



## GOOD WATER NEIGHBORS PROJECT

**A project based on sets of cross-border partnering communities sharing a common water source, promoting environmental awareness & peace building**

The "Good Water Neighbors" (GWN) project was established by EcoPeace Middle East (formerly Friends of the Earth Middle East) in 2001 to raise awareness of the shared water reality of Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians, and create political will for transboundary cooperation over issues of water and sanitation. The GWN methodology is an original idea that is based on identifying cross border communities and utilizing their mutual dependence on shared water resources as a basis for developing dialogue and cooperation on sustainable water management.

Initially eleven Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian communities were selected to participate in Phase I of the project from 2001 to 2005. Phase II of the GWN project expanded the communities involved from eleven to seventeen. Further expansion now includes 28 communities, in 11 cross border basins, supporting EcoPeace's efforts in all the region's shared water resources; the Dead Sea, Jordan River and the Mountain and Coastal Aquifers.

GWN works both on the community and municipal levels. In each community, local field staff work in close partnership with groups of EcoPeace "Youth Water Trustees" and adult activists to create awareness of their own water reality, their neighboring community's water reality, and the interdependence between the two, which necessitates shared solutions to shared problems. The experience gained through this dimension of the GWN programme shows that identifying community "environment champions" is instrumental in garnering the support of municipalities and mayors, generating change on the municipalities' policy level. EcoPeace has thus been able to develop close relations with mayors who have themselves become advocates for transboundary cooperation on water, recognizing that working together with their neighboring municipalities across the border would serve the best interest of their constituencies.

Having gained the trust of residents, municipal staff and mayors, the GWN programme seeks to change the reality on the ground: the programme staff works with neighboring municipalities to develop common solutions to their water management problems and leverage the funds necessary for implementation. Recent examples for such "priority initiatives" include the construction of a sewage collection network in the Palestinian community of Baka el Sharkiya, and the connection of this newly built network with that of the neighboring Israeli community, Baka el Gharbiya, by which the Palestinian waste water are now being transferred for treatment on the Israeli side, no longer polluting the nearby Hadera/Abu Naar Stream; and the establishment of a model farm in the Jordanian community of South Ghore, where the local farmers and Israeli farmers from the Tamar Regional Council work together to improve the local agricultural practices in order to both increase productivity and solve the problem of houseflies, induced by the use of non-composted fertilizers.

Overall, EcoPeace has helped leveraged over half a billion USD for cross border water and sanitation projects in the GWN communities. In the Jordan Valley, for example, these projects include the advancement of waste water treatment plants that are already removing major pollution sources from Lower Jordan River. In 2013, after a decade of successful public advocacy for the rehabilitation of the river, to which GWN mayors and residents in the Jordan Valley contributed significantly, Israeli Government decided to release fresh water from the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret) into the Lower Jordan River for the first

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time in the past 49 years. In addition, the Israeli Water Authority has committed to increase this allocation from 9 million cubic meters (MCM) to 30 MCM. EcoPeace, with support from GWN mayors and communities, continues to advocate for the rehabilitation of the river, and in June 2015 released the first ever Regional Master Plan for Sustainable Development of the Jordan Valley, which have already gained support of government officials in the region.

The GWN programme's success in generating political will for transboundary cooperation has provided a powerful foundation for EcoPeace's advocacy efforts vis a vis the region's national leaders and political institutions: in the past year EcoPeace' have created consensus among many decision makers in the region that shared water issues are solvable, fostered regional political pressure in Israel to double its allocation of water to Gaza and approve water supply to the new Palestinian city of Rawabi in the West Bank, helped achieve institutional change through the creation of a sub-committee in the Israeli-Jordanian Joint Water Committee to rehabilitate the Jordan River, and created large public recognition that the diversion of waters from the Jordan River and industry use of the Dead Sea water are the driving forces for the sea's decline. Furthermore, this last year, EcoPeace has successfully prevented the demise of an ancient terraced agricultural landscape in and around the Palestinian town of Battir by thwarting the building of the proposed Israel-West Bank separation barrier. EcoPeace submitted a petition to the High Court with expert opinions on environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and engineering. Both Palestinian and Israeli residents were mobilized to support the petition. In June 2014, the Palestinian Authority successfully submitted a formal request for Battir to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Danger – a request which EcoPeace contributed support to. In January 2015, following two years of deliberations, the Israeli High Court refused the request of the military to build the separation wall near Battir.

In an external evaluation of Good Water Neighbors, the [Butterfly Effect](#) concluded that "The GWN's strategy of long-term deep work in the communities, sustaining a cross-border communication network, and insisting on addressing practical tangible results and interests, rather than just peace or cooperation in general, bears fruits. It changes the discourse of those involved with the project and many have adopted the narrative of environmental peacebuilding / cross-border cooperation that the GWN project advances into their professional and personal lives." In a [New York Times](#) article published in October 2014, Thomas Friedman recognized EcoPeace as a model for peacebuilding in the region, noting that relationships of trust between neighbors (such as those built through EcoPeace's efforts) "are the hardest things to build, but also the hardest things to break once in place". In the current phase of the programme, EcoPeace is committed to further expanding its reach to include more communities across the regions cross-border basins, work to empower local women and girls to play active roles in the conversation and decision making process related to water management, and to further utilize the programmes success is changing mindsets to generate institutional and political changes.

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