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Feasibility Study on the creation of a Water and Sanitation Training Center in the Palestinian Territories

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France gives special significance to the water sector, particularly in the Middle East, where shared water resources management is particularly acute. In a context of scarce water resources, improving accessibility and the quality of services provided to the people requires special attention for water and sanitation. This means protecting and developing the water resources available to the public, and strengthening the institutions responsible for managing this service.

In such a context, the proposed creation of a Water and Sanitation Training Center (WSTC) in the Palestinian Territories, as the main tool of the strategy applied by the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) is in line with the new reform of the water sector.

This project also originated from the French will (Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Union for the Mediterranean's Mission) to join the MEDRC (Middle East Desalination Research Center), an intergovernmental organization based in Oman.

The International Office for Water (IOWater) was entrusted with the feasibility study of such a center, the recipient being the PWA. This study is financed by the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry on the FASEP-study fund.

The Follow-up Club associated with this project is made up of companies : SUEZ Environment, Pont-à-Mousson, Saint Gobain (PAM) and Veolia (through its subsidiary SEURECA). These companies have committed themselves to support the project.

Drinking water supply and distribution systems, wastewater collection and treatment are still top priorities throughout the Palestinian Territory, and the staffs responsible for the management, operation and maintenance of facilities (about 3,500 people, including 2,000 in the West Bank and 1,500 for Gaza) are the first concerned by the many training needs to meet.

The implementation of the feasibility study showed that the proposed WSTC could be economically viable in the medium and long terms, and this all the more so as the project would be accompanied by the establishment of financial mechanisms for the training of Palestinian staffs with the support (in a first step) of donors involved in the water sector.

This implies the creation of a training center providing practical and directly operational training to Palestinian operators, based on educational equipment and facilities in real scale, enabling learning and acquiring real "water professional attitudes".

The results of the feasibility study were submitted to the Palestinian Water Authority, for starting a negotiation phase with major donors to finance the project.

It is already planned that the feasibility study (Phase I) would be extended by two complementary actions :

- * The implementation of a priority training program for the staffs of the Palestinian water and sanitation utilities, which would aim to manage the transition period pending the opening of the Training Center.
- * An ad hoc support to the establishment of the Center could be provided at key stages of the construction of educational facilities, followed by a more regular support, which would be provided during the launching phase of the Center after recruitment of permanent staffs in charge of organizing activities and managing the Center (development of the first training catalog, preparation of educational kits, training of the center's management team and Palestinian trainers).

The Training Center could be located in Bethlehem, as part of the Industrial Area project located in the city (BMIP), which has undoubtedly many advantages, including :

- * A well equipped location in terms of capacity for housing and catering for future trainees, but also well positioned geographically.

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- * A location within the BMIP, intended to accommodate industries (e.g. PAM, Schneider), allowing interesting synergies with the future Center or jobs related to the water sector.
- * A suitable technological environment, as part of logics of development and modernity.