

Contesting Water Poverty in Jordan: The case of WUA in the Jordan Valley

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Technological Fetish

What we expect from donors is infrastructure and water treatment facilities. We love JICA because they don't go for the wishy-washy institutional stuff and ask us to change things. They just put down the infrastructure and move on. We appreciate that (A senior MWI operative, 12th Nov. 2013).

Alive to Geopolitics

All the water models we have done for Jordan point towards demand management, whereas the country aspires to have supply enhancements. Donors too don't want to fund supply enhancement. . . . Reality is that if we had heeded the demand management angle in the past, we would have been in very serious trouble right now with the huge influx of refugees from Iraq and then Syria. So I guess what was a mistake according to donors is saving us right now (An independent water researcher, 19th, Nov. 2013).

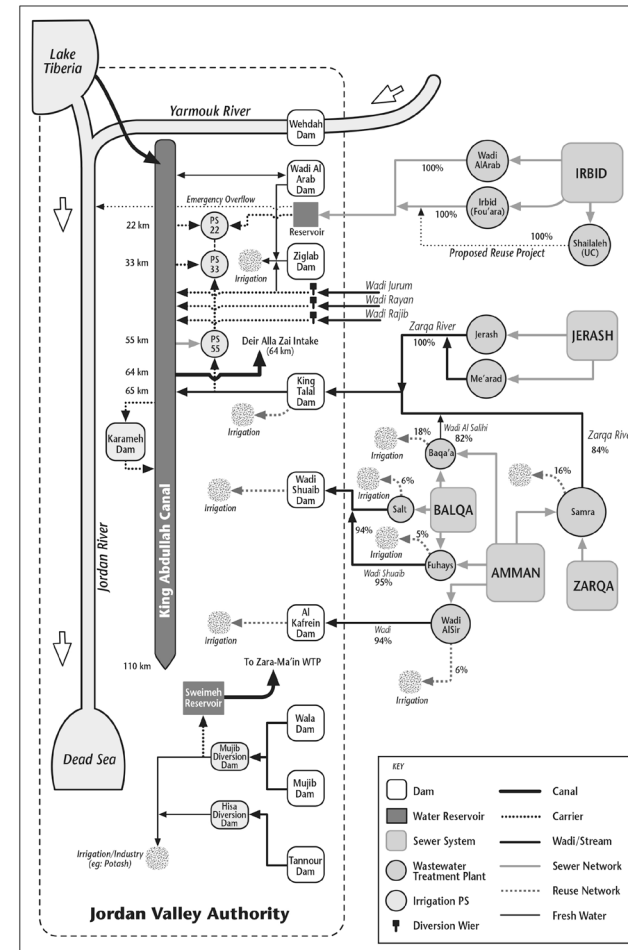
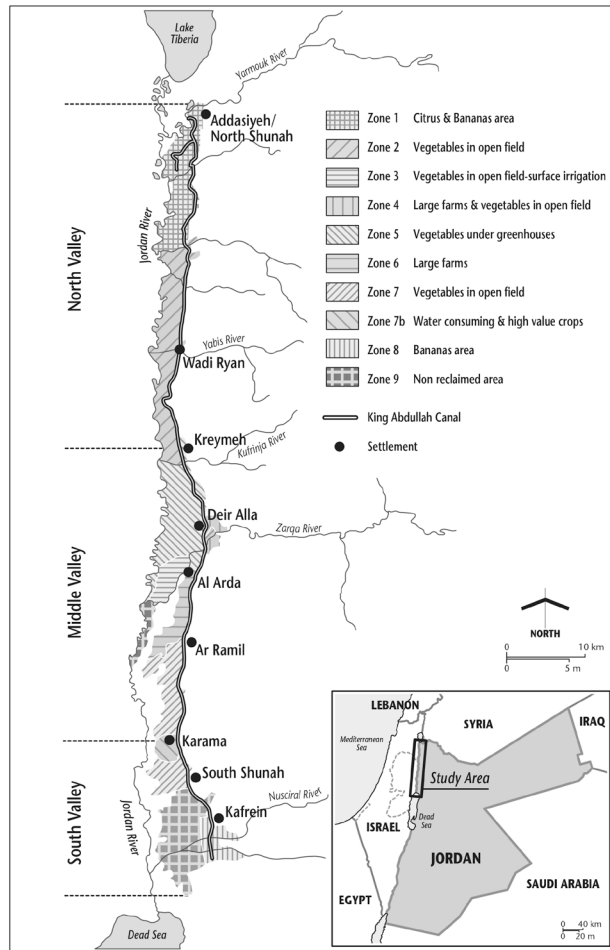
Political Stability as Key

Political stability is one amongst other objectives of water management, e.g., economic return on water and long term sustainability. But if you take political stability out of any equation of objectives, you are really talking nonsense in the Jordanian context. I guess what I am calling for is realpolitik in the water sector (A senior water policymaker 18th, Nov. 2013).

Water for Nation Building

This country does have an idealized view of agriculture where they, imitating the Israelis--wanted to settle down the pastoralist population to build a nation. Now they are continuing with that inertia. In fact, there is a strong sense of competition with the Israelis. They think that if they [Israelis] can do it, so can they. I mean they have lamps on roads in the middle of nowhere just so that Jordan may gleam like Israel from the sky (An expatriate water expert 17th Nov. 2013).

Techno-Waterscape of Jordan Valley



Fieldwork in Jordan Valley



Inequity in Water Management

Those banana plantations are owned by the big/ powerful guys; there is water for them. There is no water for the smaller, weak farmers. The water problem is for the small guys and the weak guys (A Jordan Valley Farmer, 20/08/2014).



Profile of WUAs

- 28 WUAs
- 13 WUAs have taken over water distribution responsibilities
- JVA sets up the water order
- Some WUAs have taken on maintenance



Farmers pay a 50 JD upfront membership fee, 40 JD of which is for shares in the bank, and over the course of several years the shares amount has to increase to 200 JD. The WUA doesn't have much money, it usually just breaks even. We have a contract with the JVA that only applies to the salaries of the employees. Right now the one problem is that the WUA is not profitable, we need an alternative income source, we have many ambitions but first we need money [for those ambitions] (WUA official at PS 55, circa Aug. 2014).

WUA at PS 28 got more water because of 'wasta' [connections] with some higher JVA people. We complained about not getting the same extra amount of water. In the end, PS 33 was able to get the same extra water that PS 28 was getting. So our president of PS 33 had the ability to go to the 'big guys' as well to get what our area needed. He talked to higher-level people at the Ministry [MWI] and in turn was also given a two hour extension on the water time. WUAs collectively have more power than individual farmers so it is worth being a member. Presidents are strong with power and influence in every WUA, though 'wasta' levels vary . . . In 5 years there have been no [water related] problems [within the WUA] – our WUA President is elected through consensus rather than elections and is esteemed (A WUA official at PS 33, 16/08/2014).

Dysfunction in the WUAs

There is no accountability in the associations. If the farmer has a problem with a JVA ditchrider, he can complain to the JVA and something is done so there is accountability. But in an association, a farmer has no one to complain to about a WUA employee so there is less accountability (Farmer at PS 41, 20/08/2014).

Technical specialists here are not trained well - the one here [pointing to the engineer sitting there] is trained for window metal works not water engineering. Ditchriders are illiterate and can't read meters or write violations. As long as there is aid and support there will be an association, not afterwards (Farmer at PS 33, 17/08/2014).

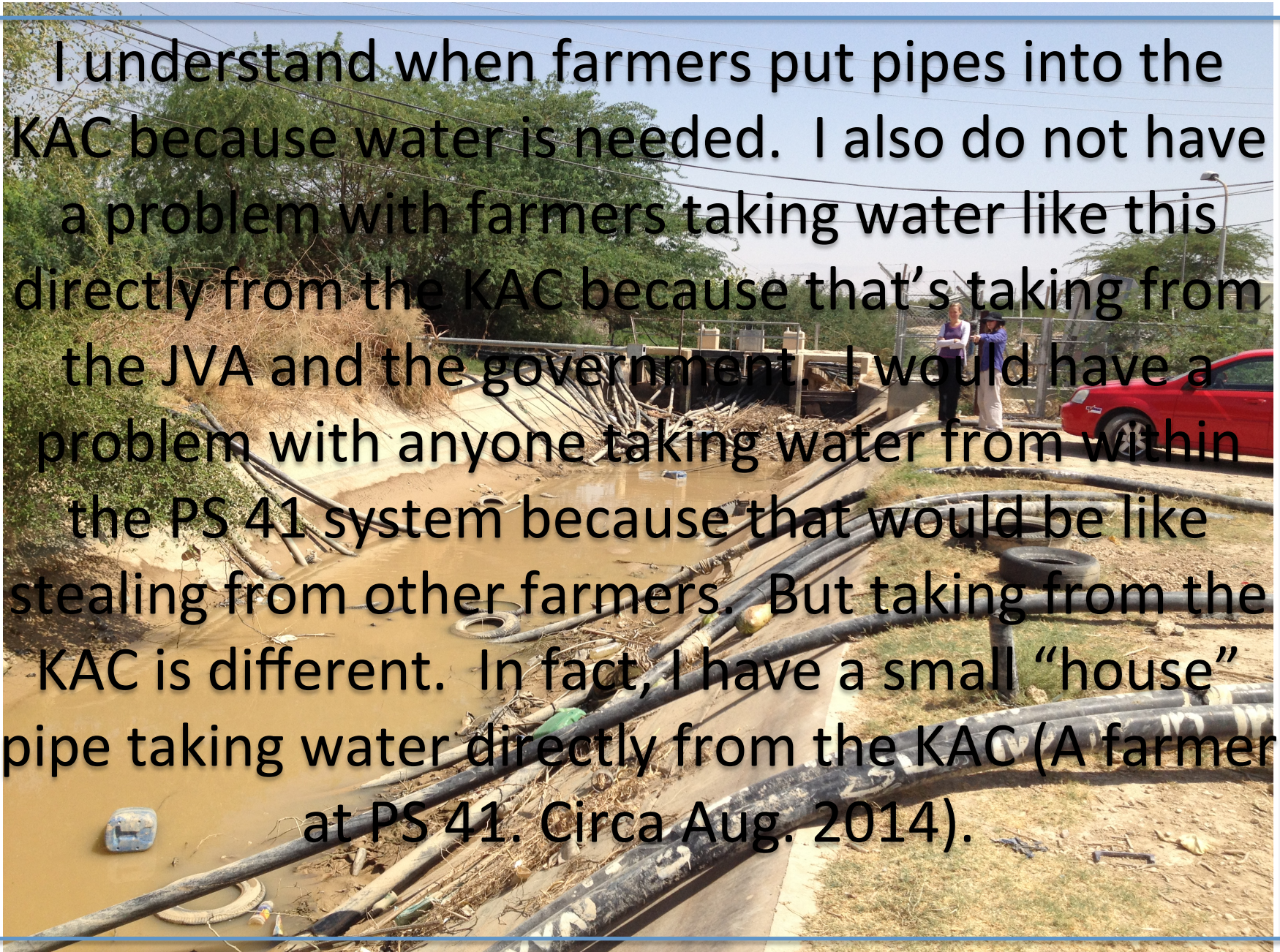
Before the association it was the big powerful people that got their water. A farmer could steal water when the JVA wasn't looking . . . Now, with the WUA's presence and my personal presence there is monitoring in the field. I am a member of a monitoring council, which monitors the behavior of the association. . . Just the other day, the ditchriders gave me a violation because my son was removing the flow limiter to clean it. There was a water turn but water wasn't coming, so my son wanted to clean it, but because it's the ditchrider's job to clean the FTA and not the farmer's, he got a violation. My son didn't know this regulation but I am not angry because now everyone knows they are not supposed to do that (A small tenant farmer PS 95. 24/08/2014).

The employees of the government have a very low salary, so we support their salaries by helping them out here and there. We give them a little bit of money for gas for their bikes. You want the reality right? We give bribes to get more water . . . The bribe isn't for more hours of water, it's to allow the farmer to get away with putting in a bigger flow limiter and thus being able to take more liters per second of water during a regular turn.

In our WUA there are 244 farming units, 145 farmers in total and 75 farmers are WUA members. It's just the palm farmers who haven't joined for the most part, as they only need water and don't care to get involved past that. Palm farming only really started in earnest in the last five years. The palm farmers always owned the land and have recently taken the land back from renters to grow palms. There are 71 farm units of palm trees this year and there were 47 units last year of palm trees so the increase has been rapid (A WUA official at PS 95. 24/08/2014).

There was talk of several WUAs coming together [as a confederation] to share facilities and maintenance crews, but the associations can not become a political entity. You don't find much of a civil society or volunteering culture here [in Jordan], for the fear of it turning political. There is always a fear [on part of the state] of creating a space, which could be politicized. The WUAs could be that space and hence there will be limits to what it can do (Farmer, PS 91. 23/08/2014).

I understand when farmers put pipes into the KAC because water is needed. I also do not have a problem with farmers taking water like this directly from the KAC because that's taking from the JVA and the government. I would have a problem with anyone taking water from within the PS 41 system because that would be like stealing from other farmers. But taking from the KAC is different. In fact, I have a small "house" pipe taking water directly from the KAC (A farmer at PS 41. Circa Aug. 2014).



Concluding Observations

- Water scarcity is a politically mediated reality
- WUA useful in negotiating the power differential between the farmers and the state.
- WUA structure maps on to the tribal power structures.
- Elite capture happens but WUAs provides a more local conduit for claim making.
- Can be potentially a political space, which might be one reason they won't be allowed to become too efficacious.