



Towards recognition of the unrecognized Bedouin villages and their integration in the Negev region

Background:

For more than 60 years, about half of the Bedouin population in the Negev has lived in acute deprivation, without basic services including electricity, water and roads, and with neither local government nor recognition of their villages. This harsh daily reality which afflicts nearly 100,000 people and severely violates their human rights is the direct outcome of government policy. Unless the various aspects of this matter are addressed immediately and the living conditions of the residents of the unrecognized villages in the Negev are fundamentally improved, the situation will worsen and imperil the viability of these communities.

The situation of these communities can only be resolved through the combined implementation of planning, land, economic and administrative policies that effectuate the civil rights of the Bedouin population, while, at the same time, settling the question of their living space. The solution reached should be based on the principles of **recognition, equality and justice, and on dialogue and cooperation with the residents.**

The Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages and Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights have been working for two and a half years on an alternative Master Plan for all the Bedouin villages. The overall goal of the plan is to present a diverse and agreed planning solution based on the existing Bedouin settlements, which would be integrated in the overall planning of the Beersheva metropolitan area. Such a plan would provide a basis for a viable development of the region, as a whole, while maintaining the principles of equality, recognition and justice.

The plan's main recommendations are as follows:

Recommended planning principles underlying the Master Plan to resolve the status of the unrecognized villages

The recommended planning principles provide a viable and practical solution for the planning of all of the Bedouin settlements in the Negev. The guiding principle is that planning in the Bedouin settlements should be consistent with their existing layout and structure while enabling their future development. This should be done by providing a planning infrastructure that allows for continual spatial and social changes within the community.



Resolution of the status of the Bedouin communities should be based on the following principles:

- 1. Protecting human rights; civil and gender equality; distributive justice and affirmative action, serve as the guiding principles for the planning of the Bedouin settlements.**
- 2. Recognition of the existing Bedouin settlements on the basis of professional criteria:** all of the still unrecognized 35 Bedouin settlements should be officially recognized since they meet the criteria formulated by the Central Bureau of Statistics..
- 3. Involving the communities in determining their future and shaping their living space:** an emphasis must be put on involving the communities in developing a plan for their village. There is a direct correlation between the degree of the communities involvement and the chances that the plans can be implemented and realized. The participation of the communities in the planning process is particularly important on issues such as the future development of the settlement, its social and spatial relationships at the local level and its integration within the wider region. The Master Plan we drafted balances the communities' needs and preferences with other needs and planning considerations at the local and regional levels..
- 4. Recognition of the Bedouin settlements in their current locations:** a key principle of the Master Plan is minimizing the relocation of villages and communities. The circumstances of the village development are critical to the understanding of their spatial rationale. We distinguish between two main types of villages: (1) Historic villages that existed before Israel was founded. In most cases, the residents of these villages demand ownership of the land on which their village resides; (2) Villages of internally displaced Bedouins, who are more flexible to other solutions, although they too would prefer that their village be recognized and developed in situ, unless there are problematic planning circumstances.
- 5. Integration of the Bedouin villages within the administrative, economic and infrastructure systems of the Beersheva metropolitan area:** the planning principles will delineate the vectors of regional development for the next two decades. At their center is the recognition of the villages, and the establishing of optimal circumstances for their development, in line with the existing regional structures. Optimal planning would strive to synchronize as much as possible with existing plans. Where possible, the planning of the Bedouin villages would integrate with regional services and opportunities such as education and health institutions, social services and employment areas.
- 6. Recognition of the Bedouin village as a distinct type of settlement with its own logic, organization and binding system of rules:** the Bedouin village is a distinct type of settlement whose plans should take into consideration its inner rationale. In the case of the Bedouin rural villages, principles such as the



cultural and social organization of the community, and social agreements dictate their construct, spread and development, as is also the case with the kibbutz or the moshav.

7. **Consideration of the traditional Bedouin land system:** traditional land ownership patterns are a defining factor in planning the villages. The desired planning of the villages would respect the extensive land system the Bedouin have developed over centuries. Such planning would also identify areas where allocation of state land is needed for further residential, economic and social development (e.g. employment zones, schools). Integrating the traditional land system in current planning would increase the efficiency of the plan and the government's ability to implement it and enforce its own rules.
8. **Cultivation of the diversity of the Bedouin lifestyle, while maintaining landscape and cultural heritage:** the physical deployment of the villages largely reflects Bedouin lifestyle, landscape and cultural heritage. Therefore, the planning principles should be based on the status quo as a starting point and view the current layout of the villages as a critical planning factor.
9. **Creating spatial conditions to accelerate economic development and reduce economic gaps in the area:** Considering the high unemployment levels in the Bedouin villages, the planning principles should seek to create conditions for new and renewed forms of employment based on the transition of part of the Bedouin community from an agrarian society to a modern urbanized society, with a greater emphasis placed on enabling mobility. The development strategy should be geared to create a suitable synthesis between the local development of small businesses and the development at a higher level of joint employment and transportation areas for Jews and Bedouins. This would have a positive effect on the growth of both Bedouin and Jewish settlements.
10. **Protection of open areas and natural resources:** the Master Plan seeks to combine the developmental needs of the Bedouin villages with the protection of open areas and natural resources, both in the context of the village and regional planning. An emphasis is also placed on integrating environmental and landscape aspects in village planning. The planning and development trends of the villages will aim to concentrate future construction within the boundaries of the family estates; while maintaining large land reserves for agricultural and open areas as buffer zones between residential areas.