



# TAUB CENTER

for Social Policy Studies in Israel

## *The Rosshandler Bulletin Series*

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### From the Executive Director

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This Bulletin focuses on resources in which Israel is uniquely scarce and uniquely abundant. The land of Israel was never blessed with water, and one of the world's leading researchers in this field, Professor Yoav Kislev, provides a glimpse at how Israel is dealing with this vital lifeline. One natural resource that Israel has been blessed with is its children, and some findings from a major new Taub Center study on the country's preschools are highlighted here. Finally, another area in which Israel stands out is its relatively low share of single-parent families. But as Professor Haya Stier finds, these Israeli families tend to be disproportionately poor.

Prof. Dan Ben-David

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## The state of public preschool education in Israel

*A comprehensive Taub Center overview of pre-primary education in Israel finds a substantial increase in Arab Israeli pre-primary enrollment. The recent study also finds that the government's latest decision to implement universal public preschool education from age 3 will require a significant financial investment.*

While the importance of early childhood education for long-term success is widely known and commonly accepted, Israel's investment in education for its youngest children is provided in a piecemeal manner, with wide disparities in preschool enrollment and tuition costs. Despite the amended Compulsory Education Law (1984) which brought the statutory age of compulsory education down to 3, the law has been implemented only since 1999, and solely in localities with lower socioeconomic rankings, affecting only about one-third of Israeli children. As a result, the cost of preschool education for 3-6 year-olds varies widely depending on the education framework in which they are enrolled. Prices range from almost no monthly fee in the public system to NIS 3,000 or higher in the private system.

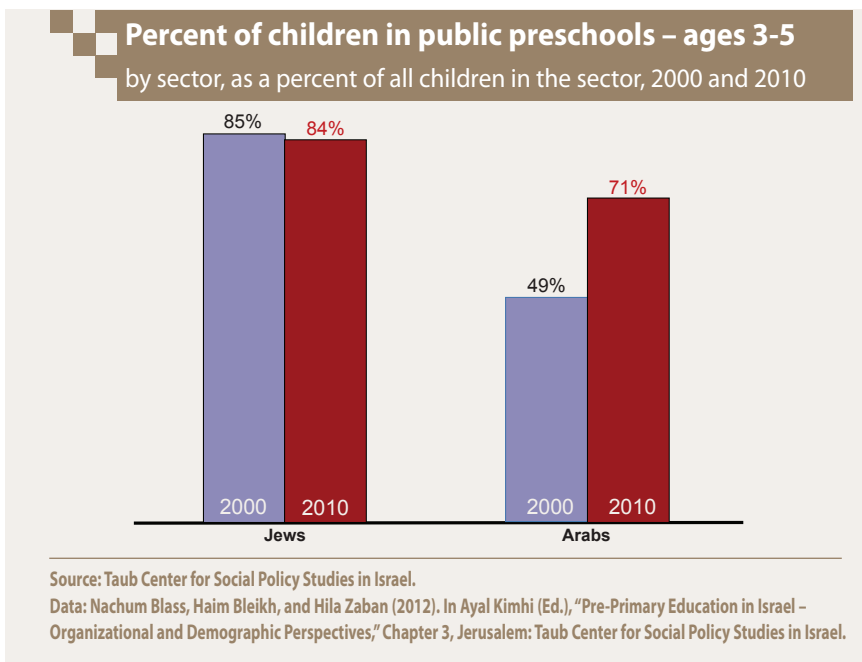
Historically, resistance to full implementation of the law has been based on a number of factors: concerns about lack of funding for construction; concern that universal preschool education would come at the expense of

other budgetary areas in need of expansion; belief that funds should be allocated to subsidies for low-income individuals rather than to universal education; and concerns about a lack of physical and organizational infrastructure in the Arab sector, which was to be the main beneficiary of the amendment.

A recent Taub Center study written by Taub Center researchers Nachum Blass and Haim Bleikh with Hila Zaban from Ben-Gurion University, and edited by Deputy Director, Prof. Ayal Kimhi, merges educational and economic expertise in a comprehensive overview of Israel's pre-primary education system, including the budgetary implications regarding implementation of the law.

### Preschool in the Arab Israeli sector

The Arab Israeli sector was to be one of the first beneficiaries of the 1984 preschool amendment, yet deficient infrastructure in the Arab sector was cited by policy makers as a potentially serious obstacle to the law's implementation.



According to Taub Center researcher Nachum Blass, the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law led to a 54 percent enrollment increase in the Arab sector between 2000 and 2005, yet only a two percent enrollment increase over the next five years. Despite this substantial increase, preschool enrollment rates remain lower in the Arab sector than in the Jewish sector.

The first figure compares the preschool enrollment rate of Arab children with that of Jewish children. In 2000, 49 percent of Arab children and 85 percent of

Jewish children attended public preschools. In 2010, by comparison, about 71 percent of 3-5 year-old Arab children and 84 percent of 3-5 year-old Jewish children attended public preschools. Attendance in private preschools was negligible in the Arab sector and grew in the Jewish sector.

### Preschool in the Jewish sector

Within the Jewish sector, the number of 3-5 year-olds attending preschool increased approximately 27 percent between 2000 and 2010. During the same period, there was an increase of approximately 57 percent in Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jewish preschool attendance, 15 percent in State preschool attendance, and 20 percent in State-religious preschool attendance.

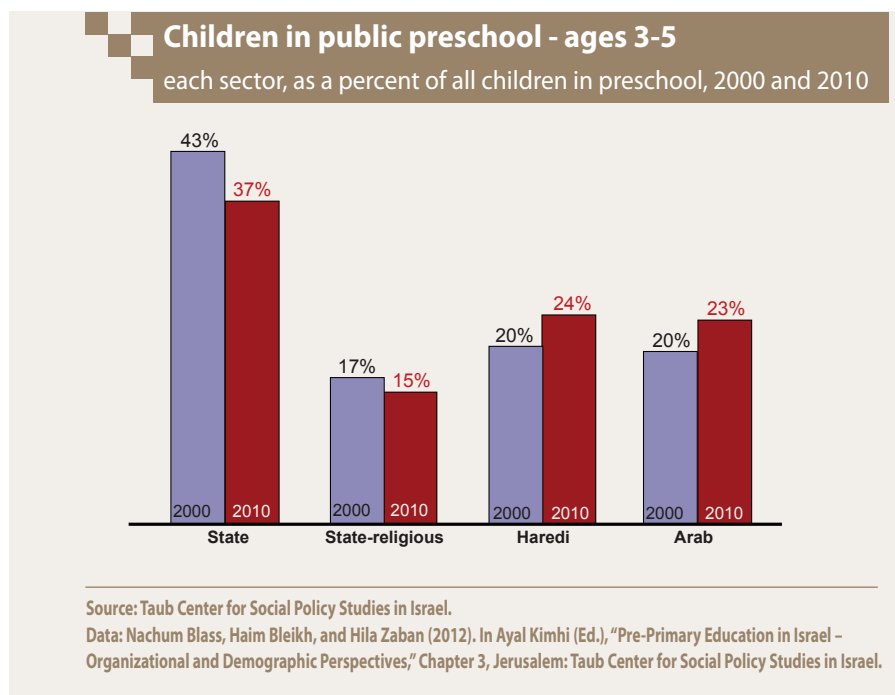
The second figure shows how quickly the distribution in preschool enrollment has changed within the past decade. The largest group of preschoolers in both 2000 and 2010 was in the non-religious State schools. However, this group's share fell sharply over the past ten years, from 43 percent of the total to 37 percent. The smallest group – in the religious State schools – also declined in its relative share, from 17 percent to 15 percent of the total number of enrolled preschoolers in Israel.

Enrollment share increases occurred in the Arab Israeli and Haredi schools. Each of these systems educated 20 percent of all preschool children in 2000. By 2010, these shares rose substantially, to 23 percent in the Arab Israeli schools and to 24 percent in the Haredi schools. Within the Jewish community alone, the share of Haredi preschoolers rose from 25 percent in 2000 to over 31 percent by 2010.

As a side note, between 2005 and 2010, there was a 20 percent increase in the number of 6 year-olds remaining in kindergarten for another year, a phenomenon that is most prevalent within the Jewish population. According to Blass, "many of these 6 year-olds remain in kindergarten without proper justification." In practical terms, this results in 10,000 extra kindergarten pupils, requiring an additional 350 kindergarten classrooms.

### Law in the books – but in the budget?

One finding of the study relates to the expected budgetary impact of immediate, full implementation of the law. According to the Taub Center study, universal implementation of the compulsory education law amended in 1984 will involve a start-up cost of NIS 2.3 billion with additional operating costs of NIS 1.4 billion a year. This is a sizeable sum, implying an increase of



about four percent of the entire current education budget at a time when budgets for existing programs are being threatened with cuts.

These costs would include NIS 700 million currently paid each year by parents that would fall on the government, and NIS 670 million spent annually on operating costs for about 80,000 children aged 3-5 not attending public preschools as of 2010. This estimate reflects the addition of 2,700 preschool classrooms with 30 children per class and operating costs of NIS 250,000 per class. One-time costs could reach NIS 2.3 billion, including capital costs of approximately NIS 500,000 per preschool classroom for 2,700 classrooms, and teacher training for 4,000 additional teachers at NIS 250,000 per teacher. The authors suggest that these costs could be reduced through the use of existing structures and better use of manpower.

The Taub Center study concludes that universal access to preschool education is a worthy and important

goal, as pedagogical research from around the world confirms. In various sectors within Israel, public preschool attendance has increased over the last decade, yet many parents continue to pay large sums for their children to attend private preschools.

The Trajtenberg Committee, appointed by the government to suggest changes in socioeconomic policy, recommended implementing the Compulsory Education Law for children aged 3 and older throughout the country, moving gradually to a longer school day in preschools, passing legislation for universal supervision of preschools, and moving the responsibility for the daycare system for 0-3 year-olds to the Ministry of Education. Given the cost of implementation of the Compulsory Education Law for all children aged 3 and older and the historical foot-dragging in budgetary allocations for universal preschool, it remains to be seen whether the Trajtenberg Committee's recommendations will, in fact, be implemented over the long term. ■

## Israeli single mothers – smaller in number and poorer in income

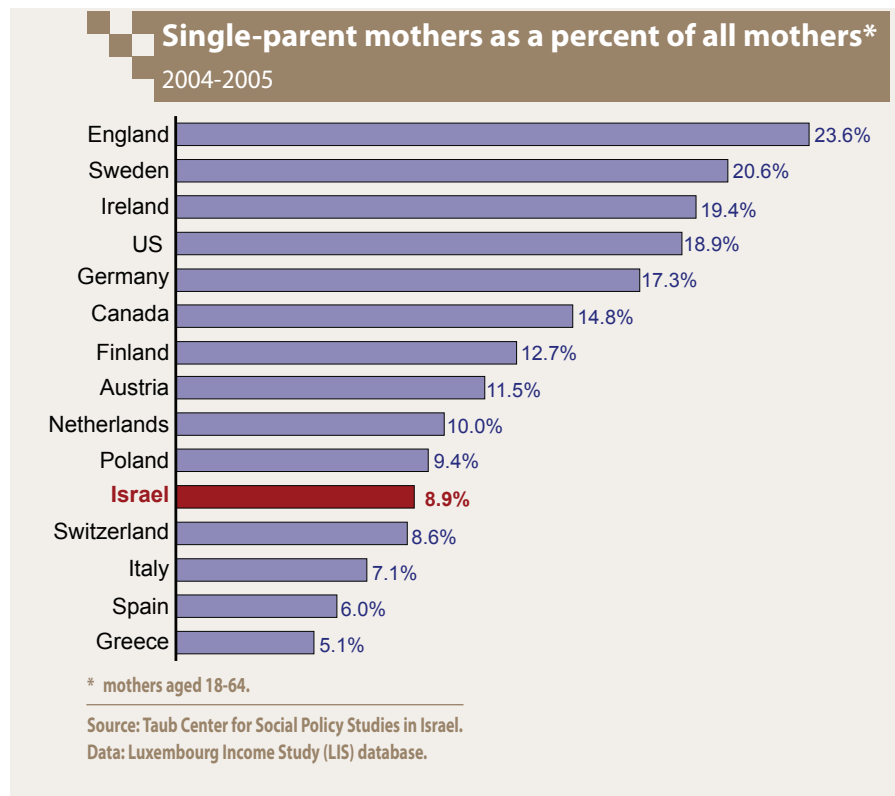
*A Taub Center study compares single mothers in Israel with those in other developed countries.*

Single mothers are among the most vulnerable members of society. These mothers have a significantly greater burden of household duties than others, with no one to share in the tasks of housework and childcare, and they also have considerably fewer economic resources since the amount of economic support they receive from the father is often quite minimal. In "Welfare and Employment among Single Mothers", the former Chair of the Taub Center's Social Welfare Policy Program, Professor Haya Stier, a Tel-Aviv University sociologist, examines how such mothers in Israel fare compared to single mothers in other developed countries.

One aspect of the study is demographic. Stier reveals that while the number of single mothers in Israel is

rising, their share of the total population is still low on an international basis. The first figure shows that 8.9 percent of mothers in Israel are single, lower than the rate in three-quarters of the countries studied and less than half the rate of England, Sweden, Ireland, and the US. Another finding regards the composition of single mothers in Israel. Stier finds that only 14 percent of Israeli single mothers have never married; only two countries in the sample had a lower rate.

The study then turns to the economic circumstances of the mothers and to government policy. In the 1990s, Israeli policy was considerably more supportive of single mothers than it is today; the 1992 Single Parent Families Law granted special eligibility conditions for income support to single mothers. This legislation substantially improved the economic status of families headed by



single mothers. It was also accompanied by a certain decline in single mothers' labor market participation rates, but this decrease mainly characterized women whose chances of success in the labor market were already low.

In the early 2000s, benefits were substantially reduced, while programs encouraging greater women's participation in the labor force were implemented. Labor force participation of Israeli single mothers rose and is relatively high in recent years; in 2004-2005 it was 67 percent, greatly exceeding the 59 percent rate for mothers with partners.

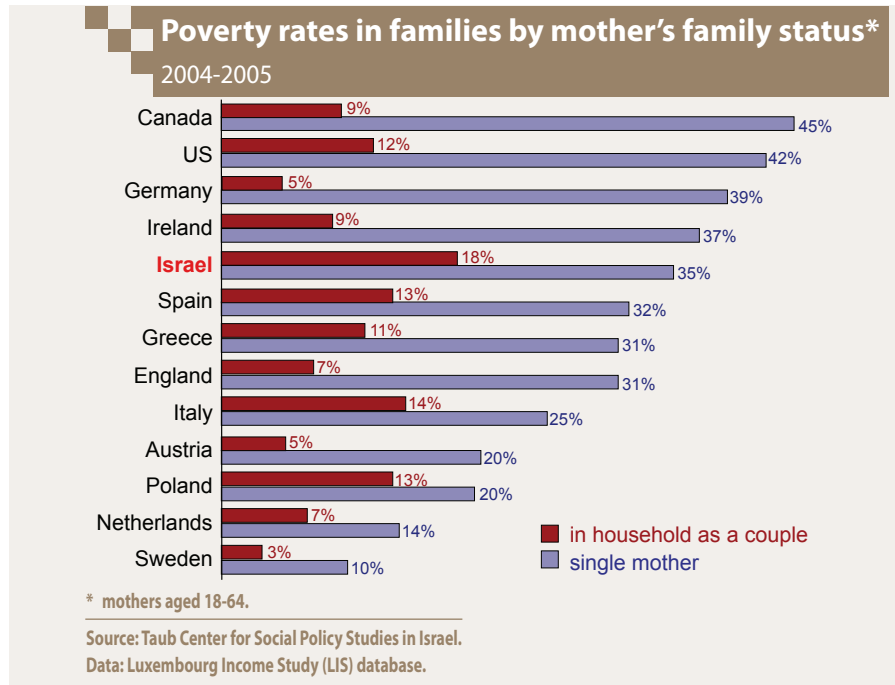
A narrow focus on employment, though, may ignore the constraints faced by single mothers seeking employment, including for example, the presence of young children in the home, childcare costs, a lack of quality, subsidized childcare options, limited labor market mobility, and the like. Research findings indicate that although the early-2000s policy changes did help raise single mothers' labor force participation rates, they nevertheless failed to improve their household incomes in a significant manner.

Accordingly, Prof. Stier shows in the second figure that Israeli households headed by single mothers have a poverty rate of 35 percent, about twice the rate for households where the mother lives with a partner. The Taub Center study concludes that Israeli single-parent families are relatively poor, compared both with Israeli two-partner families and with single-parent families in other Western countries. One reason is a comparatively low level of public support: single mothers in Israel obtain about 25 percent of their income from transfer payments, a rate lower than that for most countries studied by Stier. Israel was found to be among the lower ranking countries (e.g., US, Canada and Ireland) in terms of the level of support that it offers to single mothers, and in terms of the resources that it devotes to raising these mothers out of poverty.

Stier notes that Israeli policy has been oriented towards increasing employment of single mothers, yet due to the meager level of government benefits, increased employment has not been reflected in a commensurate increase in income and standard of living. She recommends that a comprehensive policy

should be implemented. Such a policy would include ensuring the availability of quality childcare so as to empower single mothers to genuinely improve

their standard of living through paid work, as well as guaranteeing an adequate level of income for all single mothers. ■



## Bumps on the road towards making the desert bloom

*Israel is an internationally recognized leader in water conservation and utilization, yet there have also been serious problems in national water management and planning resulting in an erosion of the quality of Israel's aquifers.*

As a country with an average of just 40 to 50 days of rain a year in its coastal region and only 4 to 30 days of rain in its more arid regions, Israel is no stranger to water scarcity. As the only country in the world with more trees at the end of the last century than at its beginning, and a population that has grown from less than 1 million to almost 8 million people in just 64 years, Israel has achieved an international reputation as a leading innovator in the utilization of scarce water resources. Extended periods of drought together with the rapidly rising price of water in recent years have raised the issue of water management ever higher on the national agenda, leading the Knesset to establish the Bein Water Management Commission in 2008.

The Taub Center recently published a comprehensive review of the water sector in Israel, prepared for

the Center by one of the Bein Commission's three members, Professor Yoav Kislev, a Hebrew University economist. Prof. Kislev finds that the water system in Israel generally performs its required functions – thanks to a relatively high level of technical sophistication, a large accumulated knowledge base, a sound legal infrastructure, and the professionalism of the system's employees. However, Kislev also identifies deficiencies in water management rooted in the limited ability – and sometimes, limited willingness – of governmental bodies to fully meet the complex demands of water management in Israel.

The primary challenge is that since the establishment of the State, population growth has greatly exceeded the growth in available water. While the quantity of water supplied in Israel grew by about 35 percent

between 1960 and 2008, the population grew by over 350 percent. The result is that per capita consumption of water declined sharply, though this decrease was not uniform across sectors. As the first figure shows, household consumption on a per capita basis has not declined and is virtually identical to its level in 1960. On the other hand, agricultural use of water has dropped sharply and is now less than a third of its per capita 1960 level despite a steady multi-decade increase in agricultural production.

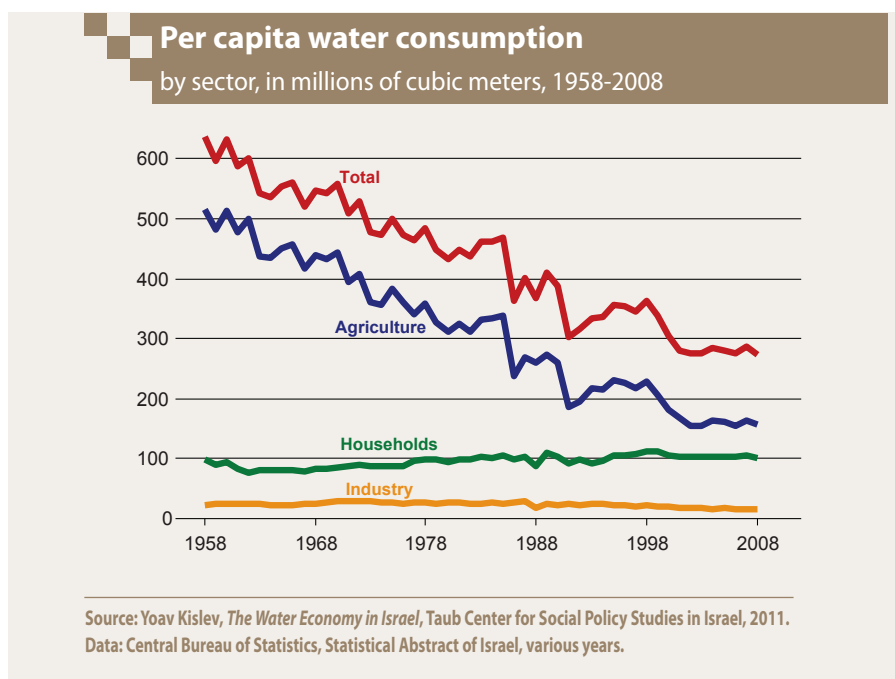
The Taub Center study shows striking differences between fresh water use and agricultural output from the 1950s through 2009. Water output was almost unchanged during these four decades, although a large fraction of the fresh water was replaced with recycled waste water. At the same time, the output of the crops making use of this water grew continually. During this period the output per unit of water consumed grew sevenfold. This increase was made possible due to the investments made in this sector, improvements in production methods and the move to improved crops and varieties.

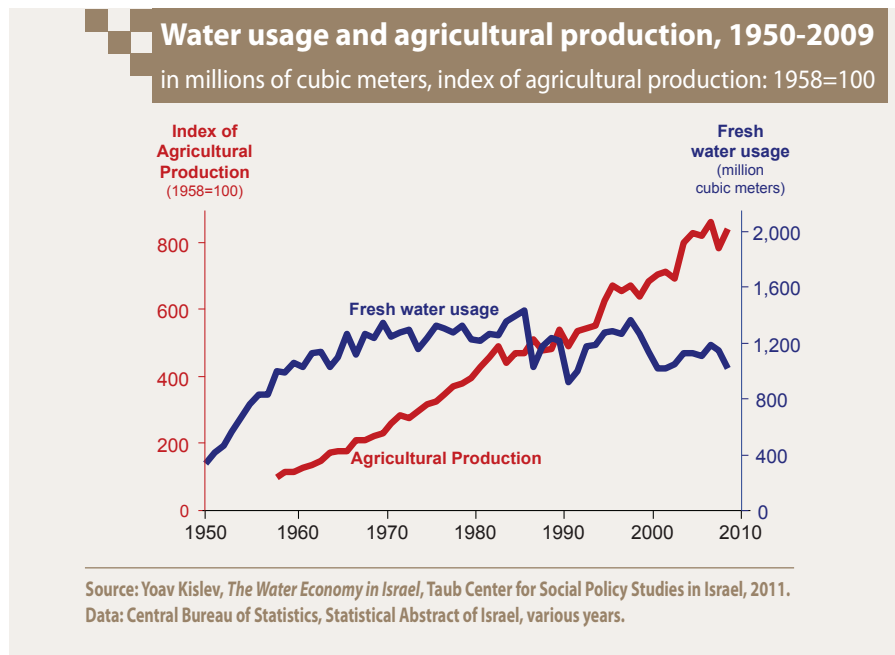
While Israel has taken significant steps to reduce water consumption and increase supply, Kislev finds that there continues to be an imbalance between supply

and demand, resulting in an over-extraction of water from Israel's natural water sources, which in turn can result in major problems. First, when reserves are low there is no cushion to cope with unexpected problems. A few seasons of below-average rainfall can cause a water supply crisis if reserves are inadequate. In addition, over-extraction compromises the quality of the water. Finally, over-extraction causes direct damage to water sources – the aquifers, lakes and reservoirs.

The government and the Water Authority have not been passive in the face of these challenges. From the early days of the State through to the early 1960s, most water consumers – including agricultural ones – could utilize nearby water sources, and the cost of transporting water was minimal. At the beginning of this period the cost of provision of water was only about NIS 0.50 per cubic meter in 2011 prices.

As the country grew, nearby sources became insufficient and water began to be piped from areas with relatively more abundant water supplies to the more arid regions. The National Water Carrier, a pipeline completed in 1964, played a significant role in this evolution. It was a costly project that raised the cost of water production to approximately NIS 1.70 per cubic meter in today's prices. Within a





number of decades, though, this source also proved to be insufficient and Israel entered the third major phase of its water supply process – the production of fresh water in desalination plants (three are already operating along the Mediterranean coast and two more are under construction). These expensive plants raised the cost of producing a cubic meter of water to about NIS 3.

In addition to these measures, the use of recycled waste water has become institutionalized. Important water management reforms have also been undertaken. These include the establishment of the National Water and Sewage Authority and the transferring of local water distribution to special water corporations in place of direct administration by municipalities and other local authorities.

Nevertheless, over-extraction remains a serious problem, one that may be exacerbated if it turns out that the region is faced with a continually decreasing level of rainfall. In the 1960s, the effects of over-extraction were already evident in the coastal aquifer. Despite repeated warnings, though, steps were not

taken to rectify the problem in the long-term. It is estimated that during the 1990s, excess extraction from all natural sources reached 80 million cubic meters per year.

In water policy management, the Taub Center study points out that it is important to preserve resources, prevent over-exploitation or over-extraction from water reservoirs, and ensure proper planning of water reserves for dry years in the form of emergency reserves. Over the years, the government has neglected its responsibilities in this area and officials in charge of executing the policy have not been sufficiently vigilant in protecting water reserves.

Kislev believes that the government's failure is not due to isolated misjudgments but rather is structural in nature. Those carrying out the government's tasks bear a heavy work load; they are subject to political pressures and are sometimes biased in their decisions. He concludes that the primary way to mitigate the failures of government is to increase transparency and public involvement in the water sector. ■

Established in 1982 under the leadership and vision of Herbert M. Singer, Henry Taub, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Center is funded by a permanent endowment created by the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, the Herbert M. and Nell Singer Foundation, Jane and John Colman, the Kolker-Saxon-Hallock Family Foundation, the Milton A. and Roslyn Z. Wolf Family Foundation, and the JDC.

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