International Water Management Institute

Project Insight Note #4

Enhancing Internal Learning

Implementing the Al Murunah Project in the Al-Fari'a Area of the West Bank, Palestine

Al Murunah Project

Building Climate Resilience through Enhanced Water Security in MENA

- Led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Implemented in Palestine by the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG)
- Supported financially and technically by UK International Development
- In coordination with Ministries of Water, Environment, and Agriculture in project countries (Figure 1: Al Murunah pilot sites in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine)



Figure 1. Map of Al Murunah implementation countries and pilot sites. *Note*: Schematic map; not to scale. *Source*: Al Murunah project (2025)

Project Overview

Al Murunah, a five-year project supported by UK International Development, works to enhance water security across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by piloting resilient nature-based water solutions (RNBWS). One of the locations for pilot implementation, aimed at enhancing agricultural resilience, is the Al-Fari'a area of the West Bank, in Palestine.

IWMI has implemented Al Murunah within the Al-Fari'a area in collaboration with the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), as well as government authorities (Environmental Quality Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Palestinian Water Authority), from 2022–2026. The primary objective of the RNBWS pilot project is to enhance the resilience of agricultural livelihoods in the Al-Fari'a area by implementing water and climate adaptation strategies while navigating the challenges of an active conflict environment.

Therefore, Al Murunah's implementation in Palestine is notable because it successfully operated during active conflict, ensuring local benefits while maintaining continuity, security, and engagement despite significant disruptions. This offers lessons for the wider humanitarian to development community about proactive risk planning, adaptive crisis management, sustained community engagement, and operational flexibility. This project also exemplifies the importance of strategic policy and donor alignment, as well as lessons for scaling and investment, which will be further explained in the document below.

Implementation in a Conflict/Insecure Environment

Al Murunah often operates within an unstable and insecure environment, where conflict-related disruptions challenge access to resources and communities. Therefore, in crafting Al Murunah, it was important to ensure project continuity despite challenges such as movement restrictions, security risks, and the necessity of engaging with local communities in a way that maintained their support despite the volatile situation. From Day 1, proactive risk planning was integrated into the project to account for risks.

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Furthermore, the team developed a risk matrix that anticipated movement restrictions, security threats, and possible conflict escalations to develop early preparedness measures. The proactive inclusion of conflict-related risks in the project design helped mitigate potential disruptions from the start.

Additionally, the project required sustained community engagement—a critical element for success—despite the security risks. Engagement with local communities was supported by government representatives and PHG staff, many of whom lived within the target project area (Al-Fari'a). IWMI and PHG's deep local networks ensured the project stayed connected with affected communities, despite security challenges. This avoided disruption in local buy-in and implementation. Furthermore, regular consultations and feedback loops continued, even as the security environment fluctuated. Community engagement also ensured that IWMI was tapped into local information networks, which, in conjunction with Palestinian security resources, were consulted before and during road travel to avoid military encounters.

Furthermore, IWMI had to ensure the project was aligned with government policies and donor expectations. The political and institutional landscape in Palestine is highly complex, requiring careful coordination with local authorities and international donors. In such an environment, managing relationships with all government institutions involved, as well as the local community, requires constant attention to shifting political dynamics. IWMI, therefore, maintained strong relationships with multiple government bodies and donors, ensuring continued support and alignment with national policies.

What Worked Well Following Heightened Conflict

During the Gaza War, the project took swift action to adapt its operations, which demonstrated the benefits of an adaptive risk management approach during crisis. Furthermore, IWMI saw the value of implementing real-time risk assessments, which were conducted using International SOS, UK government travel guidance, and local intelligence. This allowed the project to adjust operations dynamically, ensuring key activities continued. Additionally, risk assessments led to the development and implementation of a business continuity strategy to minimize movement and reduce the risk of military encounters.

These factors enabled the team to implement contingency plans quickly, which was also supported through operational flexibility. For instance, when movement became especially risky, the project reduced physical travel and anticipated the need for virtual engagement where possible. During implementation, however, virtual meeting mechanisms were prepared but ultimately not needed, as strategically leveraged local staff allowed physical work to continue safely. Furthermore, this flexibility enabled uninterrupted logistics, procurement, and project milestones.

Another key strength of the project was its ability to adapt to the needs of local communities while ensuring that the project remained on track. The strong local presence of PHG staff and government representatives played a crucial role in maintaining engagement despite the security risks. This approach not only helped the project stay connected with the community but also ensured that the agricultural interventions were aligned with local needs and priorities.



Agriculture in Al-Fari'a. Photo credit: Ayman Rabi/PHG



Water system in Al-Fari'a. Photo credit: Ayman Rabi/PHG

Areas for Improvement

Despite successes, implementation in Palestine faced several challenges that provide important lessons for future projects in similar contexts. One such challenge was managing community consultation fatigue. The original ambitious consultation plan became too time-consuming for local stakeholders, leading to 'consultation fatigue' among community members. This created a need to adjust the frequency of engagement, reducing the burden on community members while still ensuring their participation and input into urgent needs. Future projects should consider adjusting the intensity of consultations to balance engagement with the capacity of local communities to participate meaningfully.

Scaling efforts in conflict zones require careful planning due to political uncertainty, security considerations, and evolving local priorities. For Al Murunah, scaling was thoughtfully designed in close collaboration with local stakeholders, including community and government representatives. This locally grounded approach ensured the project remained relevant and responsive to shifting conditions. To further strengthen future scaling efforts, it is beneficial to integrate them from the outset through proactive stakeholder engagement, co-creation, research and analysis, policy influence, communications, and partnership development.

Market and value chain assessments in the Al-Fari'a area required a more nuanced approach due to the unique complexities of operating in a conflict- affected environment. Given the higher risks faced by the private sector, a tailored strategy was essential to ensure effective engagement. Conducting these assessments earlier in the project lifecycle would enhance intervention design and provide valuable insights for resilience planning. Similarly, engaging the private sector at an earlier stage would help align strategies with market realities and foster sustainable economic opportunities.

Integrating a cost-benefit analysis earlier in Al Murunah could have further strengthened its investment case for future funders. Doing so from the outset would have provided valuable data to support scaling and demonstrate the project's long-term sustainability and impact. This highlights the importance of embedding financial assessments into project design to enhance funding opportunities and strategic planning.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Al Murunah has offered a tested model for operating in fragile and conflict- affected regions, providing actionable insights for future projects that must balance agricultural resilience, security risks, and community engagement in volatile environments. Al Murunah further demonstrates the critical importance of adaptive management, risk preparedness, and community-centered approaches when implementing evidence-informed interventions during active conflict. By reflecting on and using these lessons, IWMI and its partners can continue to enhance resilience in conflict-affected regions, ensuring that water, agriculture, and climate resilience interventions are effective and sustainable in the long-term.

Key Takeaways: Al Murunah offers crucial lessons for future projects, specifically focused on enhancing agricultural resilience in conflict-affected geographies.

- **Risk preparedness is essential**: Incorporating conflict risks into the risk matrix from the start enabled a proactive response.
- **Community engagement should be dynamic**: Engagement should balance frequency with responsiveness to evolving community needs.
- **Scaling built into design phase**: Early integration of scaling strategies ensures better alignment with stakeholder priorities and funding opportunities.
- **Agricultural markets and private sector engagement require tailored approaches**: Given the complexity of conflict-affected economies, sectoral assessments should begin earlier to enhance sustainability.
- **Investment cases matter**: Embedding a cost-benefit analysis into project design strengthens funding opportunities and justifies scalability.

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Project

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