

Master Plan for the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages in the Negev

Team coordinators:

Prof. Oren Yiftahel, Sa'id Abu-Sammur, RCUV
Nili Baruch, 'Bimkom'

Brief Background:

The Bedouin Arabs residing in the Negev/Naqab form the most marginalized and impoverished group in the country. About half of them – some 90,000 -- live in 'unrecognized villages' situated mainly on their traditional lands around the city of Beersheba. Other unrecognized villages are made of internal refugees, evicted from their original lands elsewhere in the Negev. Since 1948 Israel has denied traditional Bedouin land ownership, refused to recognize the existing villages, and prevented them from receiving services or municipal status. The official policy strived to remove Bedouin land owners into seven modern towns. Despite the hardship, however, most villagers preferred to stay on their land rather than urbanize. During the last decade some 11 villages began a process of state recognition, which has not been completed. The 35 other villages are still totally unrecognized, and suffer poverty, continuous house demolitions, and constant threats of evictions.

Executive Summary

Over the past three years the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (henceforth, 'the Council'), Bimkom – Planners for Planning rights together with Sidreh – Arab Bedouin Women in the Negev, have worked assiduously on a Master Plan for the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev. The plan is comprised of six chapters and 450 of pages of background material, analysis, reports by experts, and concrete proposals. The plan demonstrates that in marked contrast to government plans, **it is both feasible and desirable to recognize all of the unrecognized localities.**

The Bedouins residing in the villages have lived in the region for many generations before the state, and are not trespassers as claimed by the state, a fact that has been duly recognized by the Goldberg committee (2008) but neglected by the government. As citizens of the state, Bedouins are entitled to equal treatment under the law and to have their full rights honored.

The objective of the plan is to present **a strategy for a professional and acceptable plan for the unrecognized Bedouin villages**, as a foundation for the sustainable development of the Beersheba region, while realizing the principles of equality, recognition, and respect of human rights. The program seeks to guarantee a future of dignity and equality for the villages, which today have turned into pockets of poverty, neglect and underdevelopment for their 90,000 residents.

This objective will be achieved by applying the supreme principle of professional planning – shaping the future *for* and *with* the community. This will also fulfill the key recommendation of the Goldberg Report which has since been abandoned by the government – "to recognize the villages as much as possible".

The master plan proposes a variety of principled, yet realistic and professional avenues for the recognition and rational development of all 46 Bedouin villages identified by the Council in 1999. In the target year of 2030 the population of all the villages will reach some 234,000 people, out of a total population of 440,000 Bedouin expected to reside at that time in the Beersheba area.

All of the villages included in the plan today far exceed the minimal size of a rural locality, as defined by the Israeli planning system's criteria. In this context, it ought to be mentioned that many Jewish villages much smaller in size than the existing Bedouin villages have been established over the years in the Negev, including dozens of single family farms. The Bedouin villages represent communities that have developed together throughout long years of communal living. The plan shows that there are no substantive reasons to prevent the recognition of all of the Bedouin settlements.

The plan outlines the launching of a process that leads to **recognition of the Bedouin villages in their existing locations** (aside from a couple of exceptions of villages that prefer to relocate due to external constraints) and the provision of identical infrastructures and services to which all Israeli citizens are entitled. Recognition of the villages in their present locations is preferable to the current government plans (which are based on the forced relocation of tens of thousands of human beings) because the Council's plan is founded on these villages' firm historical ties to their lands, ensuring their rational and sustainable development.

The plan will also prevent the expenditure of a large amount of resources that would be required to transform the regional geography and to enforce relocation. Critically, it will prevent the deterioration of the conflict between the state and the Bedouin, and will help the Jewish population of the Negev by reaching an end to the land and planning conflict that has retarded much of the region's development.

The plan sets forth recommendations for the future of the region on three levels: regional, local, and administrative. At the regional level, it proposes **a doable administrative and municipal solution for each unrecognized community**, whether by incorporating it into the nearest town, creating "clusters" of villages, or recognizing it as an independent community in the framework of regional councils. The plan also outlines development strategies along three geographical axes – the northern, eastern, and southern axes. These axes will be serviced by public transportation, employment zones and public institutions. The plan recommends that the village clusters be allocated areas equal in size to the standard land allocations in the Jewish rural sector. This plan would entail instituting arrangements for an additional 250,000 dunams of land for the villages by the target year of 2030. Since most of the area is currently in possession and cultivation by the Bedouin, this action would involve new **administrative arrangements but not a re-allocation of land**. The land would be zoned as residential, agricultural or open-space. The villages would be organized into regional councils that will create a municipal framework, while providing services and infrastructures.

At the local level, the plan proposes that the "Bedouin village" be recognized as a distinct type, and absorbed into the Israeli planning system and codified in the manner in which a 'moshav' or 'kibbutz' is recognized as a unique type of residential/agricultural community. This formal recognition will entail the recognition of the historical and spatial logic of the Bedouin village, including its tribal land system, and will find ways to adapt this logic to the requirements of 21st century life. The plan shows that contrary to state

claims, all Bedouin villages can remain (with minor adjustments), and the traditional land system – totally denied by the state – could provide an acceptable, just and workable foundation for future planning, together with allocations of state lands, where and when needed.

To this end, the plan contains, for the first time in Israel's history, a 'model' for the development of a Bedouin locality. This open-ended model was developed after extensive consultation with local communities, and is based on the ties forged between the communities and their living environment, on the ongoing viability of the traditional systems of land allocation and inheritance, which effectively divide the lands between tribal segments ('aila) and extended families (qom), and on the location and functions of land, roads, and public institutions.

The plan demonstrates the way in which villages can be developed according to density and zoning criteria that are standard for National Outline Plans, while adapting them to the 'idiom of Bedouin space'. The result is a form of rural planning whose point of departure is the existing development patterns, but which seeks to enhance and institutionalize future development to create residential neighborhoods of a size which will allow them to **meet threshold criteria for eligibility for all community services**. The model also presents an option for building neighborhoods as extensions of existing communities, and for bringing remote and isolated clusters of Bedouin settlement within the purview of the new arrangements. The plan also outlines the recommended development patterns of roads, public institutions and open spaces in the various communities.

At the administrative level, the plan recommends the creation of a designated planning unit that will focus on a fast track for recognition and planning of the Bedouin villages, a venture which should be accorded the status of a high-priority national project. The recommended "Committee for the Planning of Bedouin Villages" (CPBV) should be placed under the auspices of the Regional Committee for Planning and Construction, and should include significant representatives of the village residents, professional and academic experts, and government representatives.

The plan proposes a planning process comprised of eight main stages that will lead **from the current state of neglect and marginality to full recognition, and place the villages on a path of development and prosperity**. The CPBV will engage planning teams endowed with the authority to authorize fast-track planning in the format of outline plans. These teams will work closely with the village community representatives to create outline plans and a clear and consensual planning process. It will administer the Bedouin zones according to the standard principles of development, density, and provision of infrastructures, as customarily practiced in Israel's Jewish rural zones, while recognizing the unique features of Bedouin village development.

This strategy, so the plan contends, will position the Bedouin regions on the high road to development and prosperity, bringing benefits to all residents of the region, Arabs and Jews alike.