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# **The ADCR 2011: Human Deprivation under Occupation**

Oxfam





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Oxfam is an international confederation of 15 organizations working together in over 90 countries and with partners and allies around the world to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice.

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ACRI</b>	Association for Civil Rights in Israel
<b>AIDA</b>	Association of International Development Agencies
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GDP</b>	Growth Domestic Product
<b>GNP</b>	Gross National Product
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>OCHA</b>	Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OPT</b>	Occupied Palestinian Territory
<b>PA</b>	Palestinian Authority
<b>PLO</b>	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
<b>UAWC</b>	Union of Agricultural Work Committees
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

## Introduction

The Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) has witnessed a period of economic growth in recent years. Indicators such as GDP, GNP and growth ratios all show steady improvements which many commentators believe are paving the way towards Palestinian statehood.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this growth has been concentrated in certain areas, primarily West Bank urban centres and towns, under the full or partial control of the Palestinian Authority. The absence of Palestinian sovereignty, territorial continuity and integrity, have impeded growth from reaching its full potential. So have Israeli imposed restrictions on access to land and natural resources and national and export markets. Furthermore, poverty and deprivation remain widespread.

This chapter will examine impediments to both economic growth and human development in the OPT. It will be shown that Israeli policies and practices throughout the OPT, particularly movement and access restrictions, have constrained economic growth and had a devastating effect on the pervasiveness of poverty. Poverty here is defined as not merely being a lack of income but “a human condition characterised by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights”.<sup>2</sup> The effectiveness of aid in alleviating poverty and contributing to long-term sustainable development, as well as the politicisation of aid, will also be examined.

## Economic Growth vs. Poverty

The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994 between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel, and the creation of the Palestinian Authority heralded a period of optimism (that an independent Palestinian State was to emerge within five years bringing about an end to the conflict with Israel), and economic growth. In 1995, real GDP growth stood at 6% reflecting increased private sector confidence and investment in institution building for future self-governance. This optimism was short lived. The outbreak of the Second Intifada (Palestinian uprising against the occupation) in 2000, and accompanying Israeli imposed restrictions on movement and access, caused a rapid reversal in real GDP growth to -13.3% in 2002. The economy recovered between 2003 and 2005 until Hamas's victory in Palestinian legislative elections over Fatah in 2006 and subsequent take-over of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The resultant boycott of Hamas by the international community and the Israeli imposed blockade on Gaza saw real GDP growth across the OPT fall to -5.2%. Since 2007, following the Paris Donor Conference and the donor community's pledges of support for Fatah's West Bank based government and the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, GDP has continued to grow from 5.4% to 9.3% in 2010.<sup>3</sup> The influx of humanitarian aid following the Israeli offensive on Gaza, 'Operation Cast Lead' (December 2008- January 2009) also contributed to growth. It can therefore be seen that growth is largely donor driven; the OPT is one of the highest per capita recipients of foreign aid in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, in spite of the recent successes painted by economic indicators, economic growth has been constrained by Israeli imposed restrictions throughout the OPT that have cut Palestinians off from access to their productive base, raw materials and local, national and export markets. A recent report by the International Monetary Fund highlighted that had there been no restrictions since 1994, real GDP per capita in 2010 could have been between 56-110% higher.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that the continued blockade on Gaza and closures through the OPT are costing the Palestinian economy between US\$600 million and US\$800 million a year, or 13% of its GDP.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of the movement and access restrictions currently in place throughout the OPT were imposed by Israel citing security concerns following periods of increased Palestinian attacks on Israeli citizens. Whilst Israel has the duty to protect its citizens, the measures it uses to do so must conform with international humanitarian and human rights law. These include upholding its legal obligation as an occupying power to protect the safety, needs and rights of the occupied civilian population.

Movement and access restrictions have negatively impacted on both the human rights and human development of the Palestinian population and poverty indicators paint a bleak picture of life for Palestinians living in the OPT. In 2010, one in four Palestinians in the OPT were living below the poverty line (18.3% in the West Bank and 38% in the Gaza Strip), with 14.1% living in deep poverty.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the number of people living in poverty has fallen slightly over the past year, the instance of people living in deep poverty (especially in Gaza) has actually risen. According to the World Bank, unemployment rates have been amongst the highest in the world in the OPT over the past decade peaking at 30% in 2002.<sup>8</sup> Unemployment rates currently stand at 16.9% for the West Bank and 37.4% for Gaza.<sup>9</sup> These figures do not account for the high prevalence of underemployment (currently around 25%) particularly amongst youth and the less educated.<sup>10</sup> The World Bank believes the prevalence of unemployment is due to the impact of the closure regime on the labour market which has reduced Palestinian access to jobs inside Israel and has caused a decline in the private sector.<sup>11</sup> Between 1998 and 2009 the share of manufacturing and construction in total employment fell from 37% to 24%.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the share of the government in total employment increased by 9% in the same period with growth seen in health, education and public administration “suggesting an aid-driven expansion of the public sector”.<sup>13</sup> The loss of low-skilled jobs in Israel is also probably the major cause of a fall in wages of between 10 to 30%.<sup>14</sup> Women throughout the OPT have very low levels of formal labour force participation (around 15%)<sup>15</sup> and their participation is confined to a few sectors, mainly the service sector and agriculture (where 85% of unpaid women work).<sup>16</sup>

Around 33% of the Palestinian population in the OPT are food insecure, some 1.43 million people (22% in the West Bank and 52% in the Gaza Strip) with a further 13% vulnerable to food insecurity.<sup>17</sup> In many areas access to basic services such as adequate water and sanitation facilities, schools and health clinics is severely restricted and will be mentioned where appropriate in the following sections.

## **Development vs. De-development in the West Bank**

The Oslo Accords divided the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) into three separate jurisdictions or areas: Area A which came under the control of the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA), Area B which was placed under PA civil administration but Israeli security control, and Area C which remained under full Israeli control despite the Oslo Accord provision that it would be gradually transferred to the control of the PA within five years. Economic improvements have been mainly concentrated in Areas A and B (urban centres and towns) particularly the service and non-tradable sectors and the construction sector.

Yet trade, essential for sustained economic integration and growth, has stagnated. Movement and access restrictions following the Second Intifada such as roadblocks and checkpoints coupled with a complicated permit system have restricted the free movement of people and goods within the West Bank and obstructed access for Palestinian agricultural or manufacturing produce (two core sectors) to internal, Israeli and international markets. The sectoral shares of manufacturing and agriculture have shrunk throughout the OPT from 33% in 1994 to 19% in 2010.<sup>18</sup>

Whilst the Israeli government has recently been removing some internal restrictions to movement within the West Bank and creating improved opportunities for Palestinian farmers and traders to access local markets, access to export markets has not improved. In the West Bank, Israel implements the 'back to back' system for all goods being transported into or out of the OPT. This requires Palestinian goods to pass through one of five Israeli crossings located along the path of the Wall. Palestinian vehicles, or West Bank ID holders cannot cross a commercial crossing and goods must be unloaded from the Palestinian vehicle, checked extensively and then reloaded on the Israeli side (back-to-back). Likewise Palestinian produce is subjected to lengthy security checks once it reaches Israeli ports or the airport. Excessive time delays, increased transport, labour and equipment costs, security checks, lack of access to proper storage facilities and damage that occurs during handling and loading and unloading of produce, reduce the competitiveness of Palestinian agricultural produce and introduce high levels of unpredictability in terms of quality and delivery times, preventing Palestinian traders from penetrating global markets. As one trader told Oxfam:

*"In 2009 we sent a shipment of olive oil to Switzerland. When it arrived the customer complained that the pallets were not stacked in the correct way. We had to pay more than 600 Euros to re-stack the pallets. We know that the pallets were correctly packed at our end, but have no control over what happens once they leave our truck".<sup>19</sup>*

Human development indices for the West Bank often conceal stark inequalities between West Bank areas. Movement and access restrictions known as 'closures' have "turned the West Bank into a fragmented set of social and economic islands or enclaves cut off from one another",<sup>20</sup> marginalising Palestinians that live in, or are dependent on accessing these 'closed zones' for livelihood opportunities. Around 40% of the West Bank is effectively off limits to Palestinians, or access is highly restricted, due to illegal Israeli settlements, outposts, bypass roads, military bases, closed military areas and areas Israel has designated as nature reserves. The areas where movement and access is most severely curtailed include land classified as Area C and the 'Seam Zone' (land trapped between the Wall being built by Israel and the Green Line/1967 Armistice line). The construction of these 'closed zones' by the Israeli authorities has cut Palestinians off from access to basic services and led to the expropriation of many tracts of agricultural land and water resources, harming both the agricultural economy and the welfare of farming families, specifically those dependent on agriculture for subsistence and food security. Around 10% of the West Bank labour force currently works in agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

In Area C, which comprises some 60% of West Bank land and is home to around 40,000 Palestinians, 79% of communities don't have enough nutritious food (higher than Gaza) and 84% of families rely on some form of humanitarian aid to survive.<sup>22</sup> This is in contrast to food insecurity levels of around 22% for the West Bank overall.<sup>23</sup> Those most affected by food insecurity are amongst the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable sections of the Palestinian population, primarily herder and Bedouin communities, and children.<sup>24</sup> Further, households with a higher number of female adult members are more vulnerable to food insecurity, due to women's limited access to employment opportunities and lower wages.<sup>25</sup>

As herding is a major livelihood activity in Area C, the prevalence of food insecurity is strongly correlated to Israeli imposed restrictions on access to land and water resources, exacerbated by climatic factors, such as drought.<sup>26</sup> A survey carried out by UNRWA-WFP-UNICEF amongst Bedouin and local Palestinian herders in Area C found that as many households had already sold disposable assets as a coping mechanism, 77% of surveyed households were reliant on buying food on credit and 81% had decreased spending on food.<sup>27</sup>

Prohibitions on construction and infrastructure development in Area C in the absence of difficult-to-obtain permits, have led to the 'de-development' of Area C. Whilst service

provision has improved to Areas A and B in recent years, such prohibitions have left Area C communities with limited access to water and sanitation, health and education. Whilst 82% of West Bank households receive water through network supply, only 28% of Area C households do, with many communities being dependent on using rainwater harvesting cisterns and storage tanks.<sup>28</sup> 41% of households in Area C do not have a source of electricity (compared with one percent for the West Bank overall).<sup>29</sup>

Lack of planning for Palestinian communities and the resultant inability to obtain permits for construction forces Palestinian communities to build 'illegally' and risk demolition of their property. In 2010, some 113 residential structures were demolished in Area C of the West Bank leading to the displacement of 478 people, including 230 children.<sup>30</sup> Demolitions to water infrastructure and agricultural assets are also common, sometimes for lack of a permit or as a result of attacks by settlers. Three waves of demolitions by the Israeli military in Al-Farisyie in July and August 2010 caused the destruction of animal shelters, greenhouses and irrigation systems provided by Oxfam, the value of the damage estimated as being US\$40,835. Some 27 cisterns in Area C were demolished by the Israeli authorities between January and April 2011 alone. According to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the OPT, Maxwell Gaylard "The removal of such critical infrastructure places serious strains on the resilience and coping mechanisms of these communities, who will become increasingly dependent on economically unsustainable sources such as tankered water. Such deliberate demolitions in occupied territory are also in contravention of Israel's obligations under international law".<sup>31</sup> Not only preventing access to much needed basic infrastructure and essential services, restrictions on construction also prohibit economic development in Area C including private sector investment specifically for the development of industry and tourism. The development of the agricultural sector is also restricted; some 62.9% of arable land is located in Area C.<sup>32</sup>

The Jordan Valley provides a stark example of the difficulties faced by communities living in Area C. The Jordan Valley comprises up to 28.8% of the West Bank, is home to 65,000 Palestinians living in 29 communities (including those that live in the city of Jericho, which is zoned as Area A) and an additional estimated 15,000 Palestinians living in small, scattered Bedouin communities.<sup>33</sup> Some 9,400 Israelis live in 37 illegal settlements.<sup>34</sup> Only six percent of land in the Jordan Valley (90% of which is zoned as Area C) is available for use by the Palestinian population, with 50% being controlled by Israeli settlements, and 44% being closed military zones or nature reserves.<sup>35</sup> According to a survey by Save the Children, 41% of respondents who lived in high risk areas, including the Jordan Valley, lost their jobs or sources of livelihood between 2000 and 2009, causing 34% to change their place of residence as a result, and only four percent of respondents who worked in agriculture were able to market their products without difficulty (compared with 34% of the general West Bank population).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, 39% of households said that educational services were available (compared with 65% amongst the general population) and 8% of households said health services were available (compared to 66% amongst the general West Bank population).<sup>37</sup>

## **Israeli settler violence has heavy impact on Palestinian farmers in the West Bank**

Attacks and harassment of Palestinian farmers and the destruction of their property by Israeli settlers living in the West Bank have a significant impact on the ability of Palestinian farmers to engage in livelihood activities. It also raises serious protection issues. In the first six months of 2010 alone, the United Nations reported that thousands of olive trees and crops had been damaged in settler-related incidents. In a recent study, the Israeli NGO Yesh Din did not find a single case where the Israeli authorities took action to bring those involved to justice.

On 26 July 2010, settlers went on a day of rampage, setting ablaze several fields in Burin village near Nablus. According to Yesh Din-Volunteers for Human Rights, the settlers reacted to the demolition of a structure by the Israeli army in an illegal outpost earlier on that day. "The settlers implement a policy which they have termed the 'price tag'," says Firas Alami, field researcher for Yesh Din. "Their goal is to create a price for each demolition in an outpost, causing Israeli authorities to think twice before carrying them out." Outposts are illegal under both international and Israeli laws, but Palestinian farmers are paying the price for any attempt to evacuate them. Even though the field is in full view of the Israeli soldiers manning the Hawara checkpoint, some 20 metres away, Yesh Din and the villagers say the army did nothing to stop the settlers. Burin is located in Area C of the West Bank in a valley directly between two mountains, on top of which sit two Israeli settlements, Yizhar and Bracha. Ali 'Id, the Head of the Village Council, said that settlers have caused the loss of 16,000 trees in Burin over the past years, and that violence flares each autumn during the olive harvest.

Mohammed Abu Najar lives in Burin close to Bracha settlement. He is 50 years old, married with eight children. He lives solely from farming; mainly olives. In June 2009, settlers began attacking Mohammed's land, cutting down and setting fire to his olive trees as well as spraying chemicals on them. In a two week period around 400 of his trees were destroyed or severely damaged. Mohammed estimates that he used to produce on average of around 100 containers (17 kg each) of olive oil from his trees and that each container could be sold for 400 ILS (\$105) in 2009. In July 2010, settlers once again attacked his land and cut down another 75 olive trees. B'Tselem 2011 and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)

Source: Oxfam

[http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/the-road-to-olive-farming\\_0.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/the-road-to-olive-farming_0.pdf)

The 9,400 Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley consume around 45 Million Cubic Meters of water a year from wells, the Jordan River (to which Palestinians have had no access since the 1967 occupation), treated waste water and manmade reservoirs.<sup>38</sup> This constitutes almost a third of the quantity of water allocated to the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank.<sup>39</sup> The diversion of water resources to Israeli settlements has facilitated settler development of water intensive farming throughout the Jordan Valley and the production of a variety of crops, mainly for export. Meanwhile, Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley have seen their springs and wells run dry, forcing people to abandon agriculture. Some communities rely on as little as 20 litres of water per person per day, well below the 100 litres the World Health Organisation says is necessary to ensure all health concerns are met, and below the 280 litres per person per day which represents average Israeli domestic consumption.<sup>40</sup>

The Wall, currently being built by Israel as a security measure yet declared as being in contravention of international law in an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice in 2004, has harmed the Palestinian economy, increasing unemployment, poverty and the dependence of once flourishing agricultural communities on humanitarian aid for survival. Israel's Wall has left over one tenth of fertile Palestinian farm land trapped in the 'Seam Zone',<sup>41</sup> and separated many farmers from their means of livelihood, allowing them only sporadic access through gates located along the Wall and with the permit or 'prior coordination' required by the Israeli authorities. Such permits are so notoriously difficult to obtain that during the 2010 olive harvest only eleven farmers were granted permits to access their land in the 'Seam Zone', most farmers did not even try to apply.<sup>42</sup> Sharif Omar, a 66 year old farmer from Jayyous, a village in the northern West Bank which has seen much of its land confiscated by the Wall, says; "My eldest son Azzam is a business man. He has a permit to go to Israel- to Netanya, Tel Aviv or Haifa- but he has no permit to go with me to our land here in Jayyous".<sup>43</sup>

Um Al Saed, a woman in her late 30s, runs a cooperative for rural development in the village of Al Oja in the Jordan Valley. The residents of Al Oja used to depend on agriculture and tourism for income due to the presence of a spring in the area, which attracted visitors from all over the West Bank, and supplied a canal that people used to irrigate their lands. "There is no longer any water for our village," says Um Al Saed. "The settlement now controls the water source and the spring has dried up. Now many people have sold their land to buy taxis instead, or have no choice but to work in the settlements," she said. According to the Israeli NGO B'Tselem, residents of the nearby settlement of Niran consume five times more water than the residents of Al Oja.

As the spring is located in a closed military zone in Area C, the villagers have applied for permits from the Israeli Civil Administration (military authorities) a number of times to restore the spring and parts of the canal which are in a state of disrepair. These requests have been denied and the villagers continue to suffer from water shortage, especially during the summer months, when failed harvests are increasingly common.

This situation affected Um Al Saed and her family who struggled to make ends meet. So Um Al Saed decided to do something to provide for her family. "I joined a group of women from the village to start a cooperative, working with bees to produce honey," said Um Al Saed, "but it was difficult to get the tools that we needed and the money to make it work," she continued.

Oxfam targeted the cooperative through an EU funded project 'Fostering Community Change in the OPT'. Um Al Saed says that the cooperative benefited a lot from capacity building and introduction to participatory approaches and project design that were provided through the project. Now the cooperative is to be targeted by Oxfam partner MIFTAH in their income generating project. "I hope that this support will help our cooperative to grow," says Um Al Saed.

Source: Oxfam

The Wall's construction has also led to tens of thousands of Palestinian fruit trees being uprooted or destroyed. Grazing is not permitted at all in the 'Seam Zone' with the result that many livestock owning families living in that area are selling their herds. The World Bank estimates that the construction of the Wall led to an economic loss of US\$38 million, or 8% of Palestinian agricultural production in 2008.<sup>44</sup> Loss of livelihoods means some 88.5% of Palestinians living in the Seam Zone are food insecure.<sup>45</sup> As one farmer told Oxfam:

*I have 18 dunum (1.8 Hectares) of olive trees isolated behind the Wall. I haven't been able to tend to them because it is forbidden to enter this zone. In any case, there is no agricultural gate to allow us to pass through. If we have the misfortune to get too close the army arrives immediately to chase us away. These 18 dunum allowed me to produce 1,350 litres of olive oil per year. I also risk losing 23 additional dunum because the settlers are taking vital water sources for the olive trees.<sup>46</sup>*

Major urban centres have also been affected by the Wall's construction. Prior to the erection of the Wall, the northern city of Qalqiliya boasted a vibrant economy with more than 85,000 shoppers flocking to the city each week, mainly Palestinians from Israel. Currently, due to the isolation of the city by the Wall, unemployment has soared to around 67% of the working age population, with the result that many residents have moved abroad or to other West Bank towns.<sup>47</sup>

## Isolating the Gaza Strip

Israel has imposed movement and access restrictions for both people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip since the 1990s. But an almost complete blockade of the territory came into full force in June 2007 following Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and the subsequent Israeli Security Cabinet declaration that Gaza was a 'hostile entity'.<sup>48</sup> The blockade was declared by Israel as being a legitimate form of 'economic warfare' designed to protect Israeli citizens from regular rocket attacks by Palestinian militants that increased following the Hamas takeover.<sup>49</sup> Israeli imposed restrictions have had a devastating impact on both the economy and the 1.5 million Palestinians trapped in Gaza causing a severe

retrogression in the realisation of civil, political, economic and social rights. The International Committee of the Red Cross recently declared that the blockade on Gaza constitutes collective punishment of the entire civilian population and as such is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.<sup>50</sup> Egypt has also contributed to the suffering of the Palestinian people through preventing the movement of people from Gaza to Egypt due to regular closures of the Rafah crossing. The recent opening of Rafah by the Egyptian government is a welcome step, but the crossing does not have the capacity to support commercial imports and exports.

The 'easing of the blockade' announced by the Israeli government in June 2010, which amongst other measures relaxed import restrictions and allowed the entry of construction materials for international projects in Gaza approved by the PA, has done little to re-activate the decimated economy, improve people's livelihoods or increase food security. The main improvements to date have been greater access to a variety of consumer goods and a limited quantity of raw materials. In April 2011 imports to Gaza stood at 13% of pre-blockade levels.<sup>51</sup> The permanent closure of Gaza's largest and most well-equipped commercial crossing point, Karni, in March 2011, means that Kerem Shalom is currently the only crossing through which goods can enter Gaza. Kerem Shalom can only accommodate up to 250 truckloads a day whereas Karni could accommodate 1,000. An almost complete ban on exports remains in place except for a very limited quantity of seasonal agricultural produce, mainly to the Netherlands.

The economy of the Gaza Strip used to depend on Israel for imports and exports, as well as on the Israeli labour market for household income. Before the 2007 blockade, most of the 3,900 industries in Gaza were involved in manufacturing for export, predominantly to Israel. Overall, the industrial sector in Gaza provided jobs for some 35,000 people,<sup>52</sup> and many tens of thousands more were employed in Israel. Upon losing their jobs outside Gaza, very few workers have been able to access pension fund contributions, compensation for dismissal or disability allowances from their Israeli employers. As Bilal Al Hissi, a 23 year old farmer from Jabalia told Oxfam "Many of us used to make a good living working in Israel, but since the blockade we are all dependent on NGOs, vouchers and aid". Some 80% of the population of Gaza is dependent on international aid.<sup>53</sup>

The reduction in cost-effective imports from Israel and reliance on the tunnel economy (importing goods underground from Egypt) have heavily skewed the normal functioning of the market with inflated prices which are out of reach for a majority of the Gazan population and with negative impacts on the competitiveness of the small business sector. Restrictions on entry of raw materials and the limited availability of inputs, tools and machinery, means that 65% of industrial businesses in Gaza have been forced to close and the sector currently employs 29,000 less workers than prior to the blockade.<sup>54</sup>

The agricultural sector has also been hit both due to destruction caused in 'Operation Cast Lead' and the increase in access restrictions to land, which has compromised the sector's capacity to absorb labour during periods of crisis. Agriculture is traditionally the primary source of income for poor households and a major employment sector in the Gaza Strip. In the period before the closure, it provided permanent and temporary jobs for around 40,000 people in Gaza (13% of the workforce) and supported the livelihoods of small-scale producers who cultivated for their own consumption as well as marketing purposes (mainly export).<sup>55</sup> During 'Cast Lead' some 17% of cultivated land was completely destroyed in Gaza as well as over 35,750 cattle, sheep and goats and one million birds and chickens.<sup>56</sup> Without being able to export their produce, commercial agriculture is barely viable in Gaza. In 2009 the percentage of the labour force working in agriculture had decreased to 7.9%.<sup>57</sup>

Since late 2008 Israel imposed a 'buffer zone' which runs along Gaza's perimeter with Israel citing security reasons and frequent attacks of border posts by Palestinian militants. Access

to this area, which incorporates 35% of Gaza's agricultural land as well as significant water resources, is highly restricted. Frequent Israeli military incursions into the 'buffer zone' have destroyed houses, crops, fruit trees, water wells and greenhouses. OCHA conservatively estimates that the value of agricultural and other property destroyed in the buffer zone in the past five years amounts to US\$308 million to replace, and results in an annual loss of approximately 75,000 tons of potential produce (an estimated market value of US\$50.2 million).<sup>58</sup>

BOX

3

### *Farming under fire*

Ayman Subhi rents land about 700 m away from Israel in the Mashrou` Nassir section of Beit Lahiya in Gaza. Rents in this area are cheaper—about US\$400 per dunum a year (0.1 hectare), compared to US\$600 per dunum farther away from the edge of Gaza—but the lower rents come at great risk. While the area is technically beyond the 300m so-called "buffer zone" imposed by Israel on security grounds, the army frequently fires at farm workers in the area and levels land and crops with heavy bulldozers. Ayman has seen his crop destroyed 6 times since 2000. "Whenever we plant anything higher than 1½ m tall the Israelis level it. They even bulldoze plants that are shorter such as eggplant and onions." During the Israeli military operation "Cast Lead" in December 2008-January 2009, Ayman lost more than 10 dunum of strawberries worth about \$6,000, in addition to vegetables grown for the local market. "Even the plants that weren't bulldozed were lost because we couldn't water them." Since then he has replanted his land with vegetable crops, but he isn't optimistic. "Everyone now is planting for the local market so the prices are too low. When the borders were open, we produced strawberries for the export market and I used to make enough to support my wife and our nine children and hire workers, but now I don't even cover my costs. But at least I am not sitting at home, and my children are kept busy and out of trouble." Although Oxfam and Palestinian partner organizations have tried to help farmers in the area replant their fields and work on crop rotation, the impact of these projects has been limited by the ongoing Israeli restrictions on access to the area. "Oxfam worked with us on a project growing watermelon but we didn't fully benefit from the project since we lost part of the season because it took me two to three months to repair the Israeli damage to the fields and to the irrigation network, and we had to buy inputs at really high prices because they weren't available on the market. Also, watermelon needs to be watered several times a day and with the Israeli shooting we couldn't come early in the morning or at dusk so the plants didn't grow well." Ayman is not a refugee or a PA employee, so his only other source of income is from occasional short-term cash for work projects organized by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), an Oxfam partner.

Source: Oxfam

Farmers accessing this restricted area also face threats to their personal safety. The Israeli military enforces the 'buffer zone' using live fire, usually warning shots. In 2010, 15 Palestinian civilians were killed and 169 others were injured while accessing their land in the 'buffer zone'. A survey conducted in 2009 found that 50% of respondents in the 'buffer zone' area reported losing their means of livelihood since 2000 (in comparison with 33% for the general population in Gaza), 88% faced difficulty in marketing their agricultural products, and 73% lived below the poverty line (compared with 42% from amongst the general population in Gaza at that time).<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, households in the Gaza 'buffer zone' face difficulty accessing essential services with 49% of surveyed households reporting that education was either 'somewhat available' or 'not available' and 65% reporting that they have difficulty accessing health services.<sup>60</sup>

A maritime blockade has further restricted Palestinian access to three nautical miles from the shore since late 2008. Palestinians were granted the right to fish up to 20 nautical miles from the shore under the Oslo Accords. Not only have many fisher folk lost their means of livelihood, and the population lost its access to a key-source of protein (between 2008 and 2009 the catch decreased by 47%),<sup>61</sup> but also restricted access to the sea has been estimated as potentially representing an income loss of US\$26.5 million over a five year period.<sup>62</sup> The number of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who made their livelihood from fishing decreased from 10,000 in the year 2000 to 3,500 in 2010.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the overfishing of areas close to the shore, has led to a severe depletion of fish stocks bringing into question the long-term sustainability of the sector. Consequently some 90% of Gaza's fishermen are now considered poor or very poor, up from 50% in 2008.<sup>64</sup> One fisherman, Jamal, told Oxfam "I used to buy one kilogram of meat every week for my 12 children, but since the beginning of the blockade I can only afford 250 grams a week, provided I find work."<sup>65</sup>

During Israel's military operation in Gaza in the winter of 2009, Anas lost partial eyesight when shrapnel fell inside his family home in Al Zarqa area of Gaza City, injuring him in the face. Now, at four years old, Anas is at risk of becoming completely blind unless he gets urgent medical treatment, only available outside Gaza. However, Anas, like many other patients, is still waiting for permission from Israel to travel for medical treatment that is not available in the Gaza Strip.

Anas's father used to work in Israel but lost his job due to border closures. The family income is approximately 800 NIS per month (US\$ 230). They can only afford vegetables and grains and must also use some of their meagre funds to buy drinking water. Despite Oxfam's replacement of corroded water pipes, tap water is only available every second or third day, due to the limited power supplies in Gaza as a result of Israeli restrictions on fuel as part of the blockade. Even when water is available, it is suitable for domestic use but still undrinkable due to the contamination of the aquifer by chlorides and nitrates. This groundwater pollution means that 95% of municipal water supply in the blockaded Gaza Strip is not suitable for drinking.

A large part of the contamination is due to sewage infiltration into the aquifer and over extraction. Tackling both of these problems on a large scale requires new infrastructure, and the blockade of Gaza prevents or delays the essential imports of construction materials needed to complete projects such as waste water treatment plants and desalination plants.

Source: Oxfam

The continuing restrictions on entry of construction materials means that houses cannot be built and infrastructure cannot be maintained or repaired. During 'Operation Cast Lead', which cost the lives of 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, some 6,000 homes were completely destroyed or severely damaged, 18 schools were completely destroyed with more than 260 damaged, more than 50% of Gaza's hospitals were damaged and some 30 km of water networks were destroyed.<sup>66</sup> The direct material damage caused by 'Operation Cast Lead' is estimated at being around US\$1.9 billion.<sup>67</sup>

This destruction, combined with high population growth rates, means that some 86,000 housing units are currently needed in the Gaza Strip, to improve dire housing conditions including over-crowding and risk of structural collapse.<sup>68</sup> Some 40,000 children were unable to enrol in UNRWA schools at the beginning of the academic year because of the inability of UNRWA to bring construction materials for schools into Gaza.<sup>69</sup> Already over 90% of UNRWA schools are running double shifts and thousands of students have had no option but to take their lessons inside shipping containers used as supplementary classrooms.<sup>70</sup> Whilst a number of truckloads of water and sanitation items entered Gaza in the first quarter of 2011, primarily for two sewage treatment projects funded by the World Bank and German Government respectively, the lack of ability to rehabilitate damaged water infrastructure, coupled with frequent power cuts means that, as of April 2011, 25% of the Gaza Strip population is supplied with water once every four days, 40% of the population is supplied with water once every three days, 25% is supplied with water once every two days and 10% receive water once per day (all for 6-8 hrs at a time).<sup>71</sup> Some 50 to 80 million litres of raw or partially treated sewage have been released daily into the Mediterranean Sea since January 2008.

The economic crisis in Gaza has led to households relying increasingly on women's earnings. In addition it is usually women household members who go to local associations or international aid agencies to collect vouchers or food distributions. Women's mobility is generally used as one of the indicators of greater empowerment. However, in this case, it could be misleading to use this as an indicator of their growing autonomy.

Female mobility could be based on their greater engagement in the economic sphere in the interests of accessing what might be termed 'conditional' aid. It appears that often men's support for their wives to participate in activities organised by local associations depends on the likelihood of inclusion in for example, material assistance by those associations. Women themselves state that their increased role in generating household income is neither desirable nor a permanent change, but a result of household crisis due to the inability of the

male members to remain the family breadwinners.<sup>72</sup> They assert that the crisis has indeed created opportunities for them to leave the home and interact more actively in public life, but are concerned this would not continue were it not related to income generation for the wellbeing of the family.

## Inequality in Jerusalem

East Jerusalem was once the Palestinian economic, commercial, religious and cultural centre. Illegally annexed by Israel in 1967, East Jerusalem, wanted by Palestinians as the future capital of a future State, has been further isolated from the rest of the West Bank with the construction of the Wall, including from important satellite cities such as Bethlehem and Ramallah. Lack of access to the city for both Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank and lack of ability to trade (there are restrictions on the import of dairy and agricultural produce from the West Bank to East Jerusalem) has led to the economic decline of the city. Between 1994 and 2007, some 280 shops closed in East Jerusalem, around 50 of which were in the Old City.<sup>73</sup> The Wall is estimated as having cost over US\$ one billion due to loss of income for Jerusalemites and it is estimated that the cost will continue to be US\$194 million annually.<sup>74</sup> The lack of job opportunities in East Jerusalem means that some 35% of Palestinian Jerusalemites work in Israel and the settlements.<sup>75</sup> The isolation of Jerusalem has further prevented many Palestinians from being able to access schools, universities, hospitals (which provide specialised medical care not available in the rest of the West Bank or Gaza) as well as important religious sites.

Israel's position that Jerusalem is its 'undivided' and 'eternal' capital conceals the stark inequalities that exist between Jerusalem's Jewish and Palestinian residents. In East Jerusalem, 75.3% of Palestinian adults and 83.1% of Palestinian children live below the poverty line.<sup>76</sup> Inequalities in municipal funding within Jerusalem itself means that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem face a shortage of classrooms and between 4,329 and 5,300 Palestinian children in East Jerusalem do not attend school at all.<sup>77</sup> Around half of East Jerusalem's residents do not have legal water connections and a third are not connected to the sewage network contributing to the environmental degradation of Palestinian neighbourhoods and exacerbating risks to public health.<sup>78</sup> In 2003, the Jerusalem Municipality implemented 608 plans for public infrastructure; 78.8% took place in Jewish neighbourhoods and illegal settlements and 21.2% in Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> Most Palestinian Jerusalemites boycott municipal elections.

Whilst Israel continues to encourage its population to live in occupied East Jerusalem in violation of international law (around 190,000 settlers currently live in East Jerusalem)<sup>80</sup> the demolition of Palestinian property and accompanying forced displacement continues. Some 692 buildings were demolished between the beginning of 2000 and April 2009.<sup>81</sup> An estimated 28% of Palestinian owned structures are currently at risk of demolition due to the strict and discriminatory planning regime imposed on Palestinian construction which often obliges people to build 'illegally' to meet population growth and housing needs, placing 60,000 people at potential risk of displacement.<sup>82</sup> Apart from the severe economic consequences for families that lose their homes, the documented social impact on the family is enormous. Some one third of parents are at risk of developing mental health disorders following a home demolition and children often show signs of trauma such as depression, anxiety and becoming withdrawn.<sup>83</sup>

Revocation of residency rights for Palestinians Jerusalemites who cannot prove their 'centre of life' is within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries has also led to increased displacement. Those affected by this policy include many Palestinians who have been cut off from the centre of Jerusalem by the Wall, as well as those who have studied or worked abroad for a

period of time. The Israeli human rights NGO B'Tselem found that between 2003 and 2009, the Ministry of Interior revoked the residency of 7,456 East Jerusalemites.<sup>84</sup> One Palestinian woman from Jerusalem who studied for her Masters Degree in the UK and subsequently worked abroad for a number of years says:

*In 1996, I was working in Nicaragua and it was too difficult and complicated to return back to Jerusalem and so I asked my family to renew my exit permit that expired in August 1996 only to be told that my right of residence had been revoked. The reason given by the Israelis was that I had been away for too long and therefore 'lost' the right to reside in the city of my birth and my family. I felt so angry about this; it seems so wrong, why should the Israelis be able to deny me my rights to live in the city where me and my family were born and grew up in?<sup>85</sup>*

## **Constraints to Economic Growth and the Politics of Aid**

Whilst the OPT as a whole has witnessed economic growth in recent years, this growth has been constrained in the absence of Palestinian sovereignty and territorial continuity and due to Israeli imposed restrictions on access to land and resources as well as on national and export markets. Such restrictions on movement and access prevent Palestinians from being able to engage in sustainable livelihood opportunities and benefit from international trade agreements. At the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee's donor conference to the OPT on 13 April 2011, an agreement signed between the Palestinian Authorities' Prime Minister Fayyad and Baroness Catherine Ashton, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, gave Palestinian agricultural products immediate duty free access to the EU market. However, the agreement, which also includes processed foods, fish and fishery products originating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, will do little to help Palestinian farmers' income if they can't access their productive base or external markets. Further, the World Bank notes that growth does not appear to be sustainable, as it "reflects recovery from the very low base reached during the second Intifada and is still mainly confined to the non-tradable sector and primarily donor driven".<sup>86</sup>

Aid levels to the OPT significantly increased in the period following Oslo: US\$2.6 billion in 2008 which was a 1,350% increase to aid in 1993.<sup>87</sup> Aid has been determined and allocated through the lens of state building and the peace process, instead of according to need.

The 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' of international aid to the OPT has also been questioned. When Hamas won the parliamentary elections in 2006, major donors stopped giving aid to the OPT. The economic boycott imposed by the Quartet and Israel (who previously suspended the transfer of tax and custom revenues it collects on behalf of the PA) saw poverty levels soar. In an Oxfam survey carried out in mid-March 2007 of 677 households from across the OPT, 81% of respondents in the West Bank and 87% of respondents in Gaza reported a reduction in household income. In Gaza 53% reported that their household income had been reduced by more than half, and 21% said their household income had ceased altogether. In order to cope with reduced income levels, households reported increased borrowing, the selling of their possessions, a reduction in healthcare and food consumption and taking their children out of school.<sup>88</sup> One grocery shop owner from Madama village in the West Bank told Oxfam in January 2007, "Three months ago my shop closed. I could not continue because the debts of my customers became too great. This is the responsibility of the siege [financial sanctions] of the Palestinian government. Most of the villagers have not paid me the money they owe me. I sold my wife's jewellery to open my shop- now I have lost everything."<sup>89</sup>

Following Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and the establishment of two parallel governments, international donors followed the 'West Bank First' model, resuming funding to bolster the PA's support and authority in the West Bank, further entrenching the territorial, political and socio-economic fragmentation of the OPT. By isolating Hamas through, among other things, its aid schemes, the international community has marginalised Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and exacerbated the intra-Palestinian divide. Following the reconciliation of Palestinian factions in April 2011, it is hoped that the international community does not repeat the failed policies of 2006 and once again place sanctions on the unity government with potentially devastating consequences for Palestinians.

Since the Paris donor conference of 2007, aid has largely been given bilaterally to support the PA's Palestinian Reform and Development Plan 2008-2010. Such bilateral funding does not reach the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, many of which reside in Area C of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza where the PA's reach to provide access to services is severely restricted. Moreover, donors' support is largely focused on reform of the governance and the security sectors of the PA whilst neglecting other sectors and essential services such as agriculture, health and education. Since 2007, the United States and the European Union have given almost US\$450 million in assistance to the PA's security sector.<sup>90</sup> This resulted in a structural distortion in public expenditures, with security services representing 33% of public spending whereas health and education combined represented 29%.<sup>91</sup> In 2009, donor support for the development of the agricultural sector was limited to less than one percent of total funds.<sup>92</sup> The new National Development Plan 2011-2013, which is yet to be endorsed, still has high spending for the security sector (US\$61,000,000) for 2011, compared to health (US\$36,000,000) and education (approx. US\$60,000,000). However, the total budget allocated to governance is expected to decrease from 28%-19% of the total budget over the two years with a corresponding increase in social service spending from 28% to 35%.<sup>93</sup>

The OPT is one of the largest recipients of humanitarian assistance in the world and the vast majority of funding for Gaza in particular is restricted to humanitarian aid. While such assistance is essential to mitigate the negative effects of conflict and occupation, it cannot be a substitute for Palestinian national self-determination nor a sustainable solution for communities' development unless it is connected to the longer term development of agriculture and employment that could help lift the population out of poverty. Given the fact that humanitarian distributions and cash for work activities continue to be the preferred response to poverty and food insecurity within Gaza, aid dependency is growing at many levels, and as a result many people suffer from unpredictable income flows at household level. Oxfam's experience working with Palestinians in Gaza shows that people want to work rather than receive aid but with the limited opportunities available to them, the majority are limited to cash for work activities (that normally give recipients low wage employment for one or two months), receiving vouchers for food or engaging in small-scale project activities that are inherently unsustainable. This has led to a real crisis of dignity for family members and negative socio-economic impacts on the household with the resultant disaffection and social exclusion. As one Gazan fisherman who benefited from an Oxfam Cash for Work project building agricultural roads said "I'm grateful for all the help me and my family receive, but I would rather you take a picture of me working on my boat, like my father, grandfather and great grandfather used to do."<sup>94</sup>

The politicisation of international aid to the OPT has also made it challenging for humanitarian and development organisations to implement their programmes. The growing number of world-wide national and international bans on the provision of material or financial assistance to groups or governments designated as terrorists, such as Hamas, affect the provision of aid, including water and support for long-term livelihoods. Agencies in Gaza have had to modify their optimal response in order to comply with these bans. In addition, aid organisations (or the relevant authorities) are often prevented from implementing

projects in areas of greatest need, due to Israeli restrictions on planning, building and infrastructure development in Area C and East Jerusalem, the lack of entry for materials in Gaza due to the blockade, and the lack of programming in the 'buffer zone'. According to a survey carried out by the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), aid agencies have shifted from a needs-responsive to access-responsive programming, which is less effective or sustainable. For example 88% of AIDA members who operate in Gaza have modified their optimal response due to access restrictions; 87% in Area C.<sup>95</sup> The destruction of donor funded infrastructure by the Israeli military (or sometimes settlers) does not often lead to donor calls for compensation or accountability. During 'Operation Cast Lead' alone, approximately €11.3 million of European Union funded infrastructure was destroyed, yet not one claim for compensation was filed.<sup>96</sup>

Ultimately the alleviation of poverty in the OPT will not be possible without tackling root causes. These include Israel's policies of continued settlement expansion and accompanying land and water resource confiscation in the West Bank; the closure of the Gaza Strip; severe restrictions on movement and access throughout the OPT preventing viable agricultural and economic opportunity, including trade; demolitions of 'illegally' built structures in the West Bank (including Jerusalem), including donor funded projects. Above all else, only an end to the occupation and a durable and just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict can ensure a reduction in poverty, the fulfilment of human rights and security for both Palestinian and Israeli citizens alike.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> IMF and The World Bank 2011, recent reports.

<sup>2</sup> The UN Committee on Economic 2001.

<sup>3</sup> UNCTAD 2010 and IMF 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Development Initiatives 2010.

<sup>5</sup> IMF 2011.

<sup>6</sup> UNCTAD 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011. In 2010, the Palestinian poverty line for a household of two adults and three children was 2,237 NIS (US\$609) and the deep poverty line was 1,783 NIS (US\$478) per month.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, West Bank and Gaza Update 2011.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank 2011.

<sup>10</sup> WB, West Bank and Gaza Update, (March 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011.

<sup>16</sup> FAO 2011.

<sup>17</sup> WFP and FAO 2010.

<sup>18</sup> IMF 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Said Janan 2010, cited in Oxfam.

<sup>20</sup> World Bank 2010.

<sup>21</sup> UN OCHA 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Save the Children Alliance 2010.

<sup>23</sup> WFP and FAO 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Save the Children UK 2009.

<sup>25</sup> WFP and FAO 2010.

<sup>26</sup> UN OCHA 2010.

<sup>27</sup> UNRWA, UNICEF and WFP 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Displacement Working Group OPT 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Statement by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the OPT 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Palestinian National Authority, Ministry of Agriculture 2010.

<sup>33</sup> B'Tselem 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

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- 47 Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions & Stop the Wall 2009.
- 48 BBC News 2007.
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- 53 Crisis Action 2011.
- 54 Ibid.
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- 57 FAO 2010.
- 58 UN OCHA 2010.
- 59 Save the Children UK 2009.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 FAO 2010.
- 62 UN OCHA 2010.
- 63 FAO 2010.
- 64 The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) considers that fishermen with a monthly income of US\$100-190 are poor, while those earning less than US\$100 a month are very poor. According to Oxfam's partner, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), fishermen in Gaza used to economically support almost 40,000 people, including mechanics, fishmongers and thousands of local fishing families.
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- 66 Save the Children UK 2009.
- 67 CIDSE 2009.
- 68 Crisis Action 2011.
- 69 Ibid.
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- 71 EWASH 2011.
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- 73 OCHA 2007.
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- 75 Ibid.
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- 77 The Association for Civil Rights in Israel & ir amin 2010.
- 78 EWASH 2011.
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