



Photo: Courtesy Karen Hayesod

Not Just Charity

American communities team up with Israelis to rehabilitate slums in Israel

by Dr. Eliezer Jaffe

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It is ironic that the first major social program aimed at directly involving Diaspora Jews in Israel's social problems is often looked upon

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as "just another gimmick to raise money." The irony lies in the fact that, if Diaspora Jews take the project seriously and break away from past patterns of sloppy philanthropy based on charity rather than partnership and personal involvement, Project Renewal could signal the most important social enterprise undertaken by Israel and Diaspora Jews in decades. However, if Project Renewal is not properly understood

and implemented, it could be the biggest fiasco to come along in many years, and the Jewish leadership both in Israel and the Diaspora will be equally to blame for the political, social and financial consequences.

Project Renewal is a plan, presented by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, for the social and physical renewal of 160 slum neighborhoods in Israel over a five-year period—ten years is more likely. It requires 1.2

billion dollars, half to be raised by Diaspora Jews, half by Israelis. The neighborhoods were selected because they fall far below national norms on overcrowding and other social pathologies. The idea is to rehabilitate thirty neighborhoods a year—fifteen each year is more likely—based on individual plans to be drawn up for each neighborhood and approved by a Ministerial Committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin. The neighborhoods house about 45,000 families, most with more than four children, most from Middle Eastern backgrounds. All these neighborhoods are in urban areas where over two-thirds of Israel's poor live today. These neighborhoods were settled in the 1950s and 60s, and their small, hurriedly built apartments and stores are now in a sad state. The buildings are overcrowded, lack communal facilities and are of poor quality. In the rush to absorb mass immigration while fighting wars and during economic ups and downs, we never had a chance to go back to those neighborhoods of "old time" immigrants and finish the job we should have done.

The Israelis who packaged Project Renewal, primarily the ministers of Housing, Labor and Social Affairs, and Deputy Prime Minister Yadin, were well counselled by Jewish Agency personnel who understand the need for putting Israel's social issues on world Jewry's agenda in terms other than the tear-jerking, hit-and-run charity approach. The outcome is a contract which, if implemented, will be a radical departure.

Project Renewal offers four basic innovations:

The integration of physical planning with social service planning. No buildings will be put up or refurbished without first submitting an integrated plan for the neighborhood that includes social services, community facilities, manpower needs in health, education, family services, along with plans for enlarged housing, shopping centers, sewage repairs, sidewalks and other physical improvements. The history of Israeli ministries and agencies is one of each making *Shabbat* for itself; each doing its own thing, without working together in a coordinated way, and each looking to preserve its own importance, budget and public image. This has been wasteful and

often irresponsible. Project Renewal insists on submission of an integrated plan before money is allocated. Today, one can actually see representatives of the ministries and municipal departments sitting down together to work on plans for Project Renewal neighborhoods. It is a pleasure for us veterans of "the Jewish Wars" to behold!

Financial accountability. For the first time, a separate budget account has been established in the Jewish Agency for Project Renewal funds. Previously, UJA and Keren Hayesod funds went into general funds and then into a myriad of budget lines. This time, no funds will be expended without approval by the Ministerial Committee. It is absolutely essential that Diaspora leadership preserve their credibility and help keep us Israelis honest by monitoring Project Renewal funds.

Involvement of residents in plans for their neighborhood. Israeli bureaucrats have grown up in a tradition of paternalistic relationships with the disadvantaged; most of the early absorption of masses of immigrants was authoritarian, centrally planned, and involved a passive albeit highly motivated immigrant population. The political parties and the mayors look with ambivalence upon the organizations and neighborhood committees that have sprung up since those early days. On one hand, it's democratic to help people organize in order to express themselves, but on the other hand, one cannot predict how much trouble they will make in upsetting someone else's plans.

Project Renewal insists on input from local residents in developing plans for their neighborhood. One can already hear officials expressing concern about "neighborhood groups making trouble" for government planners. If nothing else promised by Project Renewal comes to fruition except the involvement of residents in local plans, then Project Renewal will have been a great success.

Involvement of world Jewry. Unlike past programs, Project Renewal demands a commitment of partnership rather than a commitment of charity from world Jewry. This partnership will be implemented by communities "twinning" neighborhoods in Israel with the Diaspora. Representatives of the twinned communities will work together to

determine needs and the resources necessary for "their" neighborhoods. This means that individuals and missions will visit sites, and lay leadership and professionals from Diaspora communities will be responsible for following the planning and investments. The Task Force can guarantee Project Renewal's credibility at home.

I am convinced that involvement leads to more involvement, and that the days of giving only charity for Israel are waning. There should be no handouts; we are all in this Israeli enterprise together, and we really are brothers and sisters. Brothers get involved, and they don't wait eternally for instructions for what to do. They work with their hearts *and* their heads. They may get held up by Israeli bureaucracy, but they can also play a crucial role in helping us reweave the social fabric of the state.

Here are some concrete suggestions for Diaspora Jews regarding Project Renewal:

1. By all means, twin your Federation with a particular neighborhood in Israel. Don't use the same general campaign approach to Project Renewal that is used in the regular Federation appeal. Don't just raise funds from the over \$10,000 donors, but get the whole community, particularly the small givers, involved. They deserve the attention, and many may have a lot to offer to the Project.

2. Don't be afraid of, or feel guilty about leaning on Israeli officials responsible for Project Renewal to get things done. Don't be unreasonable in making demands and deadlines, but do insist on information, fair partnership and cooperation.

3. Do not ask for shopping lists of buildings and facilities for funding by your community. We need time to plan properly for the neighborhoods and it may be much easier and faster for you to raise funds than it is for us to prepare integrated plans. If you push us to provide shopping lists, we could get back into old patterns.

4. Don't lose interest or get discouraged when things get bogged down. This is a ten-year program at least, and every community, yours and ours, has political problems, manpower problems, personality problems, and differences of opinion. Help understand them, and navigate them with us. But don't throw up your hands when the initial romance of Project Renewal fades. □