

# COLLABORATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA FROM THE ISRAELI POINT OF VIEW

## The Experience of Partnership 2000

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*This article, based on evaluation research of Partnership 2000, examines factors that facilitate and those that hinder the collaboration between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. It examines those factors from the Israeli point of view and compares these findings to previous studies that addressed the issue of mutuality from the point of view of Diaspora Jewry.*

There is a growing call to base the relations between Israel and the Diaspora on mutual collaboration. Rather than the Diaspora's taking a distant philanthropic approach and "adopting" communities in Israel, there is a move toward partnership and mutuality on the basis of shared identity (Gurin & Rosen, 1991; Kosmin, 1991; Rabb, 1999).

Through reciprocal activities, each side, Israel and the Diaspora, can expect to achieve its goals and meet its challenges. For Diaspora Jewry, this relationship has been found to consolidate their sense of belonging to the community, strengthen their connection to their roots, and enhance Jewish identity (Abrams et al., 1996; Cohen, 1986; Reisman, 1993). Indeed, previous studies focusing on the field of collaboration with regard to personal relations (Galín, 1996), organizational relations (Weiss, 1987), and professional relations (Germain, 1984) emphasize that collaboration is a cooperative process of exchange whereby each side has specific motives in regard to its own interests. Collaboration is aimed to fulfill motives and tasks in a better way than each side can achieve by itself.

Partnership 2000, created in 1994 by the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), in collaboration with the United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish Foundation Fund ('Keren Hayesod'), has two central goals. One is the creation of mutual relations based on a partnership between the Jews of Israel and the Diaspora to strengthen Jewish identity, prevent assimilation and facilitate Jewish continuity; the sec-

ond is development of the national priority regions of Israel—the Negev, the Galilee and Jerusalem. Project Partnership 2000 aspires to integrate the two goals with shared objectives.

In addition to the partnership between various Diaspora communities and Israel, P2K integrates an Israeli urban center with an adjacent rural area, i.e., a town or local council with a regional council, including settlements such as kibbutzim, moshavim and community villages. In other words, a partnership connection is made among an urban center, a rural area, and a Diaspora community—all of whom work together.

This article, based on evaluation research of Partnership 2000 (P2K), reveals the motives and the restraining factors in the collaboration between Israel and the Diaspora, with special emphasis on the mutuality to which the project aspires. In contrast to previous studies, which examined the mutuality from the viewpoint of Diaspora Jewry and especially from that of American Jewry, this study analyzes the collaboration through Israeli eyes. Knowledge of the motives and restraining factors can be used to facilitate more effective collaborative programs. The assumption is that for successful implementation, stakeholders must recognize the influential factors that enable mutual benefits.

P2K provides an opportunity to examine the development of collaborative relationships. In contrast to the traditional model, in which one side (the Diaspora community) gives and the other side (the Israeli community) receives, P2K stresses mutuality.

Table 1. The regions and their characteristics.

Diaspora Partners	Israeli Partners	Type of Gov't.	No. of Residents in Israel	Location	Year Started
<b>Project 1</b>					
Baltimore	Karmiel	Municipality	41,000	West Galilee	1994
Pittsburgh	Misgav	Regional council	14,500		
<b>Project 2</b>					
Detroit	Natherth	Municipality	50,000	Central Galilee	1994
	Migdal-Emek	Municipality	30,000		
	Yzrael	Regional Council	20,000		
<b>Project 3</b>					
Union of 16 Communities	Kiryat Malachi	Municipality	22,000	Negev North	1995
	Hof Ashkelon	Regional council	8,000		

### METHODOLOGY

A broad-based research evaluation of P2K examined relations between Israel and the Diaspora, relations among Israeli communities, and implementation of the project. This article focuses on the collaboration between Israel and the Diaspora.

Three partnered regions in Israel were examined in this study. Two had one or two partnered communities per region, and the third had three communities. Table 1 describes the sample regions.

The data were gathered via several modes:

- *Analysis of existing material.* Analysis was done of protocols (minutes of steering committees and other meetings), strategic programs, action programs and project reports.
- *Personal interviews.* In-depth interviews were conducted (approximately two hours in length) based on open-ended questions with minimal directives. Thirty key people were interviewed, among them politicians (including mayors), government employees (such as directors of community centers, social services departments, and business development centers), project workers, community representatives in Israel (American Jewish communities employ an Israeli resident to represent their interests in Israel), and volunteers.

- *Focus group.* A focus group was held in Kiryat Malachi, in which ten project workers and activists, most of them involved in program implementation, participated. The discussion continued for seven hours and focused on the reciprocal connection between the community in Israel and the communities in the Diaspora.
- *Questionnaire.* A questionnaire was distributed to 189 participants; 67 questionnaires were returned, of which 62 were suitable for analysis. The majority of the questions were closed, with only a few open-ended questions.

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### Factors Stimulating Collaboration

Table 2 presents the factors facilitating mutual relations with the Diaspora community, according to the mean value (based on a scale of 1-6) of each characteristic.

Non-mediated, personal encounters involving a direct connection between participants contributed the greatest extent to strengthening collaboration. The exchange of delegations was also a significant factor.

Another stimulating factor was participation in discussion forums on Jewish and professional issues held in Israel on such topics as assimilation, conversion law, and Jewish pluralism. Participants reported that they now

better understood the differences between "being a Jew in Israel and being a Jew in the United States." Some even recognized the importance that their newly acquired knowledge and awareness played in their personal identity as Jews and as representatives of the Jewish State.

The exchange of professional knowledge also contributed to strengthening collaboration. In the organizational meetings with colleagues in the fields of education, welfare, and community, the interviewees not only acquired new knowledge and information but enriched the understanding of their American colleagues as well.

Consistent with these findings, the interviewees pointed out the importance of reserving dialogue time for exploration of the personal and professional issues. In relation to this point they mentioned the summer programs that integrate visiting American counselors and young Israelis in the English-language summer camp in Israel. In addition to the personal benefits—learning English (for the Israelis) and a trip to Israel (for the American visitors)—the relatively lengthy program allows for a strengthening and continuation of mutual relations.

Another factor that may motivate collaboration was the support of the local Israeli political and government leadership, especially that of the mayors and senior directors. Reciprocal relations are strengthened when

the leadership regards the collaboration as a high-priority goal, creates a suitable atmosphere for working together, consolidates the workers and the volunteers, and rewards those who take part in the implementation. Some of the interviewees who work in the local authorities stressed that the extent to which they could find time for creating the connection depended largely upon its legitimization through the time allotted and the encouragement given by the heads of the local authorities.

Interestingly, the economic factor was less significant to the collaboration. In many communities, P2K actually replaced the funding that was already supplied by the Jewish Agency. Interviewees expected that P2K would at least serve as a basis for the development of new funding systems that would recognize the importance of developing collaborative projects in the region.

Indeed, several projects were funded outside of P2K: a national conference on education, a project to nurture immigrants, a combined Jewish-Bedouin elementary school class, and a program for children at risk. Interestingly, the number of projects funded by the Diaspora communities beyond the P2K budget was greater in the Kiryat Malachi-Hof Ashkelon region than in other communities. It may be possible that this was due to the large number of American communities—16—partnered with that region.

*Table 2. Factors stimulating collaboration.*

<b>The Factors</b>	<b>Mean Value</b>
1. Personal encounters among participants	5.4
2. Reciprocal delegations	5.0
3. Leadership that supports connections between communities	4.9
4. Recognition of common values	4.9
5. Free time in a project geared toward cooperative activity beyond discussions concerning budgeting	4.9
6. Dialogue forums, discussions on Jewish issues	4.7
7. Dialogue forums, discussions on professional topics	4.6
8. Financial contributions in the region above and beyond the Partnership budget	3.9
9. Potential for creating business connections throughout the world	3.9

Why did the interviewees stress the development of business connections as a potential, rather than an existing, factor? The answer lies in the fact that P2K did not result in direct connections between entrepreneurs in the Diaspora and entrepreneurs in Israel despite the fact that its economic development projects support and develop industrial areas and include long-term programs to train entrepreneurs and to stave off unemployment. One of the explanations given was that entrepreneurs prefer to escape the spotlight and are not interested in being involved with the P2K bureaucracy, either in Israel or in the Diaspora. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees expressed the expectation that within the framework of connections made, especially through personal relationships, joint business ventures would develop in the future, and not necessarily within the formal framework of P2K itself.

The impetus for collaboration was also explained from the point of view of complementary interests. For example, some interviewees mentioned that the connection offered them a starting point through which to develop relations in other parts of the world. The Israelis thus became proud representatives of Israel before world Jewry. At the same time, the representatives and guests from the Diaspora reaped great benefits as well. They became personally involved in the national challenge of social and regional economic development. During their visit to Israel, they have a clear sense of purpose, and their connections become stronger with each visit.

It seems apparent that the interviewees recognized the mutual benefits and the power system based upon a dynamic balance between the two sides. They also expressed a strong desire for this mutual relationships to thrive. Many interviewees recommended that the budget framework for the projects between Israel and the Diaspora be increased, even at the expense of developing social and economic projects in Israel. Many also noted that they (and others, according to them) would be willing to pay out of their pocket for a trip to the United States.

### **Factors Hindering Collaboration**

Table 3 presents factors that hinder mutual relations with the Diaspora community, according to the mean value (scale of 1–6) each characteristic received.

The three foremost factors hindering collaboration related to the complexity and burden of P2K's organizational structure and decision-making process. Analysis of the decision-making process in each of the regions revealed that each program had to pass through 14 junctions in the organizational system before it could be implemented. Not only are there a great number of junctions, but the center of gravity of P2K lay in the process of decision making, and less so in implementation. The organizational structure and the roles within it are not always clear, making for overlapping and inefficiency. Many interviewees used the words "tiring," "on the verge of breaking down," and "frustrating" to describe the process.

Many interviewees also pointed to the budgeting process as a hindrance to collaboration. One of the obvious problems was a lack of clear criteria in resource allocation. Too much time was spent on budgeting details, leaving insufficient time to discuss such topics as Judaism and professional issues.

Many interviewees pointed out the complexity caused by the intermediary function of the Jewish Agency, expressing their desire for a more direct connection with the community. They suggested that the Jewish Agency would be more helpful in the roles of enabling and empowerment, while being less occupied with the role of control and mastery.

Two additional aspects—decentralization and participation of residents—were related to the organizational structure of P2K and influenced the extent of collaboration. In each of the three regions examined, P2K fostered decentralization; that is, the transfer of power from the national authority to the region. In comparison to other processes shared between the central and regional levels, the decision-making control over the region was greater in P2K.

However, P2K did not usually succeed in deepening the participation from the grassroots level, nor did it include detailed objectives for participation by the general public. It did not establish new community participation frameworks or strengthen existing ones. Most of the participants were politicians, paid employees, and professionals, and there was a lack of authentic involvement of residents; namely, business people, academics, and average citizens. Many interviewees said that this centralist structure at the regional level prevented the extension of collaboration with the Diaspora. However, some interviewees noted that this situation might have been more comfortable for the Diaspora's representatives because they might prefer to meet with key stakeholders rather than with the residents.

The cultural differences between Israelis and Americans also made collaboration difficult. Israeli management is characterized by doubting authority, improvisation, and relying on confrontation to solve problems. The American management style is based on a more authoritative system than Israeli management, adhering to systematization and discipline, using clear planning processes, stressing individual responsibility, and paying close

attention to the financial cost of reaching program objectives. Beyond the general cultural differences and the different managerial styles in each country, the cultural clash may also be explained by the variety of participants in the process. Many of the Diaspora representatives were business people who were volunteers in the P2K projects, while their Israeli counterparts were usually politicians and paid public relations people. This may explain why the Diaspora representatives often showed a lack of patience toward taking political considerations into account, considerations that are tied to the Israeli community's power structure.

In the earlier section, we saw that the local leadership could serve as a stimulus for promoting collaboration. However, that same leadership also had the power to curb the partnership. Some of the local authorities, such as mayors and administrators, noted that P2K took away from the time and effort of their employees. The local authority leaders were ambivalent; on the one hand, they perceived P2K as an important mission, while on the other hand, they were committed to other obligations.

The decision to integrate P2K in existing frameworks also hindered collaboration. Most

*Table 3. Factors hindering collaboration.*

<b>The Factors</b>	<b>Mean Value</b>
1. The existence of a complex and complicated organizational structure that makes decision making difficult	4.0
2. A lengthy budget allocation process, rather than a pointed discussion on professional topics, Judaism, and personal subjects	3.9
3. Complex mediation by JAFI between the communities	3.8
4. The role gap between paid workers and politicians in Israel vs. volunteers in the U.S. communities	3.8
5. Hurried and fragmented visits to Israel by Diaspora visitors	3.8
6. Lack of physical space specifically designated for the project	3.6
7. Cultural gap between Americans and Israelis	3.4
8. Difficulties in the use of computer communication	3.0
9. Lack of local leadership support for the relationship with the Diaspora communities	2.7
10. Distant attitude of Diaspora community representatives	2.3

of the activities were held in existing facilities; there were no locations specifically set aside for the cooperative activities that took place in P2K. Along with noting the benefits (economic and social) of integrating activities into existing buildings, the interviewees pointed out that the current arrangement made identification with P2K activities all the more difficult.

Another factor that restrained collaboration between the communities was the lack of consistency in relationships. Many interviewees claimed that the visits from the Diaspora communities were largely hurried and fragmented. In the eyes of many Israelis, the visits seemed impersonal. They preferred more intense, close, and long-lasting personal relationships. Some interviewees felt that the Israelis were more hospitable than their American counterparts. Some of the Israeli delegations to the United States were disappointed by the lack of warm and personal attention paid to them by their American hosts.

Lastly, preserving the intensity and ongoing nature of the relationships can also be done to a certain extent through electronic communication, including sites geared specifically to this topic. Many interviewees, however, contended that a lack of computer skills and inaccessibility prevented them from taking optimal advantage of this route of communication.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **The Meeting Framework**

In studies that examine Israel-Diaspora relations from the standpoint of Diaspora Jewry, results show a growing desire to develop relations based upon partnership and mutuality and to be less philanthropic-oriented (Kosmin, 1991; Raab, 1999). The present study adds a dimension to these findings by showing that the aspiration to a mutual contribution—rather than the philanthropy of the Diaspora Jews—exists to a large extent among the Israelis as well. More than economic support, the Israelis are greatly interested in personal meetings, in frameworks that allow dialogue, in complementary delegations, and

in the development of mutual professional activity. The interviewees even expressed criticism concerning the extent of mutuality and partnership on the part of the representatives of the Diaspora Jewish communities, contending that they expected a higher level.

The findings of this study show that, as is the case among the Diaspora Jews in their personal experiences in Israel (Abrams et al., 1996; Reisman, 1993), the Israelis' experiences in their visits to the Diaspora also serve as a basis for the deepening of their roots. The interviewees reported that they now better understand Israel's place in a wider world view and recognize the significance of their being Jews and not only Israelis.

Overall, the aspects of meetings and dialogue—rather than the economic factors—serve as the central stimulant for collaboration in the relations between Israel and the Diaspora. This is in contrast to earlier research studies that indicate that in most cases, the economic factor is the central stimulant in collaboration between communities (Kipnis, 1990).

Thus, in order to stimulate the collaboration between Israel and the Diaspora, there is first a need to increase frameworks of personal meetings, dialogue forums, and delegations. However, the research findings revealed that multicultural meetings sometimes make coming together difficult. Other studies point to difficulties in inter-cultural meetings (Mead, 1994; Meshulam, 1993). Therefore, specific attention should be directed to exposing and discussing the cultural gap, with its limitations and threats, as well as strengths and opportunities. The need to dedicate resources to this topic is obvious, because in the case of P2K meetings between the countries often bring together representatives serving in different roles—volunteers and business people from the Diaspora communities and politicians and directors of human services in Israel.

### **The Organizational Framework**

The organizational structure and the decision-making process of P2K, described as burdensome, tiring, and bureaucratic, were the key factors restraining collaboration. An ad-

ditional organizational problem was that the P2K center of gravity was in the decision-making process, rather than implementation. This finding is of importance since the organizational structure has a great amount of influence on the success of each project, and this influence increases as the project becomes more complicated (Alterman & Churchman, 1991). Similarly, organizational efficiency and effectiveness are largely correlated to the ability to develop clear and simplified organizational structures (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

The central conclusion here is the need to build a simpler organizational structure that will direct the center of activity to working within small action teams dealing with planning and implementation. In an efficient organizational structure, it is desirable to have small, simple functional units—mission teams—that coordinate the activities in every area. This structure increases the chance that those participating in the activity will identify more with the undertaking and will be more involved with the activity, readily joining the effort. The basic approach adopted here is to create a sense of smallness, simplicity, and intimacy within the larger organization.

The study's findings also raise the call to expand and deepen the participation of the residents. P2K's organizational structure is focused on key people: local leadership, politicians, and managers. It may be that the absence of clear instructions to involve residents is a result of previous experience, which called for that sort of collaboration but often encountered great difficulty in achieving it and implementing projects. It may also be that Diaspora community representatives prefer to meet with people of influence in the region. In any case, it is important to remember that citizen participation is an important means by which to expand the partnership between Israel and the Diaspora communities.

#### **Budgeting the Activities**

Another conclusion of the study is that additional frameworks outside the institutional budget framework need to be established. This may prove to be a difficult mission, how-

ever, since in cases where organizations provide similar services, each organization tends to strengthen its own stand (Boehm, 1996). The findings of this research study show that the success of collaboration is largely related to the capability of a given project to serve as a lever for initiating, planning, and implementing programs outside the institutional budget framework.

In this context, the research findings reveal an interesting picture. In regions with a large number of Diaspora communities (such as in the Kiryat Malachi-Hof Ashkelon region), the number of projects existing outside the budgetary communities (i.e., Karmiel-Misgav and the Central Galilee). It may well be that grouping a rather large number of Diaspora communities causes each community to search for alternative paths in deepening collaboration beyond the project's framework. If we do indeed accept this conclusion, then we must weigh the positive aspect of the involvement of more Diaspora communities per region. In this way, the dependence of collaboration on the project's institutionalized frameworks sells.

#### **Sites of Activities**

Another conclusion relates to the physical sites of the activities. It was found that along with the benefits of integrating activities into existing facilities, it is important to establish a separate structure in which parts of the activities—especially those relating to collaboration between the communities—will be focused. This type of structure may heighten the sense of identity and the obligation to collaborate. The findings of this study support a claim raised in other studies, which contends that the tangibility and concreteness of a physical structure have a positive influence on the level of identification and effort (Boehm, 1998; Laufer, 1984).

It is also important to develop virtual sites. Electronic communication can bridge distance and encourage the continuation of personal relations from one meeting to the next. Furthermore, there are examples of development of community projects via electronic communication (Jones, 1997). The notion of electronic

communication networking, on both the personal and administrative levels, is not new to the Jewish community (Friedman & Hyman, 1996/97). However, many of the interviewees expressed difficulty in accessing and using computers. Thus, efficient use of communication systems requires the establishment of user-friendly systems and proper training.

The findings of this research, which indicates the eagerness of Israelis for mutual relations with the Diaspora, are encouraging. The expectations of both sides for mutual contributions are complementary. However, this mutuality cannot develop by itself. The varied opportunities and advantages that this mutuality confers must be emphasized in existing and new programs. As well, the limitations of mutuality need to be addressed more directly.

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