



Injaz Center for
Professional Arab
Local Governance
in Israel

Recommendation for the Establishment of
an Environmental Sub-Committee for Local
Arab Municipalities in Israel

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The Injaz Center for Professional Arab Local Governance (Injaz) is Israel's leading organization advancing the competence, integrity and effectiveness of elected officials and senior employees in Arab local authorities (ALAs), towns and villages. The mission of Injaz is to increase the wellbeing in the Israeli Arab towns and to close the socio-economic gap between Arab and Jewish citizens and pave the way for a more equitable and just society. Injaz ('achievement' in Arabic) is a registered, non-partisan non-profit organization.

All of Injaz's work is directed toward promoting professionalism, innovation and effectiveness in the Arab local authorities in order to improve both the quality and quantity of services and opportunities for the welfare of the residents.

The Sub-Committee Concept

Injaz has pioneered a massive increase in influence for the National Council of Arab Mayors – which exists to represent the interests of Arab municipalities to the central government, as well as to provide a forum for interaction between Arab local authorities – through the development of an infrastructure for the Committee to function more effectively in empowering the capacity of the municipalities. **Our goal is that this infrastructure becomes self-sustainable in the long term.**

After the publication of the Government Resolution 922, it was recognized that although a number of civil society organizations were working in different ways with the Arab municipal sector, the National Council needed assistance in reinvigorating its effectiveness. Injaz saw the opportunity to achieve this by reviving the National Council's dormant sub-committees and establishing new ones, and it took the lead in doing so in 2016. In general, these sub-committees address topical areas – such as education or interior – which match a government ministry or ministries and which have the potential to fund municipal development in these areas, including through Resolution 922 budgets. Each sub-committee is generally comprised of at least three Arab mayors, 3 Knesset members, and representation from 3 civil society organizations and experts.

The sub-committees are strengthening the connections between the National Council of Arab Mayors and participating ALA leaders, Knesset members and government officials, and creating a "safe space" for honest, mutually respectful discussion, resulting in an increased profile for ALAs in government discussions. They are also changing the approach of the government – at both political and administrative



levels – towards the ALAs, as they are seen to be more professional and organized institutions. This has led to significant additional financial allocations from central government departments to ALAs, as well as uniting the Arab municipal sector. A number of Arab mayors – seeing that “the sum is greater than the parts” – have told us that they have not seen anything like these levels of cooperation and success in two decades.

To date **The Education Sub-committee** has been a flagship sub-committee in terms of the changes it has achieved and the additional funding it has negotiated, and it is currently the sub-committee on which Injaz has focused its resources for various reasons, not least due to the fact that this important area attracts about a third of the total funding available through Resolution 922. Looking to the future, Injaz is currently working with partner organizations to define objectives for the inauguration of a new **Environment and Energy Sub-Committee** of the National Council of Arab Mayors.

Through this sub-committee the representatives of Arab towns will engage with government officials – for the first time – in an area which represents a major, untapped opportunity for the economic development and competitiveness of Arab municipalities in Israel, an area in which, until now, the ALAs have largely been absent.

Establishment of an Environmental Sub-Committee

The annual allotment of services that a resident receives in the ten poorest local authorities in Israel is NIS 3,200, compared to NIS 23,000 in the ten wealthiest municipalities. A large part of the services that are removed from the offerings to the weaker authorities are environment-related services. Thus, the environmental quality in the poorer municipalities, including most of the Arab municipalities in Israel, becomes inferior and detrimental to the overall quality of life. This is reflected in the amount of pollution and environmental hazards, the quality of public spaces and the lack of “green” open spaces, the lack of awareness in the communities, and the unique problems stemming from the presence of waste, agricultural activity, and – primarily -- the lack of an environmental infrastructure.

Recognition of the uniqueness of the needs of the Arab municipalities is taking shape, and for the first time it is reflected in the "Environmental Justice" program of the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MoEP). At the same time, the government authorities themselves have no framework or specialization in promoting environmental issues vis-a-vis the Arab authorities.

At the level of local governance generally, the Environmental Committee has been operating for more than a decade under Shoham Mayor Gil Livneh. The committee deals with promoting environmental issues in local governments and creating initiatives and budgets for the local authorities. The Environmental Tag Program is an initiative of the Environmental Committee, in which resources are



allocated to environmental issues related to energy, waste and water. Mayor Livneh also serves as the representative of the local authorities in the federal cleanup fund.

Creating a clear and unique address that will advance the needs of the Arab authorities in environmental issues is important and worthwhile. Such a development could significantly help promote

and improve the quality of the environment in Arab municipalities, especially in assisting them to act in the environmental sphere in cooperation with the central government and to enlist the support of local parties.

An Environmental Sub-Committee for the Arab authorities will provide a clear address vis-à-vis the government, especially in the ministries whose purview is the environment and infrastructure, by creating dedicated support and communication channels.

An environmental sub-committee that operates within the framework of the National Council of Arab Mayors will serve as a model for all local authorities in the Arab sector. Its activities will address a number of basic and central needs in order to promote organized and long-term solutions to environmental challenges and hazards endemic to Arab communities, including the need for a broad systemic approach, developing awareness and involvement of the political echelon in the local authorities, and investment at professional levels that may in turn promote innovative initiatives and raise external funding for their implementation.

In addition, the activity of an environmental sub-committee within the National Council of Arab Mayors will convey a message to the government that the Arab public is interested in improving its quality of life, and expects the government to invest resources equal to those invested in other sectors. Specific issues discussed by the sub-committee, with appropriate media and public backing, may stimulate public debate regarding the resources allocated (or not allocated) to Arab local authorities to address the environmental challenges that affect the quality of life of their residents.

It is expected that focusing public attention on environmental topics and public health, together with the involvement of key professionals and academics in the discussion and handling of these issues, will advance the matter in the Arab sector and encourage the government to invest more resources in this area for the benefit of the public.

Following is a list of the main issues foremost on the sub-committee's agenda:

- Representation of Arab local authorities vis-à-vis government ministries to promote environmental concerns



- Development of possible funding sources for infrastructures on the one hand, and the treatment of hazards on the other
- Representation of Arab local authorities vis-à-vis local and international environmental bodies
- Advancement of professional capabilities among local authorities for environmental management
- Development of awareness in local authorities of the importance of intelligent and improved environmental management
- Support to local environmental committees
- Promotion of environmental education and public involvement in environmental protection and sustainability

Background - The status of environment and sustainability in Arab local authorities

The Arab population in Israel numbers about 1.7 million people and constitutes about 21% of the country's population. About 80% of the Arab population lives in Arab local authorities, and the remainder live in diverse cities or in "unrecognized communities." Arab citizens reside in 11 municipalities, 70 local councils and four regional councils, constituting one-third of all local authorities in Israel. Therefore, local authorities are a central and vital factor in any process of developing services, budgeting and improving the quality of life and the environment of the Arab population in Israel.

A report by Injaz (2015) lists a number of specific obstacles and challenges for economic and environmental development in the Arab local authorities, among them:

1. Internal obstacles -- a clan-based and patriarchal social structure that impacts elected officials and their policies
2. Structural obstacles -- excessive centralization by the federal government, and the location and type of authority (most Arab local authorities are small local councils located in the periphery of the country)
3. Economic and planning obstacles -- high unemployment and poverty rates, the proliferation of private land, and the absence of designated employment areas
4. External obstacles -- long-standing governmental discrimination in allocating budgets

In general, weak local authorities have difficulty, among other significant challenges, in forming and shaping safe and clean living environments for their residents. In Arab municipalities, the intensity of the problems is particularly high. The principal concrete challenges in the area of environmental protection in the Arab community include:

1. Lack of a waste and sewage treatment infrastructure
2. Proximity to pollution sites (quarries, landfills, sewage treatment facilities and radiation exposure)
3. Lack of green and public areas



4. Insufficient regional public transportation and the absence of designated bicycle paths
5. Lack of sufficient awareness in the field of environmental protection
6. Lack of funding sources for environmental infrastructure development

There are a number of major government sources of funding for environmental and public health projects in local authorities, including:

1. The Ministry of Environmental Protection -- publishes periodic readings on issues such as building waste treatment, beach cleaning, energy efficiency, environmental education and support for environmental units.
2. The Fund for the Preservation of Cleanliness (based mainly on the landfill tax money) -- issues proposals within the framework of waste treatment and assimilation of principles of sustainability in the education system and in the community.
3. The Quarry Rehabilitation Fund -- does not transfer funds to local authorities, but examines proposals by the authorities to rehabilitate quarries within their boundaries.
4. The Open Spaces Fund (Rami) -- issues an annual call for the development and maintaining of valuable open spaces within and adjacent to the authorities.
5. The Ministry of Energy, Water and Infrastructure -- assists in financing the development of sewage infrastructures through the Water Authority and drainage infrastructures through the corresponding drainage authorities.
6. The Ministry of Transportation - assists, through a work program and proposals, in the development of transportation infrastructures, public transportation and bicycle paths.

Alongside the environmental challenges and funding difficulties, there are additional barriers that make it difficult for Arab local authorities to properly address environmental concerns. This is due mainly to the degree of accessibility and complexity of the aforementioned budget sources to Arab authorities. The information is available primarily on the Internet and usually only in Hebrew, the means of submission of complex applications is through the Merkava portal, which is not accessible in Arabic, and access requires professional personnel with relatively high skills.

In addition, the rate of assistance of government ministries depends on the subject matter of the application and the economic capacity of the corresponding authority, but in most cases it does not exceed 90% of the financing required for the project and therefore requires supplementary funding from the local authority. Moreover, the funds are disbursed in stages and is generally received only at the end of the project, which requires the authority to have the capability to provide interim financing until the government transfers the requisite funds.



Municipal Environmental Committees as a means of promoting environmental policy awareness

For the most part, local authorities are busy and preoccupied with the daily, routine provision of services, such as planning and construction, development and maintenance of the physical infrastructure, and

overseeing the education system. Environmental issues, despite their centrality to the public, are not usually high on the authority's administrative agenda, for obvious reasons.

In recent years, a number of parallel processes have developed, including an increase in public and media interest in environmental and public health issues; a gradual increase in environmental activity among local authorities; an increase in budgets earmarked for environmental issues; and an increase in the attention and encouragement coming from government ministries to address environmental issues. An example of this is the Healthy Cities Network, which is supported by the Ministry of Health and promotes public health issues in local authorities through field work and activities.

In addition, the institutionalization of the municipal environmental committees constitutes a potential for change in the area of public awareness and in the agendas of the local authorities, and later in the earmarked resources that will be made available to the authorities. An amendment to the Municipalities Ordinance in 2005 determined that an Environmental Committee is a mandatory committee in every local authority (of any size). These committees are to have a unique composition, which includes public representatives, and require transparency and the promotion of openness to ideas that come from outside the political, and even professional, level.

The agendas of local environmental committees receive wide coverage in the local, national and social media. In addition, environmental issues have active support from the Ministry of Environmental Protection through district and city associations, as well as from local and national environmental organizations. In the past decade there has been a significant increase in budgets earmarked for local authorities through applications to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Energy in the areas of energy efficiency, environmental education, public awareness and more.

The percentage of Arab municipalities approved for any kind of support by the Ministry of Environmental Protection is much lower than the number of Jewish authorities in any given year. The data shows that Arab local authorities with environmental departments have an advantage over authorities without active units in receiving support from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, which is intended for ongoing environmental activities as well as for special projects. In addition, Arab municipalities that are members of a regional council consisting only of Arab authorities are currently developing and improving their



ability to gain support as well as their ability to promote independent cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

The existence of an active environmental committee in the local authority can greatly contribute to the advancement of environmental issues in the authority and the chances of obtaining external resources for a variety of reasons. The committee will devote all of its attention to environmental matters, and serve as

a basis for discussion on a variety of issues that are not usually discussed in the plenum and its management. In addition, professionals from the Association of Regional Councils or from the district offices of the Ministry of Environmental Protection will participate in the discussions, and thereby contribute their knowledge, insights and information about opportunities. Also, media exposure of environmental action increases interest in them and influences the local authority's agenda. Strengthening ties with municipal associations, as noted, increases the chances of benefiting from government assistance opportunities.

The local environmental committees deal with a wide range of issues and have the potential to significantly influence the local discourse and priorities. Among the topics dealt with by environmental committees throughout the country are waste (encouragement of recycling, separation and landfills, cleanup trustees, electronic waste, pruning), air pollution, local and regional noise hazards (blowers, air traffic routes, transportation), cellular antennas and radiation, open spaces and urban nature areas, renewable energy, water and sewage (water conservation, greywater reuse, sewage treatment), public transportation, bicycle paths and more.

But perhaps the most important aspect of the environmental committee's work in the local authority is the focusing of the authority's administrative and political attention on the environment. The reality on the ground is that local capabilities (or lack thereof) are a major barrier to receiving and utilizing government allocations for environmental matters. Lack of structural resources does not enable the authorities to create appropriate municipal mechanisms for dealing with environmental issues and does not encourage them to pay attention to these issues. However, where a committed environmental committee operates, and the authorities are connected to environmental departments or city associations, the chances of success and the attainment of new external resources are greater.

Environmental committees in local authorities can serve as a basis for integrating Arab professionals in relevant fields, which may be key to promoting significant change and increasing public awareness of environmental issues. In this way, it is possible to promote local initiatives, regional cooperation between neighboring authorities, and to reduce political objections in light of the professional and impartial aspect of the activity.

