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## RTI helps launch Palestinians' technology hub – the 'Hills.' Will it be West Bank's RTP?



**RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C.** – Lost in the continuing rancorous debate about Israeli settlements in the West Bank is the fact that Palestinians are building their own planned community. And RTI International is playing a crucial role.

In fact, the development is anticipated as being a “technology hub” for the Palestinian people. Developers of the project called “Rawabi,” which means hills, expect it to get underway this fall. RTI helped in planning it – gratis, according to an RTI spokesperson.

What is the old saying about giving a man something to eat vs. teaching a man how to fish? RTI could be investing in a huge step toward creating prosperity for a troubled people.

Located seven miles north of Ramallah, Rawabi is being called the “first planned Palestinian town” by its backers. RTI and the local developers laid out their plans earlier this week in Raleigh at the International Association of Science Parks' World Conference on Science and Technology Parks.

It's RTI's belief that the development could help turn the West Bank into what it calls “a more investor friendly region.” Bayti Real Estate Investment Company is the force behind the project and expects to create between 3,000 and 5,000 jobs.

Could Rawabi be for the Palestinians what Research Triangle Park has become for North Carolina? Let's hope that when Rawabi turns 50 as RTP did recently that its legacy is similar to RTP where RTI International also was born 50 years ago.

“The idea behind Rawabi is to create an affordable and environmentally sustainable residential community and hub for a knowledge-based economy that will generate jobs for well-educated but underemployed Palestinians,” RTI and the developers say in a project overview. “To this end, the future development will support a business district and housing

and amenities for a population of 40,000.”

Sara Lawrence, an economic development analyst at RTI, is convinced Rawabi can help Palestinians build a better economic future because ‘highly educated yet underemployed young professionals’ are available.

Yet will the developers be able to overcome the political environment that has so long divided Israelis and Palestinians? Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, built many settlements and has even constructed a wall in an attempt to clamp down on terroris attacks.

A growing clamor for a “two state” solution could lead to a peaceful resolution – someday.

As for the immediate future, Rawabi could at least provide an economic boost.

RTI acknowledges that Rawabi faces “three major constraints”:

- Restricted flow of goods and workers across the Palestinian territory
- Unpredictable politics
- A largely Israeli-controlled infrastructure

So as part of the planning process, RTI has envisioned a “virtual network” to link researchers, workers and suppliers.

“At the outset, the building of Rawabi will reduce unemployment in the Palestinian construction sector, which has experienced a slowdown since 2001,” RTI and the developers say. “Bayti estimates that the construction will employ 8,000 to 10,000 workers. However, building the town will also have spin-off effects for other industries. For example, the project will draw on many of the young Palestinian engineers who tend to emigrate to the Gulf States for work. Based on RTI’s economic growth strategy, Rawabi will leverage this homegrown resource and build it into a Palestinian engineering outsourcing industry that supplies the globe, in addition to local demand.”

Sounds something like the dreams for RTP so long ago, doesn’t it?

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