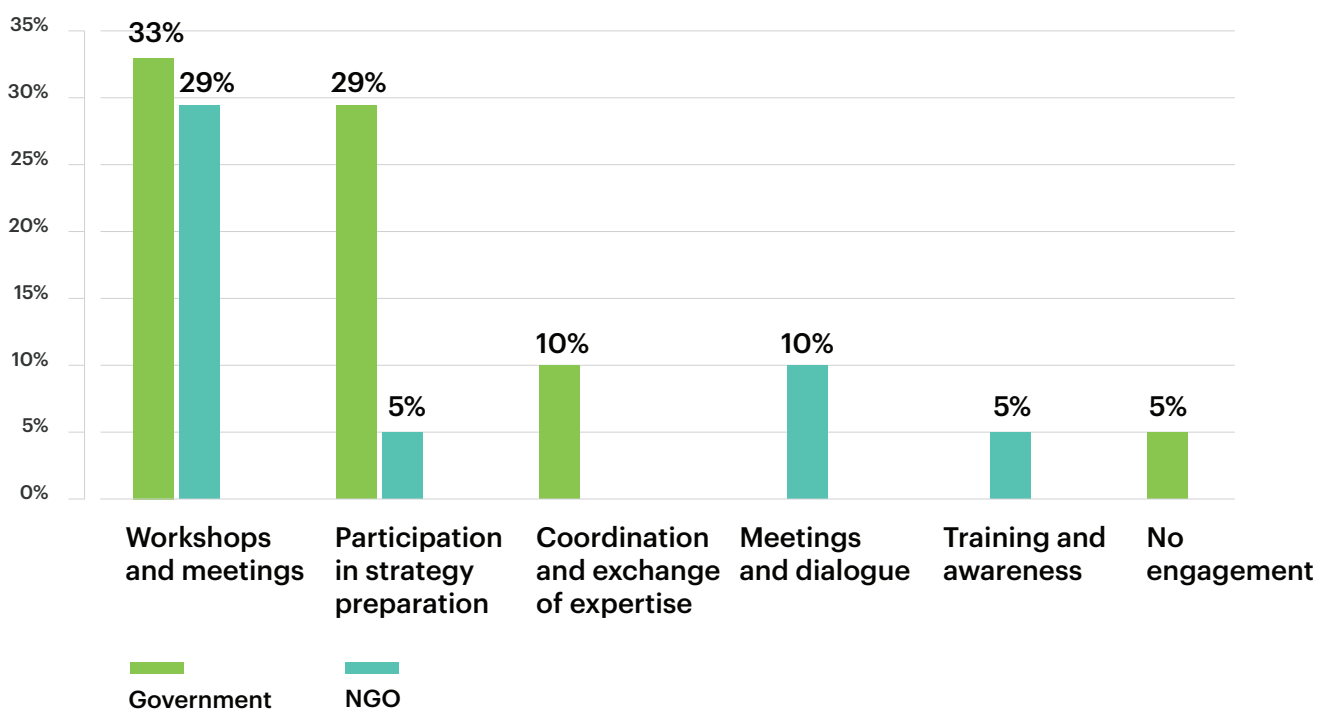
reported no proper involvement, and another 5% of NGOs were unaware of the opportunities to participate, highlighting a need to strengthen and expand these mechanisms.

The variation in the stakeholders’ answers might stem from insufficient awareness of available avenues for their participation or uneven effectiveness of their involvement across different contexts. To bridge this gap, it would be good to enhance communication channels and activate participation mechanisms more broadly to ensure wider and more effective CSO participation.

## Forms of civil society involvement in policymaking

To further understand the CSO engagement mechanisms in environmental and water policymaking, stakeholders were asked about the forms of CSO engagement and participation in planning and policy development. The responses shown in Figure 1 demonstrate how what percentage of respondents were involved in each activity.

Figure 1: Forms of CSO engagement in policymaking



As Figure 1 shows, most engagement took the form of meetings and workshops, followed by participation in strategy drafting, such as for agricultural sector. The other CSO engagement avenues are included partnerships and collaborations fostered through memoranda of understanding and cooperation agreements with government that form technical and coordination committees to pursue certain tasks.

Meetings with CSOs to gather opinions and conducting dialogues with decision-makers are useful forms of delivering CSO perspectives on the relevant issues, but are their opinions ultimately considered? Despite the varied forms, some respondents noted a lack of proper CSO involvement in certain cases or that their involvement is often merely symbolic – often referred to in the literature as tokenistic – without any potential influence or

tangible contribution in the final decision-making. It is therefore important to institutionalize CSO participation in the governance mechanism. This would increase effectiveness by facilitating interventions throughout a project, from design to implementation, ensuring CSOs’ genuine contributions to water-related decision-making.

## **Desired mechanisms and required resources for CSO engagement in policymaking**

To better understand the engagement situation and whether there is a gap between the current forms of engagement and the ones desired, the CSOs expressed a clear need for active and influential involvement in policymaking, particularly concerning just water governance. Key desired mechanisms include:

- Early and effective participation in the initial stages of policy development. This requires engaging CSOs from the beginning of policy development, not restricting their participation to the final stages or only when presenting results.
- Providing access to data and information to enhance transparency and accountability.
- Intensive coordination and genuine partnership with relevant parties, including in the formation of advisory committees. It is imperative to provide space for CSOs to be key decision-making partners, such as by forming joint committees responsible for planning and development or for taking decisions.
- Establish electronic platforms and open consultation portals for structured feedback to facilitate engagement.
- Include representation for all stakeholders – including marginalized groups such as women, people with disabilities, or farmers – for more inclusive decision-making.
- Strengthen dialogue and transparency between the government, farmers, and civil society, including the capacity building and training required for effective participation.

Even if the permitted participation and engagement with CSOs remains tokenistic, CSOs should continue their advocacy and lobbying to influence decision-makers and provide informed alternatives. Overall, CSOs seek a more comprehensive, institutionalized, and effective role in policymaking that would ensure fair representation and genuine participation in decisions affecting their lives and futures, instead of the symbolic forms of engagement that often do not recognize the CSOs’ perspectives regarding the decisions at hand. In this respect, good monitoring tools and transparent feedback mechanisms are needed, and CSOs need access to the final draft of decisions before they are confirmed to make sure that their perspectives are reflected.

To ensure that CSOs can properly monitor decision-making processes – making sure they are inclusive and that their opinions are considered – they would need both human capacity in the form of trained staff and financial resources to sustain their operations and enable the development of knowledge and evidence-based alternatives. They also would need access to real-time information and data. A digital platform accessible by CSOs could serve as a tool for this. In the meantime, some provisions in the law need to be added so that CSOs’ contribution to decision-making and the granting of oversight roles also become part of the legal and governance system. Finally, CSOs need to strengthen coordination among themselves and form alliances and networks to maximize their influence and make their engagement more effective.

## **Consequences of noninvolvement of CSOs in policymaking**

Most organizations surveyed agreed that there is no real benefit from excluding CSOs from water governance and the environmental transition if these are intended to be fair and just. On the contrary, such exclusion can lead to severe setbacks at multiple levels; the Palestinian community and citizens will be deprived of their active role in decision-making especially related to accessing basic needs and being informed on vital issues related to their rights and livelihoods. This is even more true for small farmers and marginalized groups. Furthermore, exclusion will lead to environmental damage and negatively affect the legitimacy of the government. More directly, CSO exclusion will create gaps in water

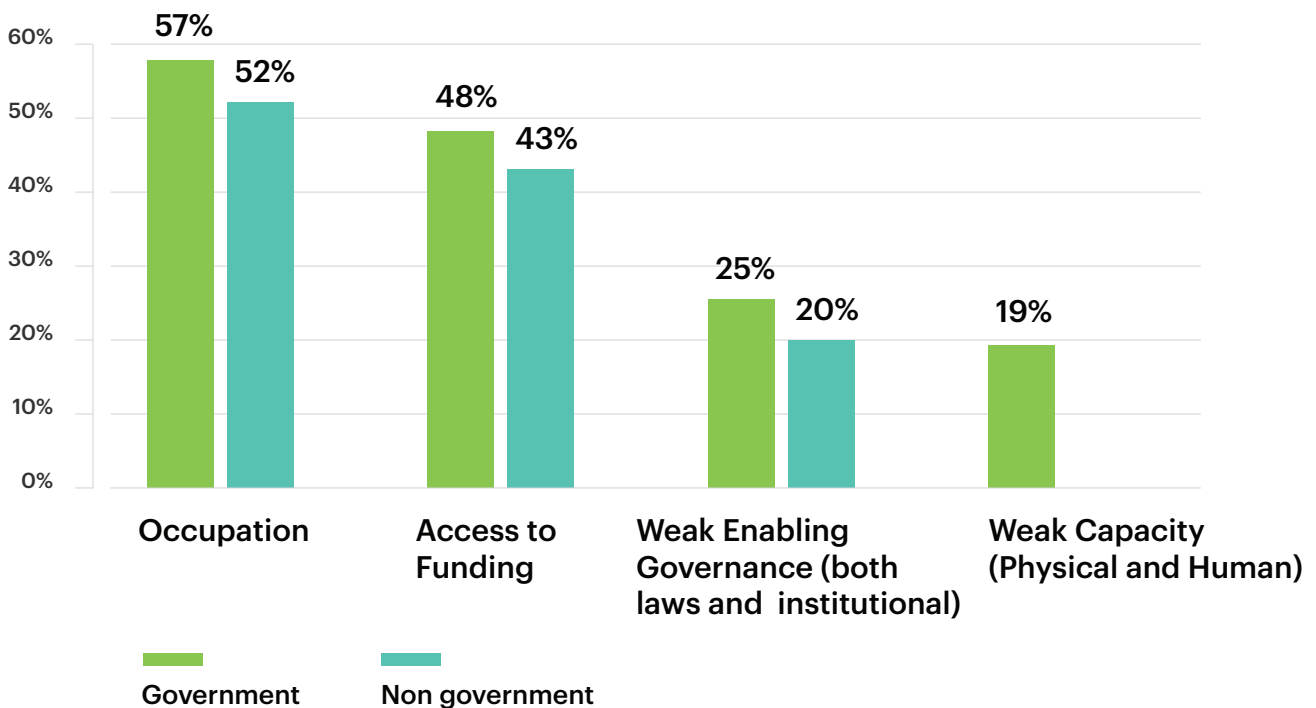
and environmental governance, weak transparency and accountability, and an inability to address root causes effectively – overall an unjust condition.

The primary beneficiaries of this exclusion will be the Israeli occupation and those with influence and vested interests. That is because the occupation benefits most by maintaining absolute control over water decisions and resources and exploiting the situation without accountability. In essence, institutions view CSO exclusion as a loss for everyone except those seeking unchecked control over resources and decisions, which only further emphasizes the necessity of CSO involvement for fair and transparent governance.

## Sufficiency of CSO Efforts for Water and Environmental Justice

There is consensus on the importance of CSO inclusion in policymaking and the value of their contributions once they are empowered and the desired mechanisms and enabling environment are in place. The question then is whether CSOs are making sufficient efforts to attain water and environmental justice. The opinions of the stakeholders surveyed were varied, but the vast majority believe their efforts are ineffective given current challenges.

Figure 2: Challenges facing CSOs contribution to for Water and Environmental Justice



As Figure 2 shows, the primary obstacle limiting CSO contribution is the Israeli occupation, which controls water sources, restricts project implementation, demolishes projects that are finished or in progress, and hinders fair access especially in Area C. Furthermore, settler violence against Palestinian property and water resources has increased and created a new challenge. CSOs also face limited funding, capacities, and expertise, impeding their influence. Public awareness of water rights is often low, and there is no comprehensive coordination among stakeholders that could develop a unified vision for water justice and the means to pursue it through national governance.

Despite their vital role, CSOs face significant challenges to comprehensive water justice, requiring greater efforts and political and material support to make their engagement possible and their work effective for water justice.

## Role of External Funding in Contributing to Water Justice

Most institutions surveyed for this report agreed that external funding can positively contribute to some aspects of water justice. Funding supports infrastructure projects that enable fair access to water, but itself faces significant challenges, especially related to the occupation.

International funding can support CSOs in areas inaccessible to the government (such as Area C) and helps build local community capacities and awareness. However, the Israeli occupation remains the biggest hindrance, destroying funded projects especially in Area C, wasting resources, and jeopardizing investments. The total number of destroyed water, sanitation, and hygiene structures in the West Bank from January 2009 to October 2024 was 906 structures – including cisterns, wells, water tanks, pipelines, and latrines – many of which were

in Area C.<sup>43</sup>

The lack of political protection for funded projects makes them vulnerable. Funding is often only partial, may not be sustainable, or comes with imposed conditions. While essential, external funding alone cannot achieve comprehensive water justice under the current political circumstances unless it is associated with guarantees for project protection against Israeli demolition.

The surveyed institutions agreed that EU funding can play a positive role in contributing to water justice and the right to water in Palestine. For example, EU investments in the water sector totaled €167 million financed between 2006 and 2019, including €86 million for Gaza alone.<sup>44</sup> This funding contributed to building essential infrastructure, securing alternative water sources, and building the resilience of farmers and communities. The EU also plays a crucial political role by pressuring Israel to stop violations and supporting Palestinian rights internationally, providing political cover for funded projects. On the political level, the EU foreign ministers unanimously voiced their strong opposition to Israel’s settlement policy including demolitions and confiscations, some of which were projects funded by the EU and its member states. Moreover, EU humanitarian assistance in Area C is governed by international humanitarian and human rights laws and aims to provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable Palestinians. Assistance is provided in situations where the government of Israel is not fulfilling its duty as the occupying power and is failing to meet the needs of the people in the occupied territory, leaving the EU with a “humanitarian imperative” to provide assistance to the “protected population”. By supporting people in their current locations, EU humanitarian assistance helps prevent the forcible transfer of vulnerable communities, which would constitute a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>45</sup> Funding also

43 “Breakdown of Data on Demolition and Displacement in the West Bank”, available at <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoim-mJkZGRhYWQtODk0MS00MWJkLWI2NTktMDg1NGJlMGNiY2Y-3liwidCl6ljBmOWUzNWRlLTU0NGYtNGY2MC1iZGNjLTVlYTQxN-mU2ZGM3MCIslmMiOjh9>

44 The Diplomatic Service of the EU, “Development Programmes (East Jerusalem, Area C, Water, Civil Society)”, 1 January 2019, available at [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/65569\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/65569_en) (EU Diplomatic Service, “Development Programmes”).

45 EU Diplomatic Service, “Development Programmes”.

builds local institutional capacities, promotes good governance, and supports advocacy: for example, the EU has contributed to developing master plans for 121 communities in Area C.<sup>46</sup>

However, the EU’s lack of unified political will to sanction Israel for its actions that hinder water justice makes its political position inadequate. While a major contributor, the EU needs stronger protection mechanisms, greater political will, and better coordination for its funding to have maximum benefit. Otherwise, the fate of Palestinians and their access to water remains subject to geopolitical forces.

## Palestinian Society’s Awareness of Right to Water

Opinions varied among those surveyed regarding Palestinian society’s awareness of its water rights, but the vast majority believed it remains limited, especially among the public. While certain groups including farmers, water sector institutions, and experts may have a good level of awareness, for others such knowledge often remains superficial and does not translate into a deep understanding of international agreements, local laws, or available mechanisms to practice their right or recognize violations.

Several factors contribute to this low level of awareness. To begin with, the Israeli occupation and its control over water resources can lead to feelings of helplessness. A lack of systematic education and awareness in the national education curricula and in public media on water and the environment is another reason. The weak capacities and resources of some institutions, both national and CSOs, to implement widespread campaigns to raise awareness does not help, resulting in a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical access.

Hence, there is an urgent need to enhance water rights awareness at all levels through concerted

efforts from governmental institutions, civil society, educational institutions, and the media.

## National Mechanisms for Empowering Access to Water Rights

Most institutions agree that empowering Palestinian citizens to access their water rights requires integrated national mechanisms. Key mechanisms would include enforcing water laws and legislation and explicitly reflecting water justice principles in the water law as well as in national water policies. It is also important to ensure community participation and CSO involvement through local water committees and citizen engagement in decision-making. This requires empowering both local communities and CSOs with knowledge and awareness on various aspects of the right to water and water justice.

To ensure the right to water, it is imperative to support water infrastructure projects either through the government budget or through CSO implemented projects, especially in Area C. It is also important to strengthen the scientific research capacity to address various global challenges including climate change. Finally, it is crucial to unify efforts, including international lobbying mechanisms to expose Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights, especially water rights; and the formation and support of professional and legal groups that could develop and present cases to the International Court of Justice and other fora in order to stop violations and ensure compliance with international law and secure compensation for the Palestinian people. These mechanisms require concerted efforts and political will for effective implementation.

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46 EU Diplomatic Service, “Development Programmes”.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the survey results provides a profound and multifaceted understanding of the challenges facing CSOs in relation to a JET and water justice within the Palestinian context. A broad consensus emerges among stakeholders: the concept of a JET transcends mere ecological preservation, encompassing critical social, economic, and human rights dimensions. This holistic view emphasizes the imperative for ensuring that no segment of society is marginalized or left behind in the pursuit of environmental sustainability.

While there is evidence of this approach being adopted in national policies, the varying degrees of implementation highlight a pressing need for enhanced coordination and transparency. The vital role of CSOs in policymaking processes is unequivocally acknowledged, with most institutions confirming existing mechanisms for their involvement. However, there is a clear call for strengthening and expanding these participation mechanisms and avenues to facilitate effective participation from the early stages of planning and decision-making, fostering greater transparency and accountability, and establishing dedicated advisory committees and electronic platforms for structured engagement.

CSOs articulate a critical need for both material and nonmaterial resources, including sustainable funding, robust capacity-building initiatives, unfettered access to information, and unwavering political and legal support. These resources are essential for empowering CSOs to exert more significant influence on public policy, thereby contributing to a more equitable environmental transition.

The responses emphatically dismiss any notion of benefit from excluding civil society from water governance and JET. On the contrary, such exclusion is seen as leading to severe and detrimental consequences for both Palestinian society and its environment. The Israeli occupation-related vested interests are identified as the primary beneficiaries of such an exclusion. Conversely, CSOs are recognized as pivotal contributors through their advocacy, community awareness campaigns, direct participation in policy formulation, collaborative partnerships, research and knowledge generation, representation of marginalized communities,

accountability and oversight functions, provision of practical solutions, and strategic political influence.

In the realm of water justice, there is a prevailing consensus that the efforts of civil society alone, while crucial, remain insufficient in the face of formidable existing challenges. The Israeli occupation stands out as the most significant impediment, exerting pervasive control over water resources and actively hindering access. Although external funding, including from the EU, demonstrably contributes to advancing water justice, its full potential is severely curtailed by the realities of occupation practices and the absence of robust political protection for funded projects.

Ultimately, this report underscores that achieving a JET and water justice in Palestine necessitates a comprehensive and integrated approach. This approach must extend beyond purely technical considerations to embrace the intricate political, social, and economic dimensions of the challenge. It reaffirms the indispensable role of civil society as a foundational partner in this endeavor and stresses the urgent need for concerted national and international efforts. These efforts are vital not only to confront the challenges imposed by the Israeli occupation but, more importantly, to secure the fundamental right of Palestinians to a just environment and to sufficient clean water. It is our earnest hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for intensified dialogue and collaborative action among all stakeholders, propelling the region toward a future characterized by greater justice and sustainability for all.



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### About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

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