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A Research Study On

*The Impact of the Israeli Military Occupation
on the Access of Rural Women to their Economic Rights*

December 2020



Research Study

on the Impact of the Israeli Military
Occupation on the Access of Rural Women
to their Economic Rights

December 2020

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Research Study: on the Impact of the Israeli Military Occupation on the Access of Rural Women to their Economic Rights

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Executive Summary:

The agricultural sector in Palestine had long been considered one of the most important pillars of the Palestinian economy comprising a sizeable portion of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and significantly contributing to family income and food security at the national level. However, in recent years its contribution to the Palestinian economy has declined significantly, especially in the West Bank. The Palestinian agricultural sector's contribution to GDP has been fluctuating, from %30 in 1970 to %18 in 1987 and continued to decline to only %11 in 2003 until reaching 3.2 % in 2019.¹ The percentage of workers in the agriculture, hunting, and fishing sector has declined in recent years among both males and females. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the percentage of workers decreased from %8.1 for males and %21 for females in 2014, to %5.9 for males and %6.7 for females in the year 2019. The percentage of women working in agriculture as employers does not exceed %0.3 compared to %76.3 working as unpaid family workers. According to the World Food Programme 2019 Annual Country Report on Palestine, the agricultural sector employs %11 of the Palestinian workforce, 30 percent of which are women².

The diminishment of the Palestinian agricultural sector is due in large part to of Israeli violations against the agricultural and cooperatives sectors and the restrictions these violations impose on all stages of agricultural production. In the pre-production and production stages, violations include confiscation of land and water resources, and other inputs of agricultural production. Land confiscation constitutes the settlement enterprise, including the construction of the Apartheid Wall, as well as military orders that designate West Bank lands as closed military zones, firing zones, and natural reserves. In the Gaza Strip, agricultural lands are leveled and turned into security isolation areas, also known as Access Restriction Areas, which account for %35³ of the total agricultural land in the entire Gaza Strip. Additionally, in the week 16-23 April 2020, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) field researchers received reports from 11 women about chemical spraying of agricultural land in Gaza by Israeli planes, making it impossible for farmers to use their land for nearly 10 days. This is particularly devastating to the many women who rely on agriculture to support themselves and their families. It exacerbates the economic stress that already exists from blockade and the effects of COVID-19 on the economy and trade.⁴

The occupation also confiscates and controls natural water sources, determining the quantities of water usage. Similarly, several policies are imposed on the introduction of pesticides and necessary fertilizers under flimsy security pretexts. The restriction on these necessary inputs leads to the deterioration of the quality and the quantity of

¹ Study on Small-scale Agriculture in the Palestinian Territories, Agricultural Research for Development <https://agritrop.cirad.fr/1/592999/Marzin20%Uwaidat20%Sourisseau20%202019%Study20%on20%SSA20%in20%Palestine20%with20%FAO20%WBG20%final.pdf>

² World Food Programme Palestine Annual Country Report 2019 Country Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000113833/download/>

³ Al Mezan Calls for Practical Steps to Tackle Chronic Poverty in Gaza <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/al-mezan-calls-practical-steps-tackle-chronic-poverty-gaza>

⁴ Violence against Women and Covid-19 in Palestine https://www.nad.ps/sites/default/files/the_double_lockdown_2.pdf

agricultural production. The violations extend all the way to the post-production stage of packaging, storing, and marketing, as Israeli movement and access restrictions, has fragmented the West Bank economy⁵ into smaller disconnected markets. This has increased the time and costs to transport goods from one area in the West Bank to another, and from the West Bank to the rest of the world. As a result, the competitiveness of Palestinian goods in local and export markets has weakened.⁶

The aforementioned violations and restrictive policies combined pose a heavy price on farmers, especially women. These policies impose multi-faceted challenges on women in terms of their productive capacity to compete profitably, coupled with the absence of opportunities for trade exchanges at the local and international levels. This is combined with the high cost of raw materials, high export fees, unfair competition in the local markets with cheaper Israeli products that have a lower cost of production and are often subsidized⁷, in contrast with the Palestinian Authority's neoliberal economic policies which do not provide any protection for women's or Palestinians' products from unfair competition.⁸

These challenges and impacts on Palestinian women farmers have multiplied in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in the Palestinian territory. The spread of the pandemic has affected %95 of Palestinian women micro, small and medium enterprises negatively, and has resulted in the closure of %27 of the micro, small and medium enterprises owned by women⁹.

Israeli occupation policies violation International Humanitarian and Human Rights law, particularly in its forced displacement of the Palestinian population to the benefit of Israeli settlers as this constitutes an apartheid regime. Palestinians' right to self-determination is continuously being violated, the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory through the use of force consistently ignored, and Palestinians' rights to work, human security, participation in decision-making, and freedom of movement and property rights is being violated, the impacts of which are all especially devastating for Palestinian women in general and rural women in particular.

The full development of the agricultural sector is not possible under continuous occupation; however, this does not absolve the international community, funders, Palestinian governmental institutions, and Palestinian civil society from their responsibilities in protecting, improving, and developing this sector as much as is

⁵ Decolonising Palestinian Economies <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/decolonising-palestinian-economies/>

⁶ How Israeli Settlements Stifle Palestine's Economy <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/how-israeli-settlements-stifle-palestines-economy/>

⁷ The Besieged Palestinian Agricultural Sector, UNCTAD p.24 https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2015d1_en.pdf

⁸ Unlocking the Labor Market for Palestinian Women <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/labor-market-palestinian-women/>

⁹ UN Women IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN-LED MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN PALESTINE <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field20%office20%arab20%states/attachments/publications/04/2020/covid20%19in20%palestine/impact20%of20%covid20%19on20%womenled20%msmes20%in20%palestine20%english.pdf?la=en&vs=3131>

possible until the occupation is finally ended. Among the paper's recommendations to this end are increased advocacy, budget monitoring, coordination and concerted efforts, the adoption of development policies based on gender equality for and empowerment of women farmers and small farmers, and facilitating cooperative growth through subsidizing cooperative products and reducing related fees, such as land registration fees.



Introduction:

Palestine is endowed with a diverse range of climate zones and topography that can be classified into a number of agro-ecological zones. This geography provides Palestinians with rich biodiversity and a wide range of agricultural opportunities. Agriculture in Palestine depends on crop cultivation, including olives by %54 of the cultivated area (%57 in the West Bank and %24 in Gaza), and field crops by %24 of the area (%24 in the West Bank and %23 in the Gaza Strip), followed by vegetables by %10 of the area (%10 in the West Bank and %32 in the Gaza Strip), and finally fruit trees by %10 of the area (%9 in the West Bank and %21 in the Gaza Strip).¹⁰

Although the agricultural sector is considered one of the most important pillars of the Palestinian economy, as it directly contributes to the GDP, and to achieving income for the family in addition to food security at the national level, however, the contribution of agriculture in the West Bank to the Palestinian economy has declined significantly since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. This was due to the occupation's policies and destructive measures to the Palestinian economy, with the aim of making the Palestinian economy entirely dependent on the Israeli one. While agriculture contributed to more than %14 of the GDP in the mid-1990s, this decreased to only %5.1 in 2011.¹¹ In 2014, agriculture value-added was USD 286.4 million, or %3.8 of GDP¹², and decreased in 2018 to a meager %3.¹³ Additionally, the ratio of labor productivity in agriculture relative to the economy as a whole fell by more than %50 between 1995 and 2011. These abnormal trends are explained by the various restrictions on Palestinian access to and investment in the land and water resources of the West Bank, predominantly those restrictions operating in Area C according to Oslo II Accords.¹⁴

Likewise, the percentage of workers in the agriculture, hunting, and fishing sector has been declining in recent years for both males and females as it decreased in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from %8.1 for males and %21 for females in 2014,¹⁵ to %5.9 for males and %6.7 among females in 2019.¹⁶ These percentages come in the context of an increase in women's participation in commerce, hotels & restaurants by %11.1 and in services by %73.1.¹⁷

Moreover, recent statistics reveal the wide gap between women and men working in the agriculture, hunting, and fishing sector in Palestine. In particular, 2018 statistics reflect

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Palestine: Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector* (FAO, 14 (2020).

¹¹ World Bank, *Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy* (World Bank, 18 (2014).

¹² FAO (n 1)

¹³ حسناء الرنتيسي، بالأرقام: القطاع الزراعي... انهيار متسارع مطلوب إيقافه (آفاق البيئة والتنمية، مركز العمل التنموي معاً، 2020) <<https://www.maan-ctr.org/magazine/article/2505>>

¹⁴ World Bank (n2)

¹⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Percentage of workers 15 years and over in the agriculture, hunting and fishing sector out of the total number of workers in all economic activities by region and gender, 2014-2018*, (PCBS, 2019) <<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/Agr-labour-2018-A-11.html>>

¹⁶ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestinian Labor Force Survey: Annual Report 2019*, (PCBS, 2020) <<http://pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2515.pdf>>

¹⁷ Ibid

the great differences in the percentages of women and men employers, self-employed, wage employees and unpaid family members in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as follows:¹⁸

Area	Employer		Self Employed		Wage Employee		Unpaid Family Member	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Palestine	6.6	0.3	34.2	15.3	47.8	8.1	11.4	76.3
West Bank	6.4	-	39.4	13.5	42.4	6.0	11.8	80.5
Gaza Strip	7.0	2.7	19.8	28.0	62.9	22.6	10.3	46.7

These statistics, especially those related to employers and unpaid family members, reflect the wide disparity between women and men working in the field. Thus, the percentage of male unpaid family members stands at %11.4, compared to %76.3 for females. This directly affects economic empowerment for Palestinian women. Moreover, almost all the land of the West Bank suitable for agricultural production is situated in area "C"¹⁹ and so is fully controlled by the Israeli occupation. Within the framework of intersecting factors of marginalization, which include gender and place of residency (village / city), these statistics give an indication of the reality of severely marginalized women in rural areas. This also represents an entry point for analyzing the impact of the Israeli military occupation on the economic empowerment of Palestinian rural women. This comes within the context of the importance of women's economic empowerment to ensure equal access to opportunity. Women's economic empowerment is fundamental to ensuring more women's protection from violence, independence, and agency, as well as being interlinked with women's public and political participation.

As for cooperatives, there are 1,439 cooperatives in Palestine including 7 cooperative unions. Cooperative unions are divided economically into five main activities: agricultural, housing, services, crafts, and consumerism. Statistics show that %38.9 of cooperatives currently registered (excluding those whose registration has been canceled) work in agricultural activities, followed by housing activity by %30.4, followed by the service field by %25, while activity in consumer and craft societies reached %3 and %2.75 respectively.²⁰ Regarding the membership in cooperatives, the

¹⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Percentage distribution of employed individuals 15 years and above in agriculture, hunting and fishing in Palestine by region, employment status and sex 2018*, (PCBS, 2019) <<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/Agr-labour-2018-A-12.html>>

¹⁹ World Bank (n 2) page 19.

²⁰ هيئة العمل التعاوني، تقرير إنجاز حول نظام معلومات التعاون (هيئة العمل التعاوني، سنة النشر غير محددة) <<http://www.cwa.pna.ps/Files/%D8%AA%D%82%D%8B%1D8%9A%D%8B%20%1D%8AD%D%88%9D%20%84%9D%86%9D%8B%8D%8A%7D85%9%20%D%85%9D%8B%9D%84%9D%88%9D%85%9D%8A%7D%8AA%20%D%8A%7D%84%9D%8AA%D%8B%9D8>>

<صفحة 3> %A%D%88%9D86%9.pdf

number of women in the 39 registered cooperatives -whose data was entered into the Cooperative Work Agency's database- reached %36) 527), compared to 937 men (64%). The number of women members of women-led/women majority cooperatives reached 63, compared to 322 members in men's cooperatives and 1,079 in mixed cooperatives.²¹

Due to inactivity, the registration of a total of 639 cooperative has been canceled. These cooperatives constitute %44.4 of the total cooperatives that have been registered since the British mandate.²² This comes in the context of the numerous challenges facing the cooperatives sector. Foremost of which is the long-standing Zionist military occupation, which affects all aspects of growth and economic empowerment in Palestine through the restrictions of movements and the export of products abroad, the latter due to the complete control of border points.

The agricultural sector is of course mainly located in rural areas increased occupation violations and restrictions. This has a disproportionate impact on rural Palestinian women, as the continuous violations of the occupation limit and prevent women from owning land, having freedom of movement, and the ability to access production inputs and thus their economic rights and quality of life. **This research paper seeks to determine the extent of the Israeli occupation's impact on rural women's access to their economic rights by using a case-study methodology, and by focusing on women working in the agriculture and cooperatives sector in Bethlehem and the Jordan Valley governorates.** To this end, all relevant stakeholders, including women working in the agriculture sector, cooperatives, civil society, governmental and international institutions were targeted through 12 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group discussions (for the list of interviews and focus groups that were conducted please refer to Annex 1).

The research tools focused on the challenges and obstacles resulting from the military occupation facing women workers and the civil, official, and international institutional frameworks governing the agricultural sector and cooperatives. Additionally, the research focused on access to land and water, and other essential inputs of production as well as post-production constraints, especially packaging, storage and marketing. The tools aimed to shed light on the direct and indirect impact of the Israeli settlement and military enterprise on women and their families. This research was within the context of decades of promotion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which, as the UN Sp. Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has stated, "are the new frontiers of dispossession of traditional inhabitants, and the implementation of a strategy of Judaization and control of the territory."²³

Research tools were assembled based on the criteria of availability, accessibility, quality, acceptability, and equality. Moreover, the tools aimed to examine the indirect

²¹ Ibid, page 12

²² Ibid, page 3

²³ ISRAEL'S POLICIES VIOLATE RIGHT TO HOUSING AND NEED URGENT REVISION – UN INDEPENDENT RIGHTS EXPERT <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-199086/>

effect of patriarchy, including the denial of women's inheritance rights and restrictions on movement, in addition to examining the impact of the spread of the Covid-19 in early 2020.

Additionally, this study analyses the policies, programs, and services provided to women working in the agricultural sector and cooperatives by Palestinian civil society organizations, official institutions, and international organizations. This was done with the view of identifying the gaps in each institution in terms of coordination, financing, budget monitoring, etc., and finally develop a set of recommendations addressing all relevant stakeholders in an attempt to enhance rural women's access to their economic rights on the basis of citizenship rights, with the aim of eventually enhancing women's social status and their participation in decision making in the public and private spheres.



The Israeli occupation has been systematically and strategically targeting the agricultural and cooperative sectors due to their importance to the Palestinian national economy and Palestinians' presence on their land. This has been the case since the 1967 occupation and what remained of historic Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza), comprising 22% of its total area²⁴; since then the occupations overt and covert policy, has been to control the largest area of land with the least number of Palestinians possible. A number of methods and strategies are employed to this end, including settlement expansion, annexation threats, confiscation of land, forced displacement policies linked to creating a coercive environment, including demolitions of houses and structures, settler attacks with full Israeli military protection, mobility and movement restrictions, and restrictions on production and marketing of goods locally and internationally under flimsy pretenses as a means of increasing Palestinian dependency on the Israeli economy, and the control of natural resources and production inputs (including labour, seeds and seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides, greenhouses and other forms of protective structures, electricity, heavy machinery and equipment, packaging, delivery²⁵, storage, and marketing.) It is worth noting that uninterrupted access to high-quality and affordable production inputs is a crucial factor to obtain profitable and quality agricultural products²⁶.

In accordance with the Oslo II agreement signed in 1995, the West Bank was divided into three administrative areas (see figure 1). Area "A", comprising 17.2% of the total land of the West Bank, Area "B" comprising 23.8% of the total West Bank land, and area "C", comprising 60% of the land, which are the most fertile lands²⁷ with an abundance of natural resources. Area "C" is inhabited by at least 150 thousand Palestinians²⁸ living in 532 localities.²⁹ All areas classified as "C" lie outside of Palestinian cities and towns, and thus most of the agricultural lands fall within this category.

²⁴ Negotiations Affairs Department, Borders (Palestinian Liberation Organization), <
<https://www.nad.ps/en/our-position/borders>>

²⁵ 15 ABC Consulting, Policies Regulating Agricultural Inputs in the West Bank (Palestinian Farmers' Union (PFU).2018)
<<https://www.pafu.ps/uploads/articles/99d0aec51e1e36801603d22815241065.pdf>> p.5.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), C Areas, <
<http://www.passia.org/maps/view/75>>

²⁸ Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *West Bank Area "C": Key Humanitarian Concerns* (OCHA, 2016) <https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/area_c_key_humanitarian_concerns.pdf>/.</p></div>

²⁹ The World Bank (n 19 (2).

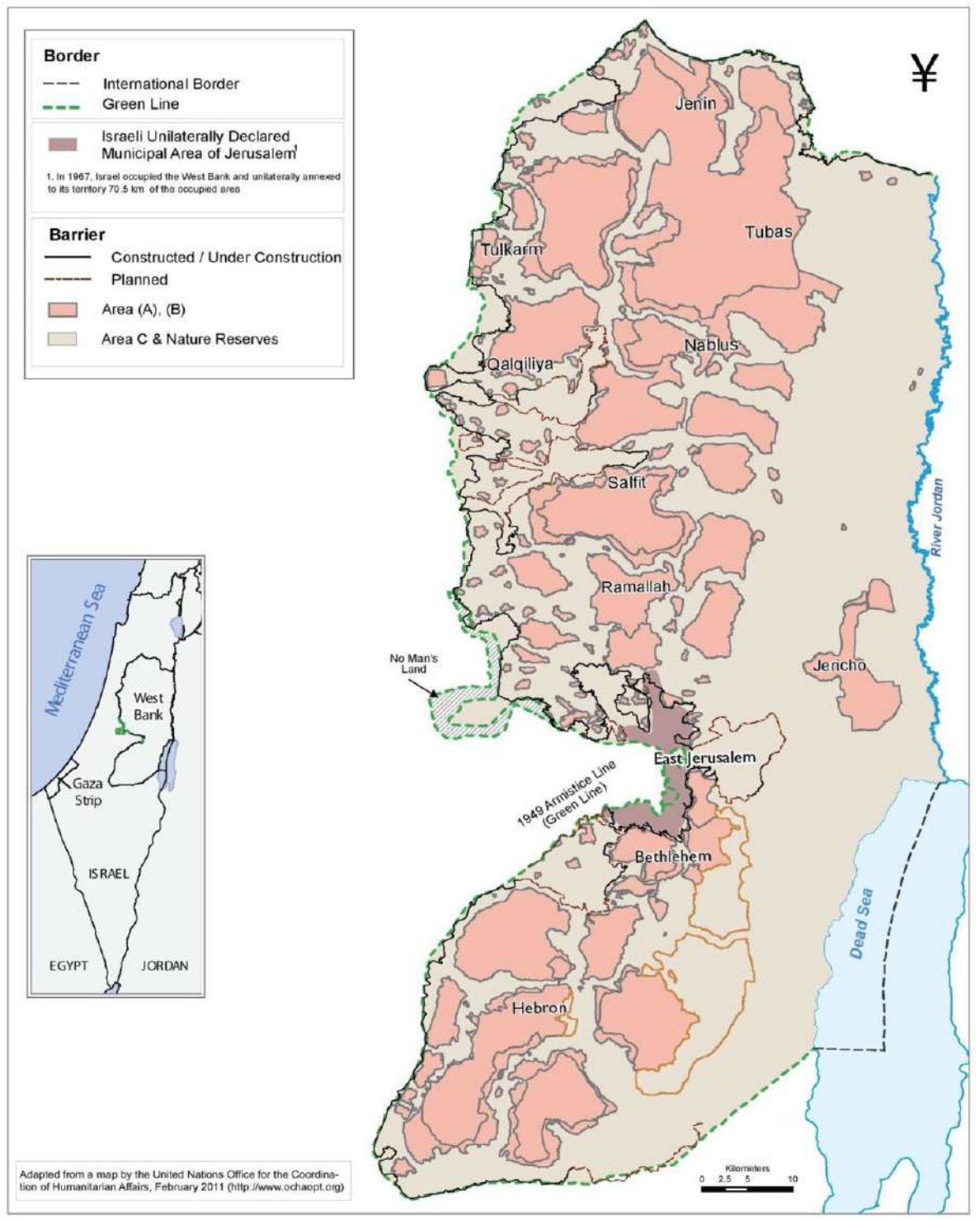


Figure 1: The administrative division of the lands of the West Bank ³⁰

This part of the research paper will tackle the impact of the occupation forces policies on rural women's access to their economic rights with special emphasis on women's access to land, water and other resources related to all the production stages of agriculture, in addition to the challenges linked to food processing including: production, packaging, storage and marketing to local and international markets.

³⁰ PASSIA (n 17).

Pre and Post- production Stages

Restrictions on Access to and Control over Lands

The Israeli occupation consistently restricts access to and control over lands, negatively impacting the quality of lands and violating the rights of Palestinian landowners. Thus, this section addresses land confiscation under Israeli annexation policies, including land theft in order to expand the illegal settlements and Apartheid Wall or ‘separation barrier’), designating lands as ‘closed military zones’, natural reservations, and dumping garbage and wastewater on agricultural areas.

60% of the West Bank lands (classified as areas “C”) are completely under Israeli military and civil control; with the exception of those in East Jerusalem. There are over 124 settlements and 100 military outposts in the West Bank³¹, excluding Jerusalem (Area J1), where, as of 2018, 442,393 settlers reside.³² The settlements are constructed on and control 9.3% of the West Bank lands. This percentage increases to 40% if the network of settlers’ roads and the access to lands restrictions imposed on Palestinians are taken into consideration.³³ It is worth noting that the West Bank areas controlled by settlers totaled 542 km² by the end of 2019, which is about 10% of the total of its lands.³⁴ On the other hand, another 10% of the West Bank lands were isolated by means of the annexation resulting from the expansion of the Apartheid Wall and the green line. This has impacted more than 219 localities in addition to the confiscation of 18% of the West Bank lands for military bases and trainings.³⁵ The confiscation and demolition of Palestinian homes and lands has only escalated during the Covid-19 pandemic; the period from March to August 2020 saw the demolition or confiscation of 389 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, on average, 65 per month, the highest average destruction rate in four years.³⁶ The head of the Palestinian Authority’s Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission (CWRC) noted that the exponential increase of demolitions and the creation of new illegal Israeli settlements has been exploiting the PA emergency stay-home orders, with the Israeli military carrying out home demolitions and serving eviction notices while people were under strict instructions to remain inside, “which reflects the moral dimension of the Israeli

³¹ Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy- MIFTAH, *Settlements Factsheet* (MIFTAH, 2018) <<http://miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=26529&CategoryId=4>>

³² Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/SETT-TimeSeries-E-2018.html>

³³ PASSIA (n 17).

³⁴ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Ola Awad, Director, reviews the conditions of the Palestinian people via statistical figures and findings on the 72nd annual commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba, (the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020) <<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3734>>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Unlawful demolitions in the West Bank spike during COVID-19

Statement by Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/unlawful-demolitions-west-bank-spike-during-covid-19>

occupation, in which the greatest number of demolitions in recent months has occurred in the past two weeks.”³⁷

The impact of these policies are felt in the Makhroun area in Beit Jala which has had its lands confiscated due to its proximity to Jerusalem³⁸, as well as in the Zbeidat village in the Jordanian Valley near the Jordanian borders, which has had %90 of its lands confiscated for the purpose of expanding the Argman settlement under the pretense that it is too near the security separation fence at the borders with Jordan. This forced the farmers to rent their confiscated lands for around ILS 1,000/ year for each dunum (equivalent to around 300 USD), or to work as wage earners in the settlement.³⁹ This is part of a concerning pattern, whereby in 2014 %63.8 of women in the Jordan Valley reported that their lands and fruits have been confiscated.⁴⁰

Access to land is further related to its takeover by settlers and the establishment of outposts with military support and backup. For example, settlers took over around 50 dunums of Al-Ouja village lands in the Jordan Valley, the impact of which is still felt in the decades since. Furthermore, the deteriorated economic conditions compelled some to sell their lands as was the case in Al-Ouja village, in which agricultural lands decreased from 35 thousand to 3,500 dunums.⁴¹

For more than five decades, the occupation army has provided protection for the ever-expanding system of roads, pumps and production inputs to allow settlers to comfortably plant date trees and raise cattle.⁴²

Conversely, availability of land is not only related to its physical presence but also to its suitability for agriculture. For instance, the policies and practices of Israeli settlement sewage and wastewater dumping⁴³ and releasing wild pigs into Palestinian cultivated agricultural lands⁴⁴ is deeply detrimental to the quality of the soil and the ability to invest in them as productive lands, the impact of which is felt across multiple planting seasons.

Farmers accessing their lands that lie behind the Apartheid Wall or in settlement “buffer zones” is limited to certain individuals and families as their IDs are registered with

³⁷ PA Panel Chief: Israel Using COVID-19 as Expansionist Cover <https://themedialine.org/by-region/pa-panel-chief-israel-using-covid-19-as-expansionist-cover/>

³⁸ An interview with Ilham Abu Al-Rub, Manager of the Cooperative Work Agency in Bethlehem Governorate, September 2020, 21.

³⁹ An interview with Hala Abdel-Kareem Zbeidat, Director of Zbeidat Women’s Cooperative Association and a Farmer, September 27, 2020.

⁴⁰ Hamdan, Ashraf and Barghouthi, Fida. 2015. Violations against women in the West Bank. The Palestinian Initiative for Promotion Global Dialogue and Democracy, MIFTAH. Ramallah, Palestine

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Focus Group with Women from Al-Ouja Village in the Jordan Valley, September 2020, 27.

⁴³ DEMONSTRATING THE HARMFUL EFFECTS CAUSED THROUGH THE ILLEGAL ISRAELI SETTLEMENT PRACTICE OF DUMPING WASTEWATER ONTO PALESTINIAN AGRICULTURAL LANDS <http://www.arij.org/latest-news/479-demonstrating-the-harmful-affects-caused-through-the-illegal-israeli-settlement-practice-of-dumping-wastewater-onto-palestinian-agricultural-lands.html>

⁴⁴ Israeli Settlers Release Wild Pigs on Palestinian Farms in WB <https://alray.ps/en/index.php?act=post&id=4050>

occupation authorities and checked each time they wish to access their own lands. In the case of Hussan and Wadi Fouqeen villages in Bethlehem area, a permit system was enforced on farmers who possessed documents that prove their ownership so that they can access their lands that lie beyond the Wall.⁴⁵ Land access is further restricted by imposed “hours of operation”; for example, in Al-Jiftlek village, hours farmers are allowed to access their lands within are limited from between 6:00 AM to 4:00 PM. This prevents many farmers from appropriately irrigating and taking care of their produce as, in many cases, periods during which water is available contradict with these hours.⁴⁶

In addition, the expansion policy and prevention of farmers to use bypass roads in many cases make it difficult for farmers to reach their lands in light of the lack of direct roads leading to the lands, the closure of main roads, or the prevention of vehicles from passing through. Farmers such as those who own lands near Road 60 in the Bethlehem area have to travel a long way to access these lands due to the restrictions in using certain routes.⁴⁷ Other examples include Irtas and Battir villages in the Bethlehem governorate⁴⁸, where the Apartheid Wall cuts seven kilometers deep into the Governorate to annex lands to the Etzion settlement. The wall takes over %77.3 of what was left of agricultural lands of the Western villages, including its water resources.⁴⁹ In the villages of Hussan, Al-Khader and Battir in the Bethlehem Governorate, flying military checkpoints are set up and roads are closed under various security pretexts, especially those related to religious occasions for the settlers. Occupation military forces intensify their presence during the olive picking season coupled with assaults by the settlers, soldiers and trained dogs against unarmed farmers.⁵⁰

All the above-mentioned policies and measures negatively affect the Palestinian inhabitants in rural areas especially in areas classified as “C”, but nonetheless have a disproportionate impact on rural women who work in both the agricultural and cooperative sectors. A study by the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD) revealed that %60.3 of women are not able to access their agricultural lands due to these policies; this is compounded by how patriarchal social and legal discriminations means that women are more likely to be pushed/force/manipulated to accept lands that are remote and closer to areas threatened by settlement activities.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (Irtas, Battir, Hussan, Al-Khader), September 21, 2020.

⁴⁶ Interview with Women Farmers from Al-Jiftlek Village in the Jordan Valley, September 2020 ,27.

⁴⁷ Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Negotiations Affairs Department, Strangling Bethlehem, Foreclosing Peace,(Palestinian Liberation Organization), <<https://www.nad.ps/ar/publication-resources/factsheets/%D%8AE%D%86%9D82%9-%D%8A%8D8%9A%D%8AA-%D%84%9D%8AD%D%85%9D8%8C-%D%8A%7D%8B%9D%8A%7D%82%9D%8A9-%D%8A%7D%84%9D%8B%3D%84%9D%8A%7D85%9>>

⁵⁰ A women’s focus Group from the western villages of Bethlehem governorate, (n.29).

⁵¹ Palestinian Women Working Society for Development, Palestinian Women; “In-depth Assessment of Women’s Access to and Ownership of Land and Productive Resources in the occupied Palestinian territory”. (Palestinian Women Working Society for Development,2020), < <https://pwwsd.org/single-library/30/en>>.

Restrictions on Water

Since the occupation of the West Bank on June 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, the occupation state adopted a systematic policy to deprive Palestinians from access to water, a principal agricultural input, as part and parcel of its policies of forced displacement. Occupation authorities installed water meters on irrigation wells to calculate the annual consumption amount for each Palestinian agricultural well. Based on this procedure, the occupation authorities determine the annual share of Palestinian water consumption according to the amount that was withdrawn during the first year.⁵²

The Jordan River system satisfies about 50% of Israel's (and Jordan's) water demand; however Palestinian's share in the River's water cannot be used because they have no access to the Jordan River due to military closure by the Israelis since 1967.⁵³ Additionally, on August 1967, military rule 92 was issued, through which complete control over water in the occupied territory was extended alongside depriving any Palestinian from establishing, owning, or managing any water structure without acquiring necessary and rarely granted permits in addition to preventing the extraction of groundwater and confiscating many of those sources, all of which decimated West bank citrus production⁵⁴ In 1982, the occupying power placed the entire water supply system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the control of Mekorot, the Israeli water supply company.⁵⁵

There are three aquifers in the West Bank; the western aquifer, the eastern aquifer and the north-eastern aquifer. These aquifers are either entirely located in area "C" or are joint with the occupation state (western and north east aquifer),⁵⁶ as seen in the map in figure 2. In the Oslo II Accords, signed in 1995, the quantity of water for settlers and for Palestinians was determined from the three main aquifers, as the following:⁵⁷

Aquifer	Settler Share (million m ³)	Palestinian Share (million m ³)
Western Aquifer	340	22
Eastern Aquifer	40	78 +54 to be developed
North-Eastern Aquifer	103	42

⁵² PASSIA, Palestinian Water Management- Policies and Pitfalls (PASSIA, 2019) <http://passia.org/media/filer_public/02/b02/3b3ffdc-21c8-4d05-860d-02e15f987ad4/water2019_final8thoct5.pdf> 4.

⁵³ The Intensifying Water Crisis in Palestine

https://www.arij.org/files/admin/The_Intensifying_Water_Crisis_in_Palestine.pdf P.7

⁵⁴ Virginia Tilley, *Beyond Occupation: Apartheid, Colonialism and International Law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Pluto Press, 97, (2012).

⁵⁵ PASSIA (n 36).

⁵⁶ World Bank (n 19 (2.

⁵⁷ PASSIA (n 36).

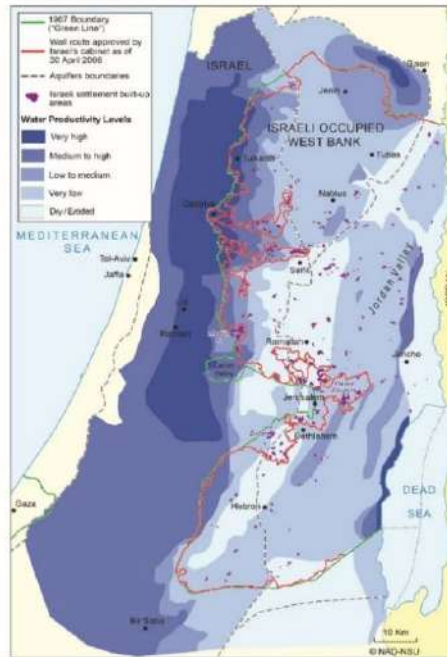


Figure 2: Location and Concentration of the Three Aquifers⁵⁸

Despite the doubling of the number of Palestinians since 1995, the water share has remained the same, such that Palestinian access to water has actually decreased since 1995, with %13 of the water allocated to Palestinians, compared with %87 for Israelis. Another indicator reflecting the racist discriminatory nature of occupation policies is the reality of the individual share. For Palestinians it stands at 73 liters/ day, despite the World Health Organization's recommendation of 100 liters/ day as a minimum, compared to the Israeli share, which stands at 240-300 liters/ day.⁵⁹ Furthermore, within the framework of the control of the occupation on the quantity of water that is extracted by Palestinians, out of an available 138.5 million m³ of water allocations in 2011, Palestinians only extracted 87 million m³.⁶⁰ Additionally, Mekorot supplies %54 of the total quantity of water that is consumed by Palestinians, with this amount dropping between 15-%25 in the summer to meet the needs and wants of Israeli settlers,⁶¹ such as the abundance of private pools. According to a study conducted by the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ), a total of 885 swimming pools were detected in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.⁶² Overall, it is crucial to note that despite the technical authority of the Palestinian Water Authority on the theoretical level, the ultimate control over the supply and shares of water lie in the hands of the occupation authorities,⁶³ and the construction of wells or building infrastructure to

⁵⁸ Negotiations Affairs Department, *Water Productivity of the Mountain Aquifers* (NAD, 2016) <<https://www.nad.ps/en/publication-resources/maps/water-productivity-mountain-aquifers>>

⁵⁹ Aljazeera, *Israel: Water as a Tool to Dominate Palestinians* (Aljazeera, 2016) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/23/6/2016/israel-water-as-a-tool-to-dominate-palestinians>>

⁶⁰ World Bank (n 2).

⁶¹ Tilley (n 98 (37).

⁶² The occupied Palestinian territory runs dry as Israeli Settlements lavish water on swimming pools <http://poica.org/08/2016/the-occupied-palestinian-territory-runs-dry-as-israeli-settlements-lavish-water-on-swimming-pools/>

⁶³ Ibid 99.

transport water and treat wastewater and reuse it in areas classified "C" requires approval from the Israeli military command and the joint water committee.⁶⁴

The occupation is waging a sustained attack on the Palestinian water infrastructure in two dimensions. The first dimension is represented in sustaining direct and extensive damage caused by large-scale military operations, while the second dimension pertains to causing long-term damage through preventing the repair, maintenance, or development of water infrastructure.⁶⁵ In the West Bank, this is clearly seen in the case of the Apartheid Wall, such that 70% of the water in the western aquifer is collected in the area situated between the Wall and the Green Line; this is clear evidence that the design of the track and the construction of the Wall was done to annex the largest percentage of Palestinian water sources, permanently. The impact of the Wall is summarized in depriving Palestinians from accessing 95% of water sources (630 m³ from an original 670 m³ annually), the destruction of 404 wells and 1,327 underground tanks, in addition to preventing 136 well owners from accessing 44.1 m³ water annually. The wall has also isolated 46 streams that provide 23 million m³ of water annually, as well as 906 dunums of underground water, which represents 99% of underground water in the West Bank.⁶⁶ In the Gaza Strip, Riyadh Jneineh, the Director of the Hydrology Group in Gaza emphasized that the occupation authorities hinder the entry of equipment, machinery and spare parts that are necessary for water structures and treatment plants.⁶⁷

Other measures to prevent Palestinian access to water include changing the course of the stream by building dams or inserting a pump, in addition to carrying out arbitrary measures that include the placement of checkpoints. The occupation also limits the number of hours of water availability similar to its restriction of hours permissible for farmers to access their own land, all of which highly impacts the quantity and quality of the agricultural produce.

In Al-Khader village, a female farmer who participated in the research was prevented from digging a well in the rock using modern machinery and equipment, forcing her to dig the well manually which of course was far more exhausting and time-consuming. Occupation authorities follow strict procedures to implement these restrictive rules, such as through continuous inspection of the digging of wells to determine the depth of the aquifers. According to Rahal Rahal with Oxfam, these procedures amount to demolishing wells in cases of "illegal" drilling, as was the case in the digging of a well for the benefit of Bedouin communities in the Tubas area.⁶⁸ In addition, farmer Lubna from Al-Ouja village pointed out that "the Israeli Environmental Authority continuously comes to inspect the aquifer and ensure that the permissible digging depth is not exceeded."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ World Bank (n 2).

⁶⁵ Mona Dajani, *Drying Palestine: Israel's Systemic Water War* (Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network, 2014) < https://al-shabaka.org/wp-content/uploads/01/2015/Dajani_PolicyBrief_En_Sep_2014.pdf > 2.

⁶⁶ Economic and Social Council, *Economic and Social Repercussions of the Israeli Occupation on the Living Conditions of the Palestinian People in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan* (ECOSOC 2007) paragraph 40.

⁶⁷ إيمان أحمد، العجز والتلوث والاحتلال... ثلاثية تفاقم أزمة مياه غزة (العين الإخبارية، 2019) <https://al-ain.com/article/water->> <crisis-gaza-israel

⁶⁸ Interview with Rahhal Rahhal, Women Economic Empowerment Programme Coordinator in Oxfam, 28/09/2020.

⁶⁹ Focus group in Al-Ouja (n 27).

Restrictions of access to water is even more egregious in the Jordan Valley, as it has less natural water sources compared to the Bethlehem area, which is rich in water springs, streams, and a water source known as Solomon's Pools. The ripple effects of water restrictions in the Jordan Valley are further exacerbated by the area's significance as the 'food basket' of West Bank. Thus, the restricted access to water not only threatens Palestinian presence on the land, but by design it also compromises food security, and enhances Palestinian reliance on Israeli products. This is evident in the case of the aquifer in Al-Ouja village, which was dug in the period of the first Palestinian and was confiscated by Israeli occupation forces as part of the aforementioned land grab to expand the illegal Eitaf settlement. This confiscation highly restricted the village's water supply; the 'alternative' is to buy water back from the occupation at extortionate prices (ILS 2,000- 3,000 monthly⁷⁰), which is far above what the average Palestinian farmer can afford.

As a result, the village landowners were forced to mostly turn away from the water intensive crops they were known so much for, such as banana, watermelon, citrus, corn, barley, and seasonal fruits to instead rely more heavily on the planting of palm trees, which requires significantly lower amounts of water. The alternative is risking crop spoilage, as in Al-Jiftlik village last year, where lack of water led to the spoilage of 15 dunums of corn. The farmers then had to rely on the remainder of that season and the season after it just to cover the resulting debt.⁷¹ In contrast, as a member of the Al-Zbeidat village pointed out, settlers can afford to grow a variety of crops, including palms, grapes, medical herbs and peppers".⁷²

This severe restriction of water by the occupation and pollution of water by settlements impacts women in particular ways. As water close to wells is polluted, women must buy freshwater for drinking and cooking, which exhausts their frequently limited economic resources. The gendered impact of access to water is also illustrated by data, gathered by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) that examined the consequences of women's long-term exposure to polluted water. According to the collected testimonies and other research, there is a correlation between exposure to contaminated water and chronic diseases such as kidney failure. In order to receive medical treatment, women must visit the hospital multiple times per week, a process which is not only costly **but also restricts women's opportunities to work**. Some women need to be accompanied to these medical visits, often by women and girls of the family, which in turn can limit the access to work or education of these women and girls. As a young rural Palestinian woman interviewed by WCLAC stated, the women of her village are particularly impacted by these water shortages as they are the ones responsible 'for cleaning the house, for planting, and for caring for the livestock'⁷³.

Restrictions on Other Production Inputs

The concept of production inputs refers to all necessary resources and materials for production, including land, water, labor, seeds and seedlings, fertilizers, greenhouses and other protective structures, electricity, heavy equipment and machinery,

⁷⁰ Focus group in Al-Ouja (n 27).

⁷¹ Interview with women farmers from Al-Jiftlik village (n 30).

⁷² Interview with Hala Zbeidat (n 26).

⁷³ The Gendered Impact of Environmental Violations and Water Occupation in the Palestinian Territories <https://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/the-gendered-impact-of-environmental-violations-and-water-occupation-in-the-palestinian-territories/>

The occupation restricts the utilization of numerous vital chemical materials as agricultural inputs, including fertilizers and pesticides, under the flimsy pretext of “dual use” materials, or restricts the quantity and concentration of these materials. These restrictions were further tightened in 2002 and another time in 2008.⁷⁴ Within this framework, multiple types of fertilizers and chemicals were prohibited, including ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate, urea, urea nitrate, fertilizers containing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium at 27-10-27 concentration, fertilizers containing nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium at 20-20-20 concentration, and any fertilizers containing ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate and urea. Regarding pesticides, the usage of Lannate and Endosulfan was also prohibited.⁷⁵ The absence of these basic materials leads farmers to use natural fertilizers or to use fertilizers at a much lower concentration, such as the replacement of the solid 20-20-20 nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium fertilizer with the 13-13-13 much lighter liquid version.⁷⁶ Nadia, a farmer from Irtas village in the Bethlehem governorate points out that “urea and sulfate fertilizers are the best types of fertilizers for grapes, tomatoes and cucumbers, as they increase the quality of the crops and fight diseases”.⁷⁷ Another female farmer participating in the study who wished to remain anonymous added that that “the prohibition on the use of necessary fertilizers for tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, wheat, corn and grapes, or the use of permissible fertilizers that comes at a lower concentration than necessary, leads to a decline in the quality of the product”.⁷⁸ Chemical products, such as sulfate power and liquid, that are necessary to fight diseases among a variety of crops, especially grapes, are prohibited,⁷⁹ under the pretext of dual use.⁸⁰

The 2008 restrictions also extended to include raw materials for industry, steel pipes, lathes and milling machines, optical equipment and navigation aids.⁸¹

Based on the Paris Economic Protocol which was signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the occupation state in 1994, occupation authorities impose custom duties and tariffs on all products and agricultural inputs ranging from 100 to 350%, leading to a substantial increase in the cost of production.⁸² As a result, the cost of fertilizers and pesticides constitutes the largest percentage of the total cost of agricultural production inputs and stands at %21 and %20 respectively.⁸³ Moreover, 2015 UN estimates indicate that agricultural productivity dropped by %20 to %33 since the imposition of restrictions on the import of fertilizers, and particularly between 2002 and 2008.⁸⁴ The direct cost that is associated with the high cost of alternative agricultural input and the indirect cost that pertains to the decrease in agricultural

⁷⁴ Palestinian Farmers Union (n 10 (15).

⁷⁵ Ibid 28.

⁷⁶ United Nations, The Besieged Palestinian Agricultural Sector (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2015) <https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2015d1_en.pdf> 22.

⁷⁷ Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29).

⁷⁸ Focus group in Al-Ouja (n 27), Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ PFU (n 24 (15).

⁸¹ UNCTAD (n 21 (60).

⁸² PFU (n 8 (15).

⁸³ Ibid 5.

⁸⁴ UNCTAD (n 5 (60).

production activity in light of the punitive “dual-use” policy on the agricultural cost is estimated at USD 142 million annually.⁸⁵

Additionally, the General Director of Policy and Planning in the Ministry of Agriculture confirmed that occupation authorities hinder and procrastinate the clearance of resources from harbors, leading to the imposition of daily floor charges for every “delayed” day. This creates an uncondusive environment for investment, and leads to an increased cost for investors, which increases the price for consumers.⁸⁶

Ultimately, despite the presence of initiatives to produce agricultural inputs locally, such as the initiative by six companies to produce organic fertilizer,⁸⁷ many of the production inputs, such as seeds, seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides are imported from abroad. In light of the absence of Palestinian sovereignty and the complete control of the Israeli occupation over borders and crossing points, the system of the occupation controls the availability of all agricultural inputs and can stop their entry at any given moment.⁸⁸

Post Production Stage

The challenges posed by the occupation’s policies and procedures in the post production phase comes at the levels of packaging, storage and marketing. Additionally, the limited access of women farmers and women in cooperatives in area “C” to financial resources from banks and lending institutions, in light of the scarce guarantees and high risks associated with occupation policies including the restrictive bureaucracy of the permit system, leads to limited financial resources left to invest in the post-production phase, including in packaging and storage, both of which affect the shelf life of the product.⁸⁹ As for packaging, the high cost of packaging material and absence of quality in packaging in light of the limited marketing opportunities abroad, leads to a lack of investment in this area.

With respect to storage, the cost of storage equipment, including refrigerators and storage space, that meet the minimum level of necessary quality standards in terms of humidity, temperature, and airing is quite high. This, coupled with the control of the occupation of the necessary infrastructure for storage equipment, including electricity, (whereby one third of the residents are connected to the regional electricity company and two thirds obtain electricity through generators and solar energy),⁹⁰ increases the risks associated with investing in proper storage.

All of this leads to a decrease in the quality and an increase in the cost of the Palestinian product, which poses challenges to marketing. The women of the Jordan Valley who participated in research groups who primarily work in seasonal agriculture (such as cucumbers, tomatoes, *molokhia*, and beans) attested to this, sharing that selling the product at ‘peak time’ (that is, when the product is widely available), from all sellers, including from the Israeli settlements, large farmers and companies, forces them to accept a financial return that is much less

⁸⁵ Ibid 9.

⁸⁶ Interview with Hassan Al-Ashqar, Director General of Planning and Policies in Ministry of Agriculture, 22/09/2020.

⁸⁷ Ibid 12.

⁸⁸ Interview with Hala Zbeidat (n 26).

⁸⁹ FAO (n 70 (1).

⁹⁰ Interview with Fouad Khourmeh, Nazih Arfan and Fida’ Halabi, Coopertive Work Agency, September 28, 2020.

than feasible as their competitors' products are cheaper and higher-quality, often forcing them to refrain from repeating the experience.⁹¹

Per article eight, paragraph one of the Paris Economic Protocol, there should be the "free transfer of agricultural products without imposition of custom duties and tariffs between the two sides in the field of agriculture". Additionally, paragraph ten of the same article indicates that "agricultural produce of each side will freely move and without restrictions to the markets of the other side, with a temporary exception for sales of certain commodities from one side to the other side, provided that these restrictions are to be lifted by 1998". Furthermore, paragraph eleven of the same article provides for the right of Palestinians to export their agricultural products to external markets without restrictions, on the basis of Certificates of Origin that are issued by the Palestinian Authority. However, in practice, the occupation state hinders the passage of products under flimsy security pretexts, which leads to the spoilage of the agricultural produce.⁹²

Paragraph twelve of the same article provides for "preventing the import of agricultural products from a third party if it affects the interests of the other party's farmers." However, the occupation imports vegetables and fruits from Jordan, for example, which incurs serious harm on the profits small Palestinian farmers, most of which are women.⁹³ Farmer Yusra from Al-Ouja attests to this reality, stating that "the Palestinian market is drowned by products that are similar to those that we produce, such as the import of tomatoes from Jordan, which has highly weakened our competitive capacity in the market."⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Israeli products drown the Palestinian market freely and without restrictions. In some cases, Israeli occupation authorities heavily inspect Palestinian products before their entry, which leads to long waiting hours on checkpoints and which could lead to the spoilage of the produce before reaching the Israeli market or markets abroad.⁹⁵ In Gaza, the siege imposed on the Strip also plays a role in produce spoilage, which has led to the diminished possibilities to export flowers and strawberries from the Gaza Strip to Europe.⁹⁶

The Compound Impact of Occupation Policies

Overall, Palestinian agricultural businesses within the private sector face numerous challenges heretofore detailed in this study, including the absence of production capacity to profitably compete at the international level, the absence of trade exchange opportunities on the local and international levels, the high cost of raw materials, the high export fees and the unfair competition in the local market in light of the low cost Israeli products, and the lack of national protection for women's products.⁹⁷

While the occupation's policies systematically target the entirety of the agricultural sector, they also have a disproportionate impact on women within that sector compounding the effects of traditional gender roles which already limit the access of

⁹¹ Focus group in Al-Oja (n 27)

⁹² هالة الشعيبي، ورقة عمل حول بروتوكول باريس الاقتصادي: مراجعة الواقع التطبيقي (معهد أبحاث السياسات الاقتصادية (ماس)، 2013). [http://www.>](http://www.mas.ps/files/server/20142210143316.pdf)

صفحة 53.

⁹³ Ibid 34.

⁹⁴ Focus group in Al-Oja (n 27)

⁹⁵ MAS (n 31 (76).

⁹⁶ آفاق البيئة والتنمية، وداعاً للزهور وللفرولة في غزة وأهلًا بالخضروات: الحصار والاحتلال وتوقف الدعم الأجنبي سبب خسائر المزارعين الفادحة (آفاق البيئة والتنمية، مركز العمل التنموي معاً، 2015) <<https://www.maan-ctr.org/magazine/article/655>>

⁹⁷ FAO (n 15 (1).

Palestinian women to work and economic empowerment opportunities. The director of the women-majority Al-Khader Agricultural Cooperative, which specializes in grape products and whose members contributed a personal sum to establish the cooperative, said:

*“despite receiving support from a Palestinian civil society organization to develop all aspects of the production, including training in a European country, they were still unable to expand their business. This was due in part to the community’s lack of belief in their capabilities as women, which forced them to expand the membership of the cooperative, add men, and hand over the responsibility of squeezing grapes to a man in order to bring customers to the cooperative and market its products. This situation reflects the patriarchal mentality of the society that perceives women’s labor as a family need rather than a human right and a boon to society, and that women’s work in the food sector is coupled with her familial duties and responsibilities”.*⁹⁸

The limited growth of the agricultural sector, coupled with the patriarchal societal mentality reinforces women’s subordination to men, negatively impacting equality and women’s independence and agency.⁹⁹ This is concurrent with the threat of violence in Palestine at the hands of soldiers and settlers, which leads to a higher degree of control of women’s movement by their family members. Consequently, women prefer to work in jobs inside the house or that are close to their place of residency, instead of seeking conventional and unconventional labor work, which significantly decreases their employment opportunities.¹⁰⁰ This is reflected in the agricultural sector in cases where the land is located far away.

The vast majority of the participants in the study indicated that:

*“all the aforementioned factors and obstacles have a disproportionate impact on women farmers and women working in cooperatives”.*¹⁰¹

These restrictions led to an increase in the production costs on women and the decrease of the quality of the product. They have also limited the development and expansion of women’s agricultural projects. For example, women from Al-Ouja village in the Jordan Valley pointed out:

*“The cost of production inputs of palms, including water and fertilizers, is very high. This, coupled with the prohibition on the utilization of fertilizers of the necessary concentration, led to an increase in the production cost and a decline in the quality of the product, compared with those of the nearby settlement that is built on the lands of Al-Ouja. This has decreased the competitive capacity of the Palestinian product, which coincides with drowning the Palestinian market with Israeli and settlement products.”*¹⁰²

This system, in its entirety, leads women to refrain from working in the agricultural and cooperatives sectors as producers and as a productive sector. It has also opened the door to the possibility of going to work inside the settlements under the daily-labor system and poor working conditions that do not fulfill the standards of decent work and in the absence of legal protection systems. The conducted interviews demonstrated this,

⁹⁸ Interview with Adla Taha, Director of Al-Khader Cooperative Association, 09.2020/21.

⁹⁹ Focus group in Al-Oja (n 27), Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29).

¹⁰⁰ FAO (n 1) 15.

¹⁰¹ UNCTAD (n 5 (60.

¹⁰² Focus group in Al-Oja (n 27)

such that the participants in the study indicated that there is a large number of women, including older women, who work during the palms season in settlements from 4:30 am until 2:00 pm, in exchange for ILS 90-100/ day, which is equivalent to USD 26.5- 29/ day. It is important to note that this amount is less than what their male counterparts receive. Furthermore, women do not enjoy minimal labor rights, including health insurance, such that if a woman sustains an injury during work, she is responsible for treating herself and she is not paid for the days that she did not work.¹⁰³ Whereas women are the ones who work in settlements in some areas, such as the village of Al-Zbeidat, this does not exempt them from continuing to take on the household and caring burdens still not fully recognized as valuable materially and otherwise.¹⁰⁴

The following are two case of the impact of the occupation on the access of rural women working in agriculture and cooperatives sectors to their economic rights.

Case Study 1: Women from Irtas Village in Bethlehem Governorate

Efrat settlement is built on 1,700 dunums of land that was confiscated from Irtas and Al-Khader villages. The settlement is located within the “Gush Etzion” settlement bloc and is served by bypass road 60, which crosses Palestine from south to north and passes through the cities of the West Bank.

Nadia and Najat Asad are two sisters from Irtas village and who own 16 dunums in the area of “*Wadi Al-Biyar*”, located in the area between the settlement of Efrat and Route 60, which is considered a security zone. The sisters and their families are forced to walk long distances alongside road 60 before reaching their land, even though their land is very close to the street. This is due to the barriers on the side of the street that prevents them from entering their land directly. These barriers also hinder Nadia, Najat and their families from delivering necessary equipment to care for the land, as well as easily transporting their produce or entering necessary products to spray the produce under “security” pretenses.

The land is planted with grapes and needs continuous follow-up in terms of trimming, spraying, and harvesting the produce, in addition to irrigating the leaves during specific times in the summer. However, in light of the difficulties in reaching the land, coupled with farmers’ blocked access to necessary materials and equipment to improve the produce, and the risks that face farmers due to Israeli settlers and soldiers’ violence, this has rendered visits infrequent, all of which impact the quality and quantity of the produce and led to a substantial increase in its cost.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Interview with Hala Zbeidat (n 26).

¹⁰⁴ Focus group in Al-Oja (n 27)

¹⁰⁵ Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29).



Figure 3: Efrat Settlement and Road 60, located on the lands of Irtas and Al-Khader villages.¹⁰⁶

Case Study 2: Al-Jiftlik Cooperative Association for Food Production in the Jordan Valley and Storage and Marketing Challenges

A group of women opened a cooperative association comprising of 22 members in Al-Jiftlik village in the Jordan Valley. Each member contributed the establishment fees and a facility was rented in the village. The cooperative became one of the most successful cooperative associations in food production, particularly in all types of pickles and *Makdous*.

However, the association had to vacate the premises due to circumstances that are beyond their control and that are associated with the owner of the premises, and bought a facility in Al-Jiftlik instead. However, the facility, being located in close proximity to an Israeli military point, was subjected to interference, harassment, and assaults by soldiers, which led to a deterioration in the production, as well as storage and marketing capacities.

In the end, the activity and effectiveness of the association declined. Nonetheless, the women in the cooperative are still exploring alternative solutions to revive the association, as it had a significant impact in empowering them economically and socially.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ < <https://akkanet.net/Article.php?ID=72705> > موقع عكا نت

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Basima Barahmeh, Manager of Cooperative Work Agency in Jericho and the Jordan Valley, 28/09/2020.

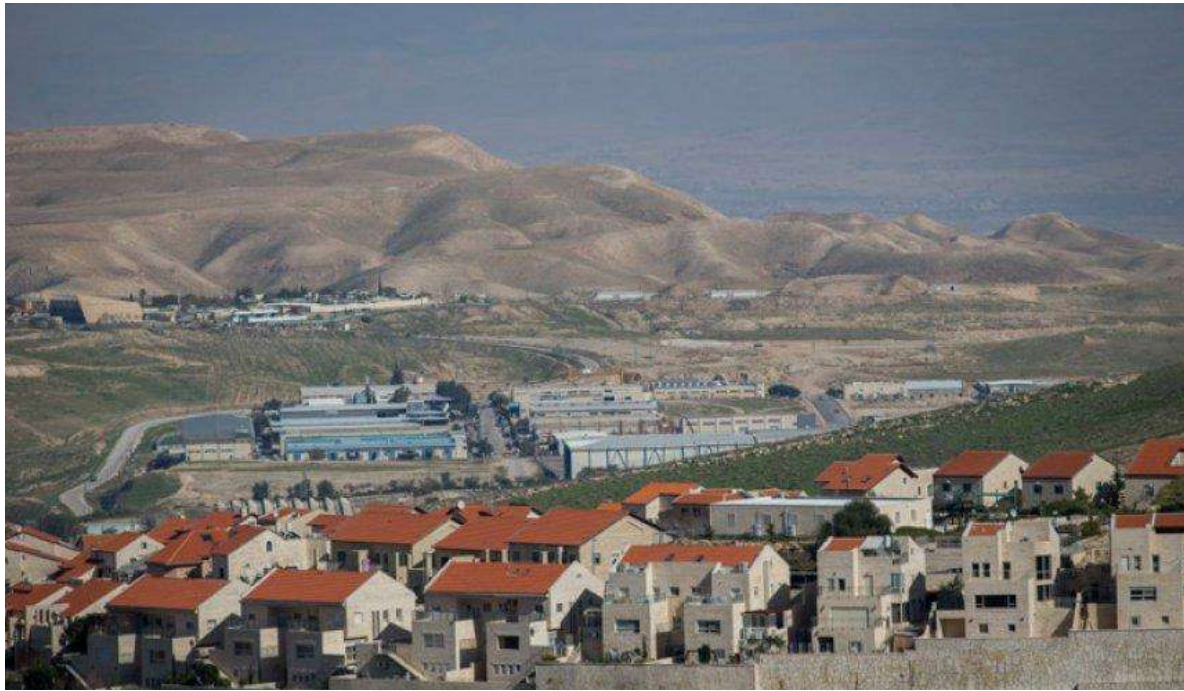


Figure 4: Givat Eden Settlement in the Jordan Valley close to Al-Jiftlik Village.¹⁰⁸

The Impact of Covid-19 on Women Working in the Agricultural and Cooperative Sectors

The above mentioned challenges and impacts on Palestinian women farmers have multiplied in light of the spread of the Covid-19 and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in the Palestinian territory. The spread of the pandemic has affected %95 of Palestinian women micro, small and medium enterprises negatively,¹⁰⁹ in addition to the closure of %27 of the micro, small and medium enterprises owned by women.¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that the sectors most affected among the micro and medium entrepreneurship enterprises led by women in Palestine were the food production sector, which bears %26 of the damage¹¹¹.

This worsened pre-existing economic conditions, whereby %32.7 of the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and %68.5 of the residents of the Gaza Strip were suffering from food insecurity before the pandemic. The income of %42 of Palestinian families decreased by half or more due to the spread of Covid-19, coupled with the fact that 61% of families feel anxious due to food insecurity.¹¹² The Ministry of Social Development

¹⁰⁸ قناة العالم <https://www.alalamtv.net/news/3234061/%D%85%9D%8AE%D%8B%7D%8B7-%D%8A%5D%8B%3D%8B%1D%8A%7D%8A%6D8%9A%D%84%9D8%9A-%D%84%9D%8A%5D%82%9D%8A%7D%85%9D%8A9-3-%D%85%9D%8B%3D%8AA%D%88%9D%8B%7D%86%9D%8A%7D%8AA-%D%81%9D8%9A-<D%8A%7D%84%9D%8A%3D%8BA%D%88%9D%8A%7D%8B1

¹⁰⁹ UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine* (UN Women 21 (2020).

¹¹⁰ OECD, *Covid-19 Crisis in the MENA Region: Impact on Gender Equality and Policy Responses* (OECD, 7 (2020).

¹¹¹ UN Women (n 93).

¹¹² الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني، الإحصاء الفلسطيني يعلن نتائج مسح أثر جائحة كوفيد 19 (كورونا) على الظروف الاجتماعية والاقتصادية للأسر الفلسطينية (آذار-أيار)، 2020. (الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني، 2020).

also publicized its expectation that the number of poor families will increase by at least 100,000 families.¹¹³ Moreover, the pandemic has affected the status of women farmers and women workers in settlements on a number of levels, as follows:

- 1) The impact of the pandemic was mainly on the level of marketing of crops and products, in light of the restriction on freedom of movement. The pandemic led to a deterioration in the economic situation, which was accompanied by a contraction in the economic cycle due to low liquidity which led to an increase in the accumulated debts of operating expenses, foremost of which are headquarters wages and restricting financial resources to purchase production inputs. Lockdown also led to a decrease in demand, which in return caused crop damage and farmers were obligated to sell it for a low prices which was not economically feasible. For example, a kilo of dates in the village of Al-Ouja was sold for ILS 35 before the outbreak of the pandemic. This decreased to ILS 10 per kilo after the pandemic. Likewise the selling prices of vegetables decreased considerably. Food processing cooperatives were affected more as the closure resulted in ¹¹⁴ spoilage of raw materials.
- 2) The pandemic affected people's purchasing power in light of the payment of half salaries by the private employers and/or reduced working hours, in addition to the suspension of work in settlements. For example, the income of a female participant in the village of Al-Ouja, who works in a factory for packing dates, decreased from ILS 2,000 per month to ILS 700 per month.¹¹⁵
- 3) The spread of the pandemic reinforced stereotypical social roles, as %68 of the women participating in a survey by the Arab World for Research and Development confirmed that the burden of housework increased under lockdown.
- 4) Since national measures were introduced in response to COVID-19, many informally employed women were dismissed from their jobs and women running small income-generating projects lost their main source of income¹¹⁶. Around %11 of Palestinian households are headed by women¹¹⁷ and they are particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty when income is lost.

In addition to the above regarding women farmers, the impact of Covid-19 on women working in cooperatives has taken special forms, as follows¹¹⁸:

- 1) Financial and Administrative Issues: the inability of members to pay the cooperative's financial dues, in addition to the inability of the members to meet and conduct organizational matters. This was also confirmed by Adla, the head of Al-Khader Cooperative, as the cooperative recently resumed its work after a long period of closure.

¹¹³ مكتب تنسيق الشؤون الإنسانية، حالة الطوارئ الناجمة عن فيروس كورونا (كوفيد-19): تقرير الحالة السادس (21-28 نيسان/أبريل 2020). (الأمم المتحدة، 2020) < <https://www.ochaopt.org/ar/content/covid-19-emergency-situation-report-6> >

¹¹⁴ Focus group with women from West Bethlehem villages (n 29), Focus group in Oja (n 27).

¹¹⁵ Focus group in Oja (n 27).

¹¹⁶ Violence against Women and Covid-19 in Palestine

https://www.nad.ps/sites/default/files/the_double_lockdown_2.pdf

¹¹⁷ 1 Awad, Situation of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of the International Women's Day

¹¹⁸ يوسف الترك- رئيس هيئة العمل التعاوني، أثر جائحة كورونا على القطاع التعاوني الفلسطيني (اقتصاد فلسطين، 2020) < <https://www.palestineconomy.ps/ar/Article/17199> >

- 2) Pre-production: the delay in supplying production inputs and delay in the arrival of some equipment and supplies .
- 3) Production: decrease in the production of craft cooperatives or the total suspension of some.
- 4) Post-production: Decline in the sales of most cooperatives, especially agricultural ones. For example, Zainab, who works at a food processing cooperative in Hussan village in Bethlehem governorate, added that "marketing of the cooperative's products to school canteens has stopped completely during the state of emergency".



The policies and practices of the occupation heretofore mentioned constitute a violation of different branches of international law, such as international humanitarian law, international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as international criminal law. This includes International Humanitarian Law and in particular Articles 1)49) and 6)49) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations Security Council Resolution 132, the subsequent resolutions within the Women, Peace and Security agenda. These policies, procedures and practices also violate International Human Rights Law, including General Recommendation 34 of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) regarding rural women. Moreover, these policies violate Articles 1)6) and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and International Criminal Law, specifically Article 1)7)(d) on forced displacement as a crime against humanity, as well as Article 4)(1)8) on the destruction of property and structures, Article 7)(1)8) on forced displacement, and Article 8(b)(8) on settlements as war crimes. It is worth noting that all branches of international law mentioned above apply in their entirety to the occupied state of Palestine.

This section will cover the policies, practices and procedures that target the agricultural sector and seek to limit its growth.

Peremptory Norms and International Humanitarian Law

On the level of peremptory norms, which apply to all States without exception, long-term military occupation, which is intended to be only temporary, and the settlement enterprise, which vindicates the approach of the occupation to control the land indefinitely, these violate the peremptory norm of the prohibition of the acquisition of land through the use of force, as codified in the UN Charter.¹¹⁹ On the level of international humanitarian law, which regulates relationships between States during times of war, including in military occupation, the “Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907” states that the occupying power shall “shall take all the measures in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.”¹²⁰ Within the framework of this article, all of the procedures and measures taken by the occupation in imposing restrictions on access to land, water, and

¹¹⁹ United Nations, *UN Charter* (UN, 1948) < <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf> > Article 2(4)

¹²⁰ Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907 <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/195>> article 43.

other production resources, alongside the imposition of a system that limits the development of the agricultural and cooperatives sectors in their totality violate this article.

Additionally, the Fourth Geneva Convention states “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive,” and “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”¹²¹ As per these provisions, the occupation state violates article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention in its targeting of the agricultural and cooperatives sectors within the framework of the policies that seek to maximize acquisition of land with the least number of Palestinians on it through forcible displacement of Palestinians and settlement expansion. The latest threat towards this end was the risk of the annexation of the Jordan Valley and Palestinian rural areas, which threatened more than 45,000 Palestinians. This represented a flagrant violation of the prohibition of the acquisition of territory through the use of force as a peremptory norm that is codified into article 2 of the UN Charter.

International Human Rights Law

On the level of international human rights law, the policies, practices, and measures of the occupation violate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.”¹²² The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights clarified in General Comment 18 that the fulfilment of the right to work is measured through three main criteria: (A) availability, which refers to services to assist and support individuals in order to enable them to identify and find available employment; (B) Accessibility, which refers to that the labour market must be open to everyone under the jurisdiction of States parties; and (C) Acceptability and quality, which refers to the right of the worker to just and favourable conditions of work.¹²³ The policies of the occupation extend beyond a lack of respect and fulfilment of criteria to ensure the right of women to work in the agricultural and cooperatives sectors. They include a direct assault on the basic needs and production inputs for this sector to grow and prosper, including imposition of restrictions on land, water, other production inputs and all restrictions imposed on the post-production stage, in addition to assaults by settlers, including dumping of garbage and wastewater, and attacking farmers.

¹²¹ United Nations, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949 (UN, 1949) <<https://ihl.databases.icrc.org/ihl/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5>> article 49.

¹²² United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights* (dated 17 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Professionalinterest/cescr.pdf>> article 1(6).

¹²³ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 18 on the Right to Work* (6 February 2006) paragraph 12.

Regarding the Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Discrimination against Women, the convention recognizes that women face a disproportionate impact in terms of the discrimination that women usually face. As such, the convention provides for “To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment”,¹²⁴ “To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes”,¹²⁵ and “To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications”.¹²⁶ Within this framework, the targeting by the occupation of the agricultural and cooperatives sectors violates and prevents the true enjoyment by women of the parts on the establishment of cooperatives to access equal economic opportunities. Additionally, the restrictions imposed on area “C”, which is completely located in rural areas, alongside the permit regime imposed, which are seldom granted, puts all developmental businesses to serve the agricultural and cooperatives sectors under continuous and imminent threat. This, in its turn, directly impacts women’s ability to access credit, agricultural loans, and market facilitations. Lastly, the control by the occupation of all production inputs, and primarily water and infrastructural needs, specifically electricity, limits the growth of the sectors and constricts the enjoyment of suitable living conditions.

The procedures of the occupation violate all of the provisions of General Recommendation 34 on rural women, issued by the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in 2016. In light of the deterioration of the economic situation, and as a result of the imposition of an invisible ceiling on the growth and development of the agricultural and cooperatives sector, this led to the refrain of women from working in these sectors and to seek work in Israeli settlements, where women earn less than their male counterparts and do not enjoy legal protection and decent work conditions, including possessing health insurance and sick leaves. The occupation state does not adhere to legal obligations in that “States parties should fully incorporate the right to decent conditions of work and the principle of equal pay for work of equal value into their legal and policy frameworks, paying special attention to the situation and labour force representation of rural women”,¹²⁷ and “Providing social security to rural women, including in cases of sickness or invalidity”.¹²⁸

In light of the restrictions imposed on area “C”, and the resulting lack of encouragement to and a conducive environment for investment in the agricultural and cooperative sectors, and access to necessary financial resources to develop the sector in light of the policies of the occupation of impoverishing the Palestinian rural community, particularly those working in agriculture, these procedures violate the legal obligations

¹²⁴ United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (dated 18 December 1979, entered into force 1 March 1980)

<<https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/cedaw.pdf>> article 14(e).

¹²⁵ Ibid article 14(g)

¹²⁶ Ibid article 14 (h)

¹²⁷ Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, *General Comment 34 on Rural Women* (7 March 2016) paragraph 50.

¹²⁸ Ibid paragraph 52(f)

of “Access to financial services on fair terms is crucial for the development of rural women’s enterprises and for their income-generating and livelihood strategies as producers and entrepreneurs”.¹²⁹ Indeed, the occupation policies that seek to limit the development of the agricultural and cooperative sectors lead women to work inside the settlements, which makes them lose their status as producers and entrepreneurs.

The Commission on the Status of Women of the UN Economic and Social Council issues an annual resolution on Palestinian women. In 2018, the resolution focused in its content on rural women and stated “Deploring the dire economic and social conditions of Palestinian women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the systematic violation of their human rights resulting from the severe impact of ongoing illegal Israeli practices, including the forced displacement and transfer of civilians, especially among the Bedouin community, and confiscation of land...”.¹³⁰ The statement also expressed “...grave concern about all acts of violence, intimidation and provocation by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including women and children, and properties, including homes, mosques, churches and agricultural lands, condemning acts of terror by several extremist Israeli settlers, and calling for accountability for the illegal actions perpetrated in this regard”.¹³¹

International Criminal Law

The policies of the occupation in targeting the agriculture and cooperatives sectors fulfil the criteria of international crimes, including several war crimes and crimes against humanity. The policies that seek to create a coercive environment with the view of forcefully displacing Palestinians, and particularly the Jordan Valley, and annexing land, fulfil the criteria of the crime against humanity of “Deportation or forcible transfer of population”¹³² and the war crime of “Unlawful deportation or transfer...”¹³³

On another hand, the permit regime enforced on area “C”, and the consequent threat of demolishing structures, including greenhouses, wells, and other necessary structures for the maintenance and growth of the agricultural sector fulfil the criteria of the war crimes “Extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.¹³⁴

Lastly, settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank, which is connected to Israeli policies and strategies that target Palestinians with the view of forcefully displacing the and replacing them with settlers, these fulfil the criteria of the war crime “The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian

¹²⁹ Ibid paragraph 67.

¹³⁰ Economic and Social Council, *Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-second Session: Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women* (United Nations 2018) <<https://undocs.org/E/CN.2018/6/L.2> <3.

¹³¹ Ibid 3.

¹³² Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (dated 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) article 1)7)(d)

¹³³ Ibid article 2)8)(a)(viii).

¹³⁴ Ibid article 2)8)(a)(iv).

population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory”.¹³⁵



¹³⁵ Ibid article 2)8)(b)(viii).

Policies, Programs, and Services Provided to the Agriculture and Cooperatives Sectors according to the Service Provider

Official Institutions

The Agriculture Sector Strategy for the years 2017-2022 was made under the theme of "resilience and sustainable development" within the vision of "sustainable agriculture, local and international competition that actively contributes to enhancing national food security, strengthening the bonds between Palestinians and their lands, enhancing their sovereignty over resources in a way that contributes to building the basis of an independent Palestinian state".¹³⁶ This is based on a number of foundations, the most important of which are:

- 1) Intensifying efforts to work in Area "C" and Jerusalem
- 2) Addressing the effects and consequences of the destruction and distortions resulting from the occupation
- 3) Accessing agricultural lands, water, natural resources, and markets,
- 4) Increasing investment in the agricultural sector
- 5) Strengthening the partnership between the public and private sector
- 6) Activating the role of agricultural organizations, especially those concerned with small farmers and women farmers
- 7) Increasing the role of women and youth in rural development¹³⁷

There are five strategic objectives that stem from the basis and vision which can be linked to five dimensions, of which the following concern us the most¹³⁸:

Dimension	Strategic Objective
Resilience and Protection	Resilience of farmers and their attachment to the land enhanced.
Natural Resources	Sustainable management of the agricultural natural resources in order to be responsive to climate change.
Product and Productivity	Competitive agricultural products and productivity in local and international markets and its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product and to food security increased.
Support Services	Access of farmers and entrepreneurs of both sexes to quality agricultural services corresponding to the needs of the value chain in the agricultural sector.
Institutionalization and Management	Efficient and effective agricultural legal and environmental organizational frameworks.

Within this framework, the Ministry of Agriculture has allocated a small development budget allocated for the purpose by the government¹³⁹towards the services of land

¹³⁶ The State of Palestine, the Agriculture Sector Strategy, (the Ministry of Agriculture, 26 (2017).

¹³⁷ Ibid 27-29

¹³⁸ Ibid 31

¹³⁹ Interview with Hasan Al-Ashqar (n 68).

reclamation/settlement (taswiya) the provision of sheep, the financing of small income-generating projects, and the provision of water. In 2019 this amounted to ILS 1,088,000, which is equivalent to USD 310,857. This comprises %1.9 of the total development budget of the Palestinian government.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, there are no strong government policies that support the agricultural sector and farmers. For example, farmers are considered one of the segments of society who are exempt from paying income tax. Also, the first ILS 300,000 of the profit gained by investor in agriculture are also tax exempt. On the other hand, farmers are exempt from the value-added tax which will be refunded to them upon submitting tax invoices on all production inputs. However, in cases of government financial difficulty or crises, the value-added tax was returned in accordance with the government's capacity. Finally, despite the existence of a government fund named "Insurance and Agricultural Risks Mitigation Fund,"¹⁴¹ women who participated in the research expressed that they did not receive services and support from the government in cases when they were exposed to harm.

Within the vision of the eighteenth Palestinian government, agricultural development was considered as highly important. This was manifested through launching and enhancing the concept of development clusters, including agricultural ones, as a strategy for a gradual disengagement from the Israeli occupation. The governorates of Jenin, Tulkarem, Salfit, Jordan Valley and Qalqilya have been identified as agricultural clusters. The Qalqilya Agricultural Cluster was launched as the first in the West Bank in September 2019 with a budget of USD 23,194,000 distributed over three years.¹⁴² Participants in this study conveyed that they have applied to rent endowment lands but were not prioritized, while farmers and individuals from outside the Jordan Valley who maintained good relations with decision-makers were leased. Thus, the use of personal connections was at times prioritized, in contradiction to the Palestinian government's rhetorical commitments strengthening the resilience of inhabitants of the Jordan Valley during the past months, especially during the period in which the danger of annexing the area was imminent. The approval to lease the land was based on the ability to provide water, bearing in mind that the cost of water, especially to available lands, is quite high, ranging between ILS 500 and 700 per week making this opportunity economically unviable.¹⁴³

The Cooperative Work Agency that is affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and replaced the General Directorate for Cooperation in the Ministry in 2017 plays a regulatory role for cooperative societies in the West Bank. In this context, the scope of the Agency's responsibility extends from the regulation, supervision, guidance and legal follow-up from the establishment of the cooperative society until its dissolution in accordance

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Finance, Monthly Expenditure Reports, December 2019, <<http://www.pmof.ps/pmof/documents/accounts/monthly/2019/Dec.202019%-updated--v3.pdf>> table 5b.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Hasan Al-Ashqar (n 68).

¹⁴² The Palestinian Council of Ministers, Cluster Development Plan, Agricultural Cluster in Qalqilia, (Council of Ministers 2019) <<http://palestinecabinet.gov.ps/.WebSite/Upload/Documents/GOVPLAN/3naqeed3.pdf>>

¹⁴³ Women's Focus Group in Al-Oja village (n 27).

with the provisions of Cooperatives Law No. 20 of 2017 and its bylaws. Within this framework, the scope of responsibility of the Agency extends to the provision of cooperative counselling, including registration procedures, meetings, raising awareness on the rights and duties of members, and the foundations of financial management.¹⁴⁴ In addition, the Agency's interventions include taking necessary measures against violators and conducting investigations if necessary. They also issue financial letters around those authorized to deposit and disburse funds. This comes within the context of creating a cooperative society and promoting its contribution to the Palestinian national economy, taking into consideration that it is still under %1.5 of the GDP.¹⁴⁵ Women participants in the research speaking as representatives of their cooperatives expressed that there is absence of service provision by the Agency, as it merely assumes supervision and regulatory roles, instead making them dependent on the civil society and international organization to obtain needed services.¹⁴⁶

Palestinian Civil Society Organizations

Palestinian civil society organizations are trying to fill the development gap in the agricultural sector left behind by the work of the public institution. In this context, they support the agricultural production process and cooperative activity from A to Z, according to the needs of each project, including reclamation of lands, construction of agricultural roads, digging water wells, and providing farmers with equipment, machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds and seedlings, implementing needed capacity building trainings, providing local and external marketing support, including packaging and storage mechanisms and skills^{147 148 149 150}.

For example, PWWSD considers economic empowerment for women as part of its strategic priorities.¹⁵¹ It provides direct support through enhancing the capacity of organizations, cooperatives, and unions that support women in rural areas who plant or produce crops to sell, in addition to promoting access to cultivatable lands and production inputs, finding mechanisms to ensure access of small farmers, women and youth to funding with the aim of enhancing their current farms and creating entrepreneurial agricultural businesses, providing women with effective and gender-responsive access to agricultural inputs, supporting women's income-generation activities, financial savings, access to credit and extension services, increasing women's participation in decision-making around economic policies and programs, and providing training in women's rights, gender mainstreaming and participatory gender

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Cooperative Work Agency (n 75).

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Ilham Ayyoub, (n 25).

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Najat Irmeileh, AL-Dyouk Agricultural Cooperative Society, September 2020 ,27. Interview with Adla Taha (n 82).

¹⁴⁷ Collective interview with project partner organizations, September 2020 ,9.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Mohammad Sawafta, Economic Justice Program Manager, Oxfam, September 2020 ,24.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Rahhal Rahhal (n 56).

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Intisar Ishtayeh, Manager and Gender Focal Point at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, September 2020 ,22.

¹⁵¹ The Palestinian Women Working Society for Development, Economic Empowerment, (The Palestinian Women Working Society for Development). <<https://pwwsd.org/page/economic/ar>>.

planning for all authorities and institutions responsible for land administration and tenure.¹⁵²

Other organizations also act on protecting the lands under annexation threats due to the policies and measures of the occupation forces, through international advocacy and litigating before Israeli courts.¹⁵³

Palestinian organizations are working to bridge the gap between Palestinian cooperatives' needs and available support and resources. They are working to amplify the voices of their right holders, especially women, for more encouraging environment for cooperatives' work and growth and lobbying against the GBV rural women face.

The Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ) has prioritized women and youth projects using funds allocated for cooperative support. The same applies to the Union of Palestinian Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) and the Palestinian Agricultural Cooperatives Union (PACU) who target women and youth.¹⁵⁴

International Organizations

International organizations along with Palestinian civil society working to support farmers throughout the production value chain by designing intervention programs in accordance with the needs of each project.

International and civil society organizations aim to improve national policies and making them gender-sensitive and more supportive to women's participation. For example, We Effect is acting as a driving force for the cooperative sector with a special focus on marginalized and vulnerable women, including working toward fair cooperative law amendments, women's rights campaigns, and raising women's democratic positions as decision makers.¹⁵⁵

Oxfam is reviewing relevant laws, policies and practices, including cooperative law, and is lobbying the private sector to adopt policies to guarantee decent job opportunities for women, pressuring banks to adopt gender-sensitive lending schemes, advocating for the implementation of a gender audit within private sector companies.¹⁵⁶ It is also following up on the adoption and implementation of the recommendations of the audit and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all projects as a segment of the population subjected to multiple layers of marginalization.¹⁵⁷

Existing Gaps in Policies, Services, and Programs

Despite the shortcomings and gaps in the performance of the Palestinian government in supporting the agricultural and cooperative sectors in Palestine in terms of laws, policies and services, it is crucial to state that the main obstacle and challenge to the

¹⁵² In-depth Assessment of Women's Access to and Ownership of Land and Productive Resources in the occupied Palestinian territory <https://pwwsd.org/uploads/15949011091533037615.pdf>

¹⁵³ Collective interview (n 134)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ We Effect Palestine <https://weeffect.org/where-we-work/asia/palestine/>

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Mohammad Sawafta (n 135)

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Rahhal Rahhal (n 56)

development of this sector remains the Israeli military occupation, and thus are not under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Consequently, developmental work in these areas becomes subject to threats of destruction and damage.

Nonetheless, this does not absolve the State of Palestine from its responsibilities, especially as it raises the slogan of "Citizens First" in the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022, and emphasizes on enhancing resilience in threatened areas of continuous settlement expansion and annexation. The main gap in the official approach regarding Palestinian rural women working in the fields of agriculture and cooperatives is the division of the relevant services and duties among a number of ministries and the absence of gender-sensitive policies and adequate budgets to support this sector. The organization of the ministries' services and duties are divided among five ministries in the Palestinian government: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Cooperative Work Agency affiliated with the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of National Economy, and the Ministry of Social Development (the main Ministry responsible for women's economic empowerment), and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (responsible for the revision of policies of all ministries and ensuring that they are gender-sensitive). The main gap in this respect lies in the absence of coordination between above-mentioned ministries in regards their responsibilities to Palestinian rural women. The issues with this lack of coordination are as the following:

1. The policies of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of National Economy and the Cooperative Work Agency are not gender-sensitive, and their combined budgets with those of the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, are not able to fulfill the needs of the sector. For example, the percentage of the budgets of the ministries to the total budget of the Palestinian government in 2018 were as follows: the Ministry of Agriculture stood at 1.12%, while that of the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of National Economy was 0.26% and 0.30%, respectively. The budget of the Ministry of Women's Affairs stood at %0.07 and that of the Ministry of Social Development was 8.86%.¹⁵⁸ (It is important to note that the 2019 budget was excluded due to the financial crisis the Palestinian government went through, and the resulting austerity measures implemented in development budgets.)
2. The economic empowerment program of the Ministry of Social Development does not prioritize or adopt affirmative action policies for women's projects in the agricultural sector. The development budget in the Ministry amounts to %0.5, while %95 of its total expenditures go to poor families support program in the form of cash transfers.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, adopting law No. 8 of 2014 regarding public procurement makes it extremely difficult to support economic empowerment projects in the field of agriculture and in area "C" as it requires obtaining three quotations, tax invoices and other requirements that are not

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Finance, *Monthly Expenditure Reports, December 2018*, <<http://www.pmof.ps/pmof/documents/accounts/monthly/2018/Dec.202018%.en.pdf>> table 5b.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

attainable or difficult to provide for women working in the fields of agriculture and cooperatives.¹⁶⁰

Additionally, access of women working in agriculture and cooperatives to financial resources is one of the most important challenges and gaps in the development of the two sectors. The policies of banks and lending institutions lead to their reluctance to support projects in the "C" areas, given the high risks associated with the occupation policies in these areas.¹⁶¹ Also, the requirements of these institutions to obtain the necessary financial resources depend on women presenting identification papers that include mortgaging a property, car or other belongings, bearing in mind that the majority of women in these two areas do not possess such privileges. If they do have such ownership, they will not need to access these financial sources mainly from banks and lending institutions. Statistics show that the percentage of loans given to the agricultural sector in 2012 by lending institutions specialized in the field came in third place after the housing and trade sectors, at %19.6, or 16.3 million USD. It is necessary to note that there is a scarcity in the availability of specialized lending institutions in this field.¹⁶²

On the other hand, the weak supervisory role of specialized organizations, foremost of which is the Ministry of Local Government, leads to the unfair distribution of development projects that are funded by various parties through the village/municipality councils. As such, nepotism, favoritism and bias play a major role in the distribution of these opportunities and resources. These models extend to include access to water, land reclamation, and basic production inputs, thus depriving the population of the opportunities that would develop this sector. Etidal, a female participant from Al-Ouja, commented "as a result of these practices, the community was deprived of building a dam and digging an artesian well in the village of Al-Ouja to collect water." Participant Aida added "any development within the municipal boundaries is directly related to the personal interests of the members of the municipal council."¹⁶³ Finally, the absence of a supportive legal environment and framework that governs informal or seasonal agricultural work has resulted in the failure to protect women from exploitation and marginalization.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Women Focus Group in Al-Oja (n 27)

¹⁶¹ Interview with Mohammad Sawafta (n 135)

¹⁶² FAO (n 54 (1.

¹⁶³ Women Focus Group in Al-Oja (n 27)

¹⁶⁴ FAO (n 52 ,(1.

Recommendations

This research study clearly shows the occupation's deliberate targeting of the agricultural and cooperative sectors in Palestine, which has a disproportionate impact on rural Palestinian women working in both fields. This deliberate targeting is due to the important role these sectors play in strengthening the steadfastness of Palestinians and in preserving the Palestinian presence and comes in line with Israel's systematic policy: maximizing the acquisition of land with the least number of Palestinians on it possible. This is reinforced by the absence of deterrence and accountability mechanisms by the international community and political regimes. The full development of the agricultural sector will not be achieved in light of the continued occupation; nevertheless, this does not absolve the international community, funders, official Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian civil society from their responsibilities in protecting, improving, and developing this sector. Thus, the following are recommendations applicable to all or some of these parties.

Donors and the International Community:

- 1) Support Palestinian civil society organizations in advocacy efforts and through providing opportunities and platforms to highlight the violations and systematic practices of the occupation in targeting agriculture and cooperatives sector. The advocacy efforts must target parliamentarians, trade unions, universities and all relevant influential bodies. This should be done with the view of holding the occupation accountable in accordance with international tools of justice, and halting the renewal of Trade Agreements, especially those between the European Union and Israel.
- 2) Pressure the European judiciary in order to hold the occupation accountable for the demolition of facilities such as barracks, greenhouses, wells, water pipelines, and other production inputs, especially those established in area "C", including solar panels donated by the EU and destroyed by Israel occupation authorities.¹⁶⁵
- 3) Promote the participatory approach in determining funding priorities with Palestinian civil society organizations to serve national needs.
- 4) Enhance cooperation between diplomatic missions and representative offices in Palestine and Palestinian civil society organizations to host diplomatic and political delegations to highlight the systematic targeting of the agricultural and cooperative sectors by the Israeli occupation. The highlight should focus on human rights violations with a special focus on the rights of women.

¹⁶⁵Israel "drastically escalates" destruction of EU-funded energy projects
<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/israel-drastically-escalates-destruction-eu-funded-energy-projects>

Palestinian Governmental Institutions

- 1) Adopt affirmative action policies that support small farmers and producers in general, and women farmers and producers in particular, through a number of measures, as follows:
 - 1.1 Establishing government-affiliated "cooperative societies" to market agricultural products that act as a mediator between women and the markets, ensuring the economic viability of agriculture and preserving the status of women as producers. This would contribute to protecting small farmers from the exploitation of the private sector especially large companies and traders in the "vegetable market".
 - 1.2 Reducing land registration and inheritance fees for women in area C, in order to facilitate women's access to their inheritance rights.
 - 1.3 Fostering financing mechanisms that differ from the impoverishment system established by commercial banks and lending institutions for women farmers and small farmers. These mechanisms should be based on the values of solidarity; examples include the "advance payment" or "salam contract" system. Within this system, contracts are made with farmers, in which companies purchase a certain quantity of a specific crop. This in return gives the opportunity for female farmers to focus on production, thus marketing becomes among the responsibilities of the companies that contracted them. Under this agreement, large companies bear any losses in products or profits. Another example of this solidarity system is share-tenancy, which is based on leasing endowment lands or state lands, so that the farmer has a share of half or a third of the profits, provided that the state provides all production inputs and bears any losses in the product or profits.
- 2) Coordinate and unify efforts between the official institutions and ministries working in the field of agriculture and cooperatives, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Cooperative Work Agency, the Ministry of National Economy, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. This coordination should be coupled with allocating sufficient budgets to achieve the government's priority of strengthening the resilience of farmers and communities in area "C". It is also necessary to expand the scope of the work of the Cooperative Work Agency to include the service provision dimension instead of keeping its work confined to the regulatory- supervisory role. In addition, it is necessary to activate the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to document violations committed by the Israeli occupation against the agricultural and cooperative sectors as a national priority. This can be achieved by establishing a coordination body consisting of these ministries and meeting periodically to enhance coordination and concerted efforts, provided that this body integrates the Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular focusing on the following goals: goal 1: no poverty, goal 2: zero hunger, goal 5: gender equality, goal 8: decent work and economic growth, and goal 17: on partnerships for the goals.

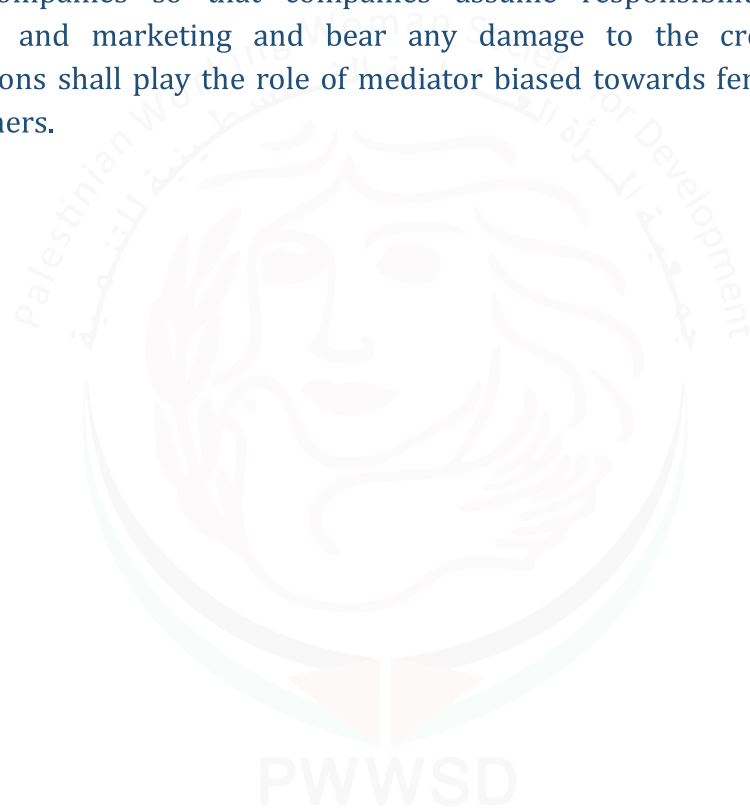
- 3) Expanding the scope of the case referred to the International Criminal Court on settlement in order to clearly highlight the direct and systematic targeting of the agricultural and cooperative sectors, and link it to the policies of forcible displacement as a war crime and apartheid as a crime against humanity. In addition, it is necessary to work to activate international jurisdiction and to file civil and criminal lawsuits in European countries that recognize this concept and guarantee it in their legislation and legal systems.

Palestinian Civil Society Organizations

- 1) Given the current situation, especially the lack of adequate budget allocation by the government for the agricultural and cooperative sectors, in addition to the deep partnerships enjoyed by civil society organizations at the regional and international levels, it is imperative that institutions continue to support small farmers, especially women. However, this does not exempt Palestinian civil society from its responsibility to influence policies and exert pressure on all relevant duty bearers in favor of small farmers, especially women. In this context, it is necessary to work on the following:
 - 1.1 Investing in regional and international partnerships to activate litigation based on international jurisdiction to hold the occupation accountable by filing civil and criminal lawsuits in European courts.
 - 1.2 Reviewing the policies and scope of work of the Palestinian Disaster Risk Reduction and Insurance Fund due to its importance in protecting the agricultural sector from shocks and contributing to its recovery. This is recommended in the context of what the participants reported that they did not obtain support from this fund at all even when they were affected by unfavorable weather conditions and emergencies.
 - 1.3 Pressing the government to allocate the necessary financial and human resources to support the agricultural and cooperative sectors by actually adopting it as a strategic national priority.
 - 1.4 Work to review the legal frameworks and their implementing regulations and policies, foremost of which is the Cooperatives Law (No. 2 of 2003) and its amendments by Decree Law No. 14 of 2018. Other laws that require review are the Labor Law, the Public Procurement Law, the Investment Promotion Law, and the financial and tax policies. The review will ultimately identify gaps and put pressure on the government to adopt gender sensitive policies that are bias to the benefit of small farmers rather than large companies.
 - 1.5 Forming alliances in order to enhance the application and compliance with the principles of good governance, foremost among which is integrity and transparency in the implementation of agricultural cluster development projects announced by the government, in addition to the role of local government units and the Ministry of Local Government in agricultural

development issues, including opening agricultural roads, digging wells, land reclamation, and other interventions.

- 2) Integrating women's empowerment and capacity building effectively along the production chain, and providing continuous support and follow-up with women in all stages of production and post-production, as experience has shown that the chances of success of projects are greatly reduced when there are gaps in follow-up. In this context, it is necessary to strengthen and improve monitoring and evaluation systems to collect and analyze success stories and failure stories equally to identify lessons learned and recommendations and redesign programs, projects, and interventions accordingly.
- 3) Promote the "Pull System" approach by networking between female farmers and private companies so that companies assume responsibilities for storage, packaging and marketing and bear any damage to the crop. Civil society organizations shall play the role of mediator biased towards female farmers and small farmers.



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Annex 1: List of Interviews and Focus Group Discussions:

Focus Group Discussions		
Governorate	Location	Participants
Bethlehem	Al Khader village	Nadia As'ad, Najat As'ad, Maha Butmeh, Malak Abu Hasan, Zainab Manasra, Adla Taha, Muna Hussein.
The Jordan Valley	Al Ouja village	Itaf, Lubna, Yusra Ishteywi, Itidal Khader, Aida Njoom
Interviews with women farmers and cooperatives		
Name of interviewee	Position	Location
Adla Taha	Head of Al Khader Cooperative	Al Khader- Bethlehem
Najat Ermeileh	Head of Al Dyouk Agricultural Cooperative	Al Dyouk village- Jordan Valley
Jahida Masa'eed	Farmer	Al Jiftlek village- Jordan Valley
Sa'ada Kassab		
Hala Zbeidat	Farmer	Al Zbeidat village- Jordan Valley
Interview with Palestinian civil society institutions		
Name of institution	Name of interviewee	Position
Applied Research Institute- Jerusalem (Arij)	Rasha Alyatim	Manager of Good Governance Program
	Sami Mujahed	Research Associate
Land Research Center	Abeer Istanbuli	Project Manager
	Enas Rahhal	Project Coordinator
Economic and Social Development Center of Palestine (ESDC)	Abeer Qteiri	Capacity Building Program Coordinator
Palestinian Agricultural Cooperative Union (PACU)	Raed Theeb	Projects Coordinator
Union of Agricultural Work Committees	Omar Tabakhna	Head of Planning and Research Department
Interview with Official Institutions		
Institute	Name	Position
Ministry of Agriculture	Hasan Al Ashqar	DG Planning and Policies
Cooperative Work Agency (CWA)	Ilham Ayoub	Head of CWA in Bethlehem
	Fouad Kharma	Projects Manager
	Nazeeh Erfan	DG Planning and Policies
	Fida' Halabi	Projects Coordinator
	Basima Barahmeh	Head of CWA in Jericho and the Jordan Valley
Interviews with International Institutions		
Institution	Name	Position
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN	Intesar Ishtayeh	Head of Program and Gender Focal Point
Oxfam	Mohamad Swafta	Economic Justice Program Manager
	Rahhal Rahhal	Women and Youth Economic Empowerment Project Coordinator