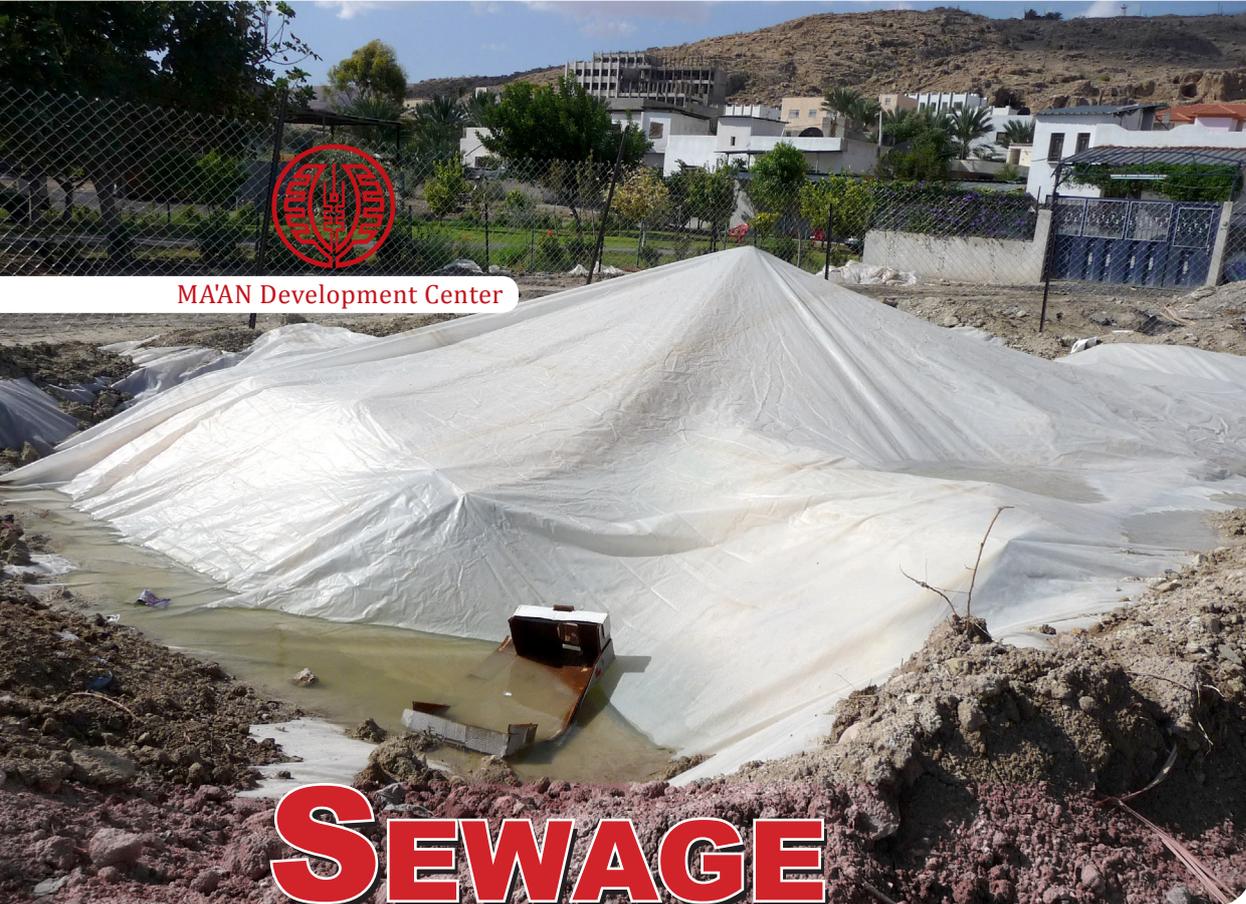




MAAN Development Center



# SEWAGE

## Maintenance in Zbeidat

- **42:** number of dunums on which 2,000 Palestinians in Zbeidat are able to build
- **13:** average household size in Zbeidat
- **41:** number of cesspools located in Zbeidat
- **0:** amount of money Israel and the Palestinian National Authority contribute towards the construction of a functioning sewage network in Zbeidat
- **30,000:** number of dollars Oxfam offered to create a Zbeidat sewage network, a project that Israel prohibited
- **3:** number of cesspools with pending demolition orders

The Palestinian village of Zbeidat lies two and a half kilometers west of the Jordan River in the occupied West Bank. Palestinian Bedouin refugees moved to the village in 1948 and have remained on the land for the last 60 years. Since the Israeli occupation of 1967, Palestinians in Zbeidat have had to deal with severe restrictions on their right to access basic services. Their water and physical space are extremely limited. The 2,000 Palestinians living in Zbeidat are only allowed to build on 42 dunums of land. These 2,000 people live in just 152 houses, 90% of which are two-family homes; a further 3% of the houses must accommodate four families or more. In addition, Israel has complete control over water sources in the area, forcing Palestinians in Zbeidat to rely exclusively on the Israeli water company *Mekerot*. This precarious situation greatly impacts the removal of sewage from Palestinian houses in the village.

## PROBLEMS WITH BUILDING A CESSPOOL

For the Palestinians of Zbeidat, the restrictions that Israel imposes create a critically unsanitary situation. Since a sewage network in Zbeidat does not exist, Palestinians must build private or communal cesspools to cope with the lack of a sewage disposal system. Residents of Zbeidat must pay for these makeshift solutions, with each cesspit costing approximately 10,000 NIS. Constant maintenance of these pits is necessary as water is greatly limited in Zbeidat, leaving pipes to become easily clogged. The cost of cleaning for these cesspools ranges between 425 and 500 NIS and must be done weekly or bi-weekly, depending on size of the cesspool. Clogged pipes result from not being connected to a central system or infrastructure which would moderate the water flow. Repairs to these pipes typically range between 500-1,000 NIS depending on the length of the piping and the extent of the clogging.<sup>1</sup>

## OPTIONS FOR BUILDING A CESSPOOL IN ZBEIDAT

Residents have two options when building cesspools: they can build the cesspool next to their house or they can route the piping to go several hundred meters away, under the highway, to the Palestinian agricultural fields. However, Israeli authorities deem this second method illegal because this piping extends into Area C. Consequently, there are currently three cesspits with standing demolition orders from the Israeli authorities. Another 39 cesspools are built 'legally,' but remain dangerous for

hygienic reasons. Serious health risks arise from allowing uncovered waste to fester in close proximity to people's residences. The vast majority of the cesspools are not completely lined or properly covered due to high costs and lack of space, resulting in the dangerous potential of passersby falling into the pits.

## SIDE EFFECTS OF CONDENSED SEWAGE CONSTRUCTION

There has been an increase in the prevalence of water-borne illnesses in the past five years.<sup>2</sup> The most probable explanation for this increase lies in the close proximity of sewage pipes to water pipes, as residents of Zbeidat have very few alternatives in their waste disposal. This situation has caused many Zbeidat residents to rely on the Israeli national water carrier, Mekerot, for clean water, an alternative that is expensive and intermittent at best.<sup>3</sup> The high water prices, contamination rates, and sporadic shut-offs have consequently forced many Zbeidat residents to cut down their water consumption substantially or spend more money on bottled water or alternative water sources.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MA'AN Development Center Interview. Recorded, internal document. 14 February 2012.

<sup>2</sup> MA'AN Development Center Interview. Recorded, international document. 14 February 2012 and 15 January 2011.; All residents of Zbeidat that were interviewed mentioned that Zbeidat, and potentially many more villages, have experienced more illnesses connected to water in the past five years.

<sup>3</sup> MA'AN Development Center Interviews. Recorded, internal document. 8 August 2011, 24 December 2011, 14 February 2012.; Mekerot occasionally turns off the water that is being pumped to Palestinian villages, especially during winter months, while this situation never occurs for Israeli settlements.

<sup>4</sup> MA'AN Development Center Interview. Recorded, international document. 15 January 2012.; Depending on the family, some stated they simply used less water and dealt with it in this way, others stated they bought bottled water or brought water from other places.