



MAAN Development Center

# The Crisis of Food Insecurity in the occupied Palestinian territories

- **33:** percentage of food insecurity, which has remained relatively constant, in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) since 2003<sup>1</sup>
- **55-79:** percentage of herding and Bedouin communities in Area C that are food insecure<sup>2</sup>
- **10:** percentage of West Bank Palestinian children with stunted growth related to malnutrition; 13.2: the percentage in Gaza<sup>3</sup>
- **20:** percentage of agricultural output in the West Bank from olive groves, a primary target of Israeli land confiscation and reallocation<sup>4</sup>
- **50-80:** million liters of sewage are dumped into the ocean from 16 sewage outfalls into the sea every day in Gaza, invariably affecting the fishing industry<sup>5</sup>
- **30-40:** percent of Gaza's most viable agricultural land – amounting to 27,000 dunums – which is classified as a “high risk” area buffer zone and is under Israeli control<sup>6</sup>

**P**alestinian food insecurity remains a crisis of public health and a fundamental obstacle to development throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Food insecurity in Palestine, however, is not driven by a lack of availability, but rather limitations on physical and economic access. In 2011, 22% of Palestinians in the West Bank and 52% of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were food insecure.<sup>7</sup> Although West Bank food security is higher, 33% of the population in refugee camps is food insecure.<sup>8</sup>

The WFP reports that the food price index for the oPt is noticeably higher than in previous years. In 2011, 63% of household cash expenditures were devoted to food in the Gaza Strip while that percentage drops to 52.5% in the West Bank.<sup>9</sup> In 2010, 25.7% of Palestinians in the oPt lived in poverty, 14.1% of which are

in deep poverty.<sup>10</sup> These figures reveal the increased vulnerability of Palestinians to food price fluctuations.<sup>11</sup>

## **Water:**

Without access to clean water, Palestinians are unable to maximize their food production capabilities. The 46% of Palestinians in the West Bank who are not connected to a formal water network must rely on the delivery of expensive water from the Israeli company *Mekerot*. In the Jordan Valley, for example, water consumption reaches as low as 10 liters per day, while settlers in the Beka'ot settlement in the Jordan Valley use upwards of 401 liters per day.<sup>12</sup> The inability of Palestinians to maximize the use of natural resources cost the Palestinian economy US\$4.5 billion in 2010.<sup>13</sup> In September 2011,

it was reported that only 40% of Palestinians in Gaza receive water, for a 6-8 hour period, once every three days. Only 10% of Gazan households have access to water each day.<sup>14</sup>

### **Freedom of movement:**

Palestinians face severe obstacles in agricultural trade and distribution, which increases costs of products for consumers and producers. In the West Bank there are approximately 522 roadblocks and checkpoints, and 495 temporary “flying” checkpoints are set up each month.<sup>15</sup> Most agricultural areas are located in Area C, which takes up 61% of the West Bank, including 95% of the Jordan Valley, meaning most Palestinian food production is under Israeli military control.<sup>16</sup> Overall in Palestine, only 247,000 of 708,000 dunums of irrigable lands are in use by Palestinians.<sup>17</sup>

### **Expropriation of Property:**

In the agriculturally rich Jordan Valley, settlements control 50% of the land while military areas and free-fire zones constitute another 44.37%, leaving very little room for independent Palestinian food production.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, olive groves account for nearly 80% of cultivated land in Palestine.<sup>19</sup> In 2011, Oxfam estimated that Palestinian farmers lost an equivalent of over US\$500,000 due to the destruction of more than 7,500 olive trees during the year by Israeli settlers.<sup>20</sup> The separation wall, when completed, will annex 119,500 dunums of potential agricultural land in the West Bank. Eighty-five percent of the wall will not be located on the Green Line, but on Palestinian land.<sup>21</sup>

### **International Food Aid:**

For the past several years, Palestine has been among the top global recipients of international humanitarian aid. Most of this aid, however, has been directed towards emergency projects, rather than sustainable development. Consequently, many impoverished Palestinians have grown dependent on aid while levels of food insecurity remain constant. Around US\$2.5 billion in aid was delivered to Palestine in 2010, representing 36% of Palestinian GDP.<sup>22</sup> As of 2010, the siege compelled 80% of Gaza’s population to rely on food aid.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Siege:**

Due to the destruction caused by Israel’s siege, 48% of Gaza’s agricultural land is out of production.<sup>24</sup> The loss of access to agricultural land has reduced Palestin-

ian annual yield by about 75,000 metric tons – around US\$50.2 million lost annually.<sup>25</sup> Israel further cut Gaza’s nautical limit to a mere three nautical miles in 2007, where it remains today. Since 2008, Gaza’s fishermen have suffered a 60% decrease in catch.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence of Israeli restrictions, Palestinian fishing yield has decreased by 7,000 metric tons – around US\$26.5 million over five years. In 2010, the Palestinian economy lost over US\$1.9 billion as a direct result of the siege.<sup>27</sup>

### **Endnotes**

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