

MA'AN Development Center



# The Jordan Valley Through Our Eyes



2014



The Jordan Valley

Through

Our Eyes





## Introduction

The Jordan Valley is the eastern strip of the West Bank which stretches along the Dead Sea in the south, to the Beisan crossing in the north, from the Jordan River in the east, 15 kilometers westward. This area is approximately 28.5% of the overall West Bank and includes over 58,000 Palestinians and 11,679 settlers. The fertile land allows for massive agricultural development, but since 1967 has been monopolized by the 31 settlements and 7 outposts in the area. This area used to be home to over 200,000 Palestinians and was the agricultural breadbasket of the West Bank, but due to large scale ethnic cleansing and large scale land expropriation, the area's population dropped to around 15,000 in a matter of weeks after the war.

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, 95% of the Jordan Valley was declared Area C or closed natural reserves. This means that the Palestinian Authority only has autonomy in 5% of the Jordan Valley and Palestinians are only able to develop 5% without needing a permit from the Israeli Civil Administration. Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000, the area has seen strict enforcement of restrictions on all facets of life. This includes land and water access, as well as movement restrictions to and from the Jordan Valley.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, MA'AN partnered with World Vision to conduct a project geared towards youth in the Jordan Valley. This project included giving a media training to 30 youth by one of Palestine's most well known

photographers, Fadi Aroui. After the media training, 12 youth were selected to receive a camera and participate in the full project. For the following three weeks, they spent between four to eight hours in the field taking photographs and learning about the areas they were photographing in the Jordan Valley.

This publication is a collection of the photos taken during this project. The photos are organized by topic and many of the photos will be accompanied with a description of the photo by the Palestinian youth who took the photo. The main sections were chosen after reviewing the photos and were the most prominent themes throughout. The sections are agriculture, water, herding, landscape, and social life/random. This is not surprising given that all photos were taken in the Jordan Valley and were meant to reflect the youths' lives. Each section will also have an introduction discussing the topic and its importance for the Jordan Valley.

1- For more information see MA'AN Development Center *Parallel Realities* 2012 and *Uprooted Livelihoods* 2013





Agriculture

# Agriculture

The Jordan Valley is famous for its fertile land and underground water resources. These have allowed the valley to grow a large variety of fruits and vegetables. Until the war in 1967, this area was used to grow for local markets and was able to feed a large percentage of the Palestinian population in the West Bank. After the war of 1967 and the subsequent ethnic cleansing that took place, the area was heavily colonized with Israeli agricultural settlements.

These settlements were the first established in the West Bank and are all agriculturally based. They monopolize water and land resources and use them to export valuable fruits and vegetables to the European Union, yielding a high profit.<sup>1</sup> The settlements' monopolization of land and water resources has directed led to the impoverishment of Palestinians in the Jordan Valley. Without access to adequate fertile land and fresh water, Palestinians in the valley are squeezed between two detrimental choices, to either leave the valley and seek work in another part of the West Bank, or work as exploited labor in the settlements. Currently, over 60% (and in some places of the valley, 90%) of Jordan Valley Palestinians work in one way or another in settlements.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, both agriculture and settlements have a very symbolic value in Palestinian society and in the Jordan Valley in particular. Settlements are seen as the reason for Palestinian poverty, and at the same time the sole potential employer in the region. Agriculture, once seen as a beneficial and prideful profession, is now seen as a continuation of a poverty trap, specifically due to Israeli restrictions which artificially inflate Palestinian prices and make them non-marketable for export or even within Palestine.

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1- For more information see MA'AN Development Center *Cultivating Dispossession* 2013 and *Parallel Realities* 2012

2- For more information see MA'AN Development Center *Limited Opportunities* 2013







### Ahmad N

*"I will not be a farmer in the future, because I am ambitious towards building a career in an alternative area. But I see in every farmer in the Jordan Valley a great struggle towards cultivating their lands with dignity against the occupation. Al-Auja is my village, where agricultural work has slowly declined due to the loss of access to water from the local spring. This has effected farmers from cultivating thousands of dunums of land. There is no doubt, the occupation is working towards systematically displacing us."*

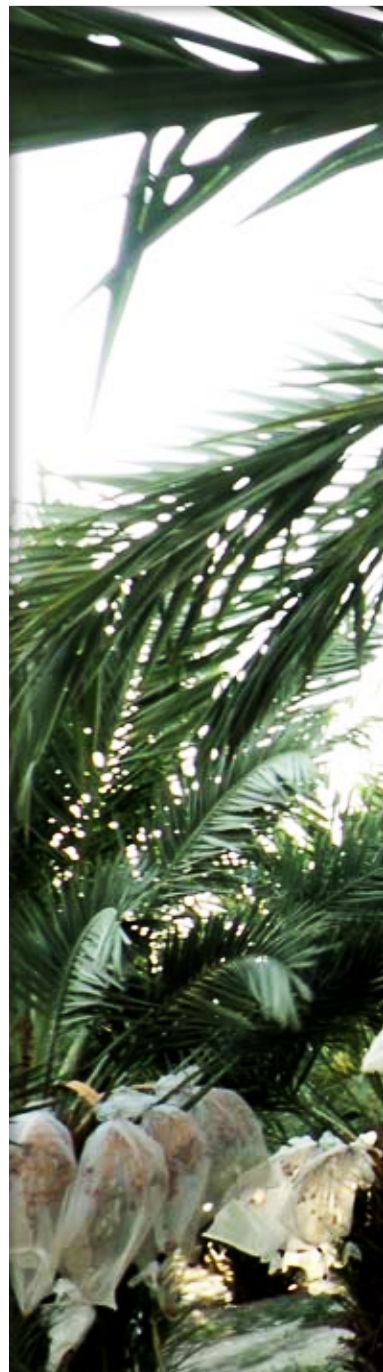


### Abeer

*"The government should support Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley because they are resilient in maintaining a presence on their land and standing firm against all adversities."*











### Ameen

*"I come from village where the local community is primarily engaged in agricultural work, and I understand what it means to be the son of a farmer who has spent his entire life working hard using his bare hands. Nonetheless, there is no sustainable income because the farmers in the Jordan Valley have restricted access to water and agricultural material. Therefore, we are forced to work in Israeli settlements instead. "*













## Haneen

*"I love to take pictures of agricultural landscapes and sceneries that are close to my home. We don't have land to plant so most of us here work in the settlements. If we had access to our lands we would cultivate them with joy."*













**Muhammad M.**

*"Agriculture is the main vein of the livelihoods of Palestinian communities across the Jordan Valley. Farmers work hard through the day and lose out on building sustainable livelihoods through low market prices of fresh produce. See through my pictures the impact of the occupation and how it effects the Palestinian farmers. "*



## Waseem

*"I would like to share my pictures about Khazouq Musa area, which is a fertile agricultural space. Our ancestors have planted and tended to this land for decades, and more recently due to the lack of water the land has lost its fertility. And only a small percentage of the land is now arable. I hope that one day we will be able to cultivate the entire land once again as it will provide opportunities for the youth and will help create income for the community. "*







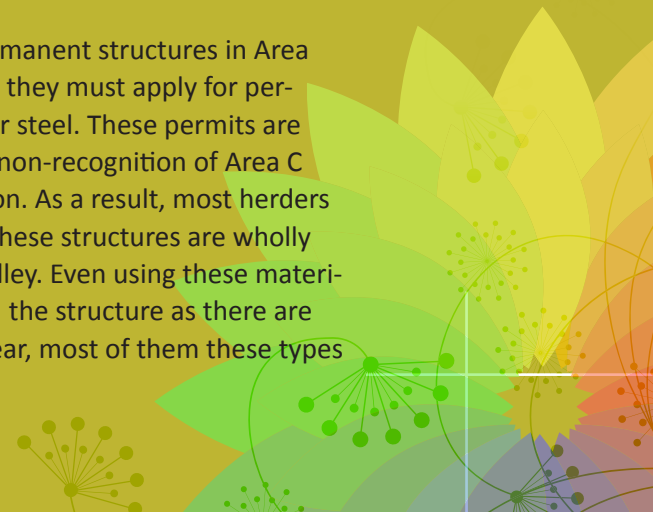
# Herding

# Herding

One of the defining characteristics of the Jordan Valley is the prevalence of herders and herding communities. Although once nomadic, almost all of these communities are sedentary and have lived in the same communities for upwards of 40 years. These communities rely on animal husbandry and small rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods. They typically sell the milk and cheese produced by the animals and sell the meat of the animals during Muslim holiday seasons.

What was once a productive profession has turned into a continuous poverty trap as a result of the Israeli occupation, and especially since the heavy enforcement of land and water restrictions that came about after September 2000. Due to these enforcements, Palestinian herders are only able to access a fraction of the area of the Jordan Valley and must rely heavily on feed and barley to supplement the lack of access to natural grazing areas. Prices for feed and barley have gone up approximately 500% in the past decade due to transportation costs related to the occupation. Herders used to be able to access many natural springs located in the Jordan Valley from which they would supply themselves and their animals with plenty of water. Between over extraction and the closing off of many natural springs, Palestinian herders are now completely dependent on tanked water for their animals. As mentioned in the water section, prices for tanked run are 10-20 times as much than if they were connected to a Palestinian village.

Another main cause of concern is that of the construction of permanent structures in Area C. As most Palestinian herders in the Jordan Valley live in Area C, they must apply for permits from the Israeli Civil Administration to build using cement or steel. These permits are rarely permitted because the Israeli Civil Administration uses its non-recognition of Area C Palestinian villages to justify the denial of permits for construction. As a result, most herders are forced to construct using plastic, tin, aluminum, and mesh. These structures are wholly inadequate for the harsh conditions which exist in the Jordan Valley. Even using these materials does not guarantee the Civil Administration will not demolish the structure as there are approximately 300-600 demolitions in the Jordan Valley every year, most of them these types of structures.







**Maryam:**

*"In Fasayal village, the local communities are comprised of herders, however the mountains that surround the area are dry. This means that shepherds struggle in taking their animals to graze. The people of Fasayal are forced to buy fodder and expensive feed for the livestock. This is why I want to press this issue from my village."*



**Muhammad A:**

*“Animal herding is the most important resource for income for families in Jiftlik, and this is why the government should support the local herding communities. The occupation prevents herders from accessing land with their livestock and continue to declare the area as closed military zones and provide security for the settlements.”*



A black pipe is shown leaking water into the soil. The water is forming a series of small, clear droplets that are falling from the pipe. The soil is dark brown and appears to be wet. There are some dry leaves and twigs scattered around the pipe. The word "Water" is written in a large, blue, sans-serif font in the bottom left corner of the image.

Water

# Water

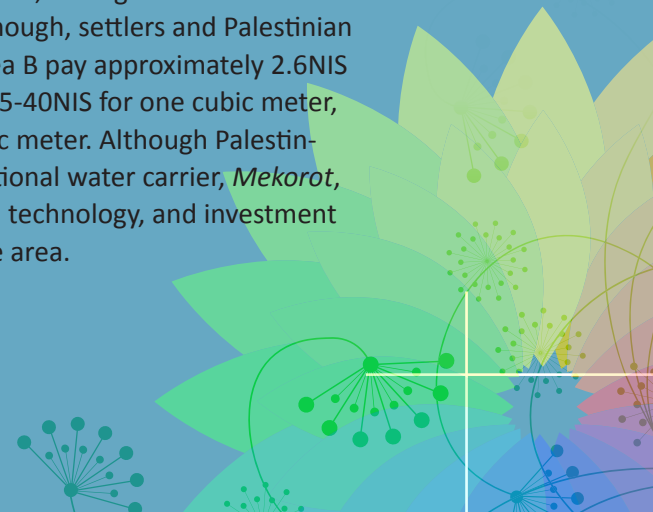
Similar to the issue of agriculture, water is a resource which used to be utilized by Jordan Valley Palestinians to grow produce but has since become a symbol of oppression in the area. One cannot travel through the Jordan Valley without seeing the consequences of excessive Israeli water extraction, in addition to gross restrictions put on Palestinian herding communities and their access to water. Any part of the valley one drives through sees recently dried out riverbeds, humongous Israeli water storage facilities, secured Israeli water wells, large swathes of irrigated settlement agriculture, and long running, modern water piping.

In addition, travelers would notices the painted water tanks that become abundant in Palestinian communities in the valley. These water tanks are filled with water from a private company (sometimes from a settlement) one of two ways, either by a travelling truck which goes to the community, or by individuals who must drive by tractor to the nearest water station (which can be upwards of 30 kilometers away).

As a result of incentives for settlers and restrictions imposed on Palestinians involving water, there is a gross disparity in the amount of water used by each of these groups. Settlers, on average, use 487 liters of water per person per day for personal usage.<sup>1</sup> Palestinian communities on the other hand vary greatly depending on their location and if their village is recognized by Israel as being legitimate. Villages located in Area B average between 75-110 liters per person per day while herding communities, all located in Area C, averaged between 10-30 liters per person per day.<sup>2</sup> As if access were not discriminatory enough, settlers and Palestinian residents do not pay the same price for water. Palestinians in Area B pay approximately 2.6NIS for one cubic meter, Palestinian herders in Area C pay between 25-40NIS for one cubic meter, and settlers pay anywhere between zero and 1.8NIS for one cubic meter. Although Palestinians in Area B and settlers both receive water from the Israeli national water carrier, *Mekorot*, the company blatantly discriminates in terms of price, allocation, technology, and investment between the two which directly causes Palestinian poverty in the area.

1- B'tselem *Dispossession and Exploitation* 2011 pg. 24

2- MA'AN Development Center *Uprooted Livelihoods*









**Nidal:**

*"Water is a key resource for the MarjNa'ajeh village. We were formerly used to drinking salt water from a local well. Recently, we have a new water network however the amount of water that is accessible is not sufficient for the needs of the community. "*



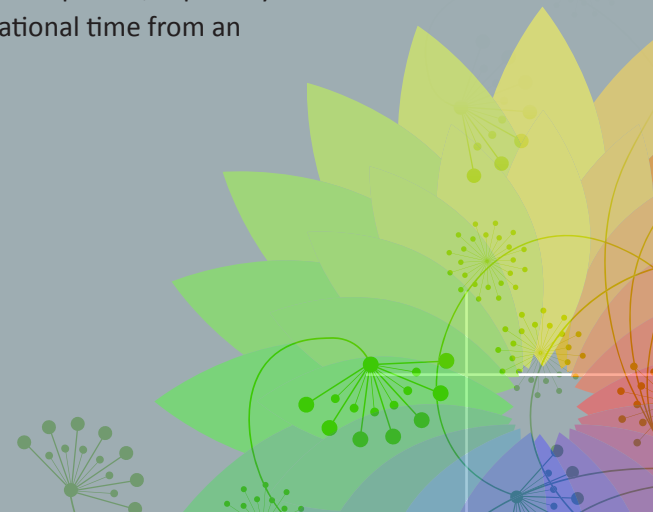
# Social and Public Life



# Social and Public Life

Following the war in June 1967, Israel began the process of land expropriation in order to create and sustain agricultural settlements. As of today, 95% of the Jordan Valley is currently under Israeli control. In addition to economic life, this control impacts social and public life as well.

With the signing of the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, this system of closure and restrictions was temporarily legalized and has been consistent since. As a result, Palestinians are only able to build and develop 5% of the Jordan Valley for anything and everything. Unfortunately, this 5% is already built up and cannot take much more population growth. In addition, this means that projects that involve public space must be located in Area B, hence very few spaces in the Jordan Valley are available for public development. As a result, families and children are confined to dangerous streets, very small play areas, or inside the house for recreational time. This confinement has impacted, especially among children, who do not get to release energy or view recreational time from an alternative perspective.







Ameen:

*"The village of Zbeidat is the most crowded throughout this area, this is due to the lack of building permits allocated to the community. There is no playground for the youth nor are there any community spaces for children and families. There are narrow roads with poor infrastructure that navigate around septic tanks with no proper framework for drainage. While, we love life and hope that conditions will improve in our village, we face a lack of opportunities and abilities to enhance the situation in our village. "*



**Maryam:**

*"The village of Fasayal is dried out and poor because of the little amount of water that is given to us by the Israeli water company. I was able to visit Israel and I saw that all the neighborhoods are green and water is easily accessible to Israelis. So, I ask why are we deprived from accessing water? Why do they steal water and sell it to us? "*





*"A picture illustrating the disparity between Israeli and Palestinian communities in terms of water use, captured by Maryam's camera".*







# Landscape

# Landscape

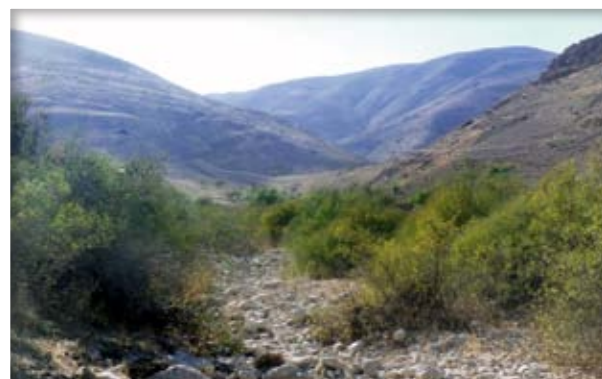
**A**lthough the occupation has been destructive to the environment and land of the Jordan Valley, residents of the Jordan Valley and the rest of the West Bank continue to be absolutely fascinated by the beauty of the valley. Its unique climate compounded by its ecological diversity are a fascinating sight. From the Dead Sea and its surroundings to the northern Jordan Valley and its large open swaths of grazing lands for goats, cows, and sheep, the Jordan Valley offers picturesque photos of Palestine.





**Muhammad A:**

*"What is most beautiful about the Jordan Valley is its nature and especially in both spring and winter seasons. The scenery is breathtaking, from the valleys to the mountains. But unfortunately the occupation controls all of the Jordan Valley and therefore I can only enjoy it through photography."*





**Ahmad N:**

*" I enjoy photography and in particular taking pictures of the valleys, mountains and the sky filled with clouds. I like to take a lot of pictures that feature our nature from the area, I like to document this nature scenery in the Jordan Valley because everything will change in a few years. And people should see what the area used to be and document how it is changing slowly. "*



















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