



Second Paper

International Scientific Symposium

Priorities for Palestine's Economy
in the Midst of War

Palestinian Agriculture, Food Security and Incomes in the Context of Genocide

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Palestinian Agriculture, Food Security and Incomes in the Context of Genocide

This is the Second Paper in a series of discussion papers prepared for the International Academic Symposium "Priorities for Palestine's Economy in the Midst of War" scheduled for December 4, 2024. These papers reflect on optional scenarios for the post-war phase, including Palestinian governance strategies, immediate socio-economic challenges and priorities, and the (legal, institutional and political) tools at the disposal of the Palestinian people to actively determine their future. They will also analyze the economic policies and strategies that are needed to support Palestine's struggle for independence, focusing on self-sufficiency, economic resilience and productive capacity, trade expansion and market diversification and sustainable growth. The issues also include concern about how to strengthen the social contract in Palestine, focusing on how governance, economic policies, and social services can be aligned to meet public expectations and foster social cohesion.

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The ongoing genocidal war in Gaza has been detrimental to the lives and livelihoods of the Palestinians in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In Gaza, the daily massacres, continuous displacement of the population, destruction of infrastructure, damage of agricultural land and devastation of means of production have made it impossible to sustain economic life. The ongoing war's impact involves immediate humanitarian concerns, yet goes beyond that to alter the socio-economic landscape of the Gaza Strip. The situation in the West Bank has also been arduous. Settler attacks, land confiscation, closure of the Israeli labour market in the face of Palestinian workers, movement barriers coupled with broader trade restrictions and supply chain disruptions, have severely impacted its economy. In light of the devastation brought upon the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the focus of this paper will be on its impact on agriculture, food security and incomes as well as the potential policies to protect its economy to set it on a course towards recovery.

1. Starvation as a Tool of War and Genocide

Since the first day of the war on Gaza in October 2023, Israel has sought to break the resilience of Gazans, using starvation as a weapon. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food noted in March 2024: 'In Gaza today, we are witnessing how Israel is using starvation as one of its tools to commit genocide'.¹ This situation materialized as a result of Israel's tight siege on the Strip following October 7 whereby all crossings were closed and trucks, whether loaded with aid or commercial trucks, were prevented from entering the Gaza Strip. Since then, very limited number of trucks were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip; before the Rafah crossing was closed, trucks entered at a rate of one truck every 3 hours and 12 minutes, and not all of them were loaded with food.² Oxfam has estimated that only 2% of the needs of the population in Gaza's population were allowed to enter the Strip throughout the period of the war.³

As a result, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics confirms that there is a severe shortage of medicines, health supplies and foodstuffs, and that such are provided at minimum levels that do not exceed 5% of the quantities that should be provided to Gaza Strip.⁴ A UN Rapporteur has wondered about the speed with which a civilian population has been forced to go so severely hungry so quickly compared to other locations around the world. The answer for this question lies in the 17-year Israeli blockade of Gaza, which created a population that is totally dependent on aid and food trucks that came in through the Israeli controlled borders. Oxfam points out that prior to the war, one truck entered the Gaza Strip every 14 minutes, totaling 104 trucks per day.⁵ This means that the Israeli blockade on Gaza kept everyone in the Strip on the verge of hunger. As a result, before the current ongoing war, half of the population in Gaza were food insecure and 80% relied on humanitarian aid.⁶

This dire situation is not limited to food, as Gazans were driven to thirst quickly. Prior to the war there was a lack of access to clean drinking water, as 97% of the water in the Gaza Strip is contaminated. The overconsumption of underground water by settlements over the period 1967-

1 Michael Fakhri (March, 2024) UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. UNHR. The Palestinian People's Food Sovereignty. UN HRC Side-Event. 6 March 2024.

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/21/israel-hamas-war-aid-trucks-enter-gaza-egypt-rafah-border-crossing-opens>

3 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/starvation-weapon-war-being-used-against-gaza-civilians-oxfam>

4 PCBS. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics "PCBS" Highlights the Socio-economic and Environmental Conditions after One Year of the Ongoing Israeli Occupation Aggression against Gaza Strip and the West Bank. OCT 2024.

5 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/starvation-weapon-war-being-used-against-gaza-civilians-oxfam>

6 UNHR. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri. The Palestinian People's Food Sovereignty. UN HRC Side-Event. 6 March 2024.

2005 contributed to this contamination.⁷ In addition to the lack of purification plants for wastewater, which is disposed of in the sea and valleys, thus leaking into the fresh water aquifer. Israel also established dams that prevent water from reaching the Gaza Valley, which reduces the quantity and quality of water feeding the aquifer.⁸

The war exacerbated the poor conditions of water availability in the Gaza Strip, as about 40% of the water networks in the Gaza Strip were destroyed and the main pumps were disabled due to bombing or fuel depletion, with one desalination plant operating at 5% capacity and two plants are completely out of operation. At the same time, more than 194 water production wells, 40 large water reservoirs, and 76 desalination plants were damaged by Israel, either entirely or partially.⁹ In November 2023, it was estimated that 3 liters of water is allocated per person per day in Gaza, knowing that the minimum in times of crisis, according to UN estimates, is between 7.5 and 20 liters per person per day to meet their basic daily health needs.

The agricultural sector and farmed land have endured the worst of this aggression. According to FAO,¹⁰ 67.6% of the cropland in the Gaza Strip, more than 71% of orchards and trees and 67.1% of field crops have been fully destroyed. At the same time, 44.3% of Gaza Strip's greenhouses have been damaged. A comparison of imagery from August 2023 and August 2024 revealed significant destruction. 42,500 square meters of solar panels were destroyed. Such carnage aims at destroying the resilience of the Gazans to withstand the genocide through using destruction and starvation as a weapon. The port of Gaza City infrastructure and vessels, which was a vital hub for economic activity were destroyed at the beginning of the war (October and November 2023) and remain non-functional, severely impacting local trade and livelihoods.

The consequences of this Israeli aggression on agriculture and farmed land were not limited to Gaza. The West Bank saw the systematic uprooting of trees by settlers, demolition of farms and productive structures by the Israeli army, denial of access to farmers to pick olives which Palestinians rely on for food and income, as well as confiscating land and resources. Since beginning of October 2024, OCHA has documented 203 incidents involving settlers directly related to the olive harvest in 79 communities across the West Bank, the majority of which (151 incidents) resulted in casualties or property damage. In this period, 69 Palestinians were injured by Israeli settlers, 13 by Israeli forces, and more than 1,600 mostly olive trees burnt, sawed-off or otherwise vandalized, and many crops and harvesting tools stolen¹¹. These colonial measures caused a sharp contraction in the West Bank's productivity base, and an unprecedented increase in the unemployment rate.

1.1 Food Insecurity Outcomes

Food security, according to FAO 'exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'¹² The current situation in Gaza underscores a severe and worsening crisis of food insecurity. By June 25, 2024, an alarming 96% of Gaza's population, equivalent to 2.15 million people, were enduring acute food insecurity, categorized as IPC phase 3 or higher. By September 2024, around 495,000 individuals, or 22% of the population were experiencing

7 <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1654847>

8 <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1654847>

9 https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_AggressionEnvGazaWar2023A.pdf

10 FAO. Agricultural Damage Assessment in the Gaza Strip from October 7th 2023 to September 1st 2024

11 [Humanitarian Situation Update #238 | West Bank | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#)

12 FAO (1996). Rome Declaration on World Food Security. Rome: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

catastrophic food insecurity, classified as IPC phase 5 or famine.¹³ This stark reality signals an urgent need for comprehensive humanitarian intervention and policy action to address the deepening food crisis in the region.

The situation in the north of Gaza became catastrophic in early October 2024, when the Israeli army resumed major ground invasion, mass evacuation orders affected hospitals, nutrition clinics, and other critical facilities. The northern population remains heavily reliant on aid due to extremely limited commercial food availability.¹⁴ In October 2024, WFP had only reached 42% of the 1.1 million people targeted for food assistance in Gaza, with reduced rations due to dropping aid levels¹⁵. In the southern part of Gaza, during October 2024, the entry of food through southern border crossings reached its lowest since October 2023, covering only 10-15% of the population's daily caloric needs in September. Restrictions in early October threatened food availability further, as Israel limited truck approvals to 50 per day, down from an average of 85-90 trucks from May to September.¹⁶

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 165 patients had been admitted to hospitals due to severe acute malnutrition on August 20, 2024. The situation deteriorated further after October 7, 2024, when 34 people, mostly children, died from malnutrition. This tragic loss highlights the devastating impact of hunger and malnutrition, particularly on mothers and infants, severely impairing children's survival, growth, and development. The swift imposition of widespread food deprivation on millions has been so severe that the people of Gaza now compose over 80% of all people starving globally. All children under the age of five are at a high risk for severe malnutrition, leading to stunting, which can have irreversible impacts on growth and development.¹⁷

An assessment by UNICEF conducted between July 19 and 25, 2024, revealed that markets in Gaza City were devoid of vegetables and fruits due to high transportation costs and logistical challenges. Prolonged transit periods for trucks at crossings further increased the risk of food spoilage, worsening the availability of fresh produce. Additionally, a survey by UN Women highlighted that 99% of households with pregnant women struggled to access nutritional products and supplements, with 78.4% of these were unable to take necessary tests to monitor their nutritional and health status. This paints a critical picture of nutritional deprivation and devastation to individual and public health in Gaza. OCHA report shows that, since mid-January, a total of 280,591 children aged 6-59 months have been screened for malnutrition, of all screened children, 18,239 have been diagnosed with acute malnutrition, of whom 14,243 with moderate acute malnutrition, and 3,811 with severe acute malnutrition, including 145 of them with medical complications¹⁸.

1.2 Rising Unemployment, Shrinking Wages and Declining Incomes

The unemployment rate in the OPT increased significantly over the course of the past war year; rising to 51% (35% in the West Bank and 80% in Gaza), according to PCBS estimates. These figures are unprecedented in comparison to the unemployment rates during the past politically turbulent 30 years. These rising unemployment levels have exerted downward pressure on local

13 According to the Famine Review Committee, famine is a term used to describe the fifth phase of food insecurity across an entire area. Famine occurs when at least 20% of the population is in IPC Phase 5 (catastrophe), with one in three children acutely malnourished and two in 10,000 people dying, or four in 10,000 children dying every day, due to outright starvation or the interaction of malnutrition and disease. Source (IPC. Fact Sheet the IPC Famine- March and September, 2024).

14 FEWS Net. Gaza Strip Targeted Analysis Update. September 2024.

15 WFP. WFP Palestine Emergency response. External Situation Report. api.godocs.wfp.org/api/documents/ 30 OCT 2024

16 FEWS Net. Gaza Strip Targeted Analysis Update. September 2024.

17 ANERA (February, 2024) Food production systems under attack in the Gaza Strip. <https://www.anera.org/blog/food-production-systems-under-attack-in-gaza/>

18 OCHA. Gaza Humanitarian Response Update 19 August- 1 September 2024. 4 Sep 2024.

daily wages, with PCBS projections indicating a 10% decline in 2024 compared to 2023, which are anticipated to be among the lowest in the post-Oslo Accords period.¹⁹

In addition to the devastating impact of the war on workers in the Gaza Strip, most of the 171,000 workers from the West Bank who previously worked in Israel and the settlements have lost their jobs. Only around 10,000 – 25,000 of these workers are reported to have worked in the Israeli economy throughout 2024, as reported by PCBS. This amounts to around 6% of the total number of West Bank Palestinians who worked in Israel and the settlements pre-October 2023. Additionally, given the escalating Israeli colonial policies in the West Bank and its impact on supply chains, production capacities and workers' access to their workplaces and losses in private sector employment in the West Bank.²⁰

In the Gaza Strip, nearly 100 per cent of the population now lives in poverty, reflecting the dire situation faced by families struggling to meet basic needs. Meanwhile, the significant economic contraction in the West Bank is estimated to have more than doubled the short-term poverty rate, rising from 12% in 2023 to 28% by mid-2024.²¹

As a result, the economic and social situation in the OPT is projected to deteriorate further, the Human Development Index (HDI) may fall to 0.643, levels last seen before 2004, while Gaza's HDI is projected to drop to 0.408, wiping out 20 years of progress. Poverty could rise to 74.3%, affecting 4.1 million people, and multidimensional poverty is expected to surge to 30.1% from 10.2% in 2017, exacerbating deprivations in housing, services, and safety.²²

These devastating outcomes are further compounded by inflationary pressures, which erode individuals' purchasing power and their ability to meet their most basic needs, particularly amid increased job losses and reduced incomes. In April 2024, year-on-year inflation reached 34% in the OPT, soaring to a 153% in the Gaza Strip, while remaining comparatively lower at 4.2% in Jerusalem and 2.5% in the West Bank.²³

In summary, the war on Gaza indicate that Israel has been targeting and destroying food systems and devastating agricultural land, thus exacerbating an already dire food crisis and shattering income levels. Gaza is still facing genocide with severe humanitarian needs, including food insecurity. Every Palestinian in Gaza has been affected, with over two million people uprooted from their homes and facing acute shortages of all basic necessities. The physical damage alone was already catastrophic, basic services have been devastated, health services have been left barely functioning and on the verge of collapse due to a lack of access to medicines, ambulances, basic lifesaving treatments, electricity, and water. All Palestinians in Gaza are now considered poor, and formal employment is largely limited to those working on the humanitarian response, journalists and some petty trade. Electricity, water, sewage and solid waste, and telecommunications services are severely degraded and inadequate to the needs of the population.

At the same time, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been enduring increasing settler violence, settlement expansion, strict movement restrictions, demolitions, and displacement

19 ILO & PCBS (October 2024) A year of war in Gaza: impacts on employment and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Brief No. 5. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/year-war-gaza-impacts-employment-and-livelihoods-west-bank-and-gaza-strip>

20 ILO & PCBS (October 2024) A year of war in Gaza: impacts on employment and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Brief No. 3 <https://www.ilo.org/publications/impact-war-gaza-labour-market-and-livelihoods-occupied-palestinian>

21 Ibid

22 ESCWA and UNDP. 2024. Gaza War: Expected Socioeconomic Impacts on the state of Palestine. Policy Brief.2.

[Gaza war: expected socioeconomic impacts on the State of Palestine - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia](#)

23 [Consumer Price Index in Palestine \(pcbs.gov.ps\)](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/consumer-price-index-in-palestine)

have caused human suffering, stifled economic activity, curtailed access to basic services. The looming threat of annexation of parts of the West Bank pose yet another existential challenge.

2. Main Challenges for relief, rehabilitation and recovery

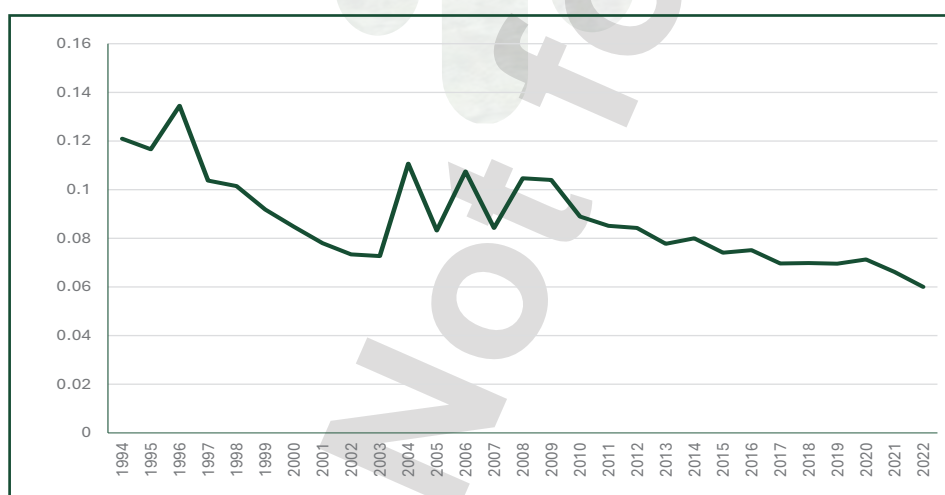
Thus the first challenge facing the recovery process, is the scale and extent of destruction in Gaza and to a lesser extent in the West Bank which not only inhibits immediate access to food, but also reduces the population’s long-term prospects for food autonomy and sustainability.

Yet, the challenges faced by the Palestinian economy are not solely a consequence of the past year of war, but are rooted in a prolonged 57-year occupation and 17 years of siege on the Gaza Strip. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967 has led to an erosion of the productive base of the Palestinian economy, coupled with the confiscation of resources essential for growth and development.²⁴ The genocide in Gaza not only exacerbates pre-existing challenges but has led to a profound destruction of all aspects of life in the Strip, rendering it essentially uninhabitable, as described in the early stages of the war by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute.²⁵

2.1 Erosion of the productive capacity of the agricultural sector

The second challenge to food security and sustainable incomes lies in the long-term structural weakness of the agricultural sector. The food insecurity generated by Israel’s colonial attack on Gaza is part and parcel of a long history of systematic measures by Israel to undermine food security of the Palestinians. Agriculture has always contributed to Palestinian income, exports, food security and job creation in the OPT. However, the sector has been operating well below potential for years. Its contribution to GDP and exports have been declining for decades now, while the absolute size of agricultural output has been fluctuating, with a clear downward trend.

Figure (1): Contribution of agriculture to GDP, 1994- 2022



Source: PCBS, national accounts statistics, various years.

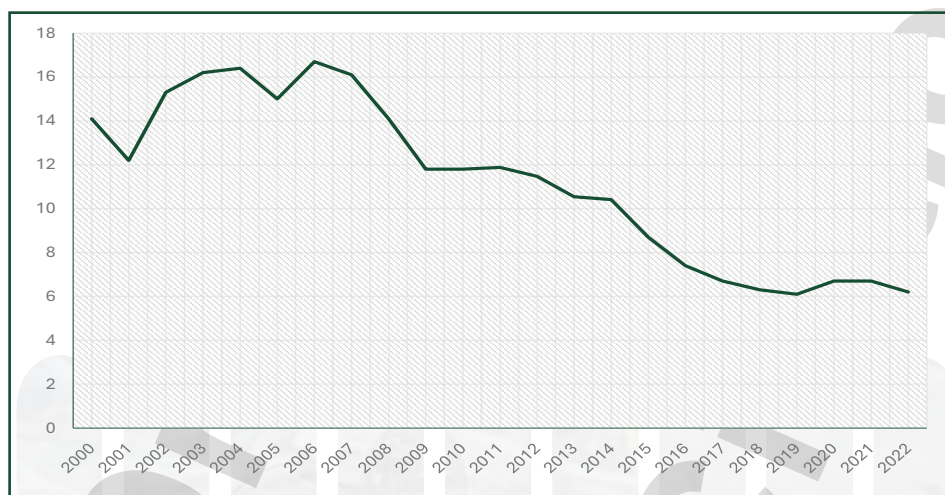
Palestinian agricultural output and productivity have lagged behind that of comparable countries in the region. For example, on average, the yield per dunum in the OPT is half that in Jordan,

24 UNCTAD (2017). UNCTAD Assistance to the Palestinian People: Developments in the Economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb64d4_embargoed_en.pdf

25 MAS (November 2023). Israel’s War: Making Palestine Unlivable for Palestinians - Gaza War Economy Brief #6. Available at: <https://mas.ps/en/publications/9514.html>

despite nearly identical natural environments.²⁶ The majority of those who still are engaged in farming, do so as a secondary activity. According to PCBS's 2020/2021 agricultural census, only 3% of agricultural holdings account for 100% of a household's income while only 32% of farmers considered farming as their primary work. Farming land has gradually shrunk and become more fragmented. Between 2004 and 2020, the average agricultural landholding dropped from 18.6 dunums to 8.6—a 54% decrease over the course of 16 years.²⁷ In addition, employment in the agricultural sector has also declined substantially.²⁸ As of 2023, only 6.2% of OPT workers were engaged in the agricultural sector.

Figure (2): Percentage employment in the agricultural sector 2000-2022



Source: PCBS, labour force survey, various years.

Much of the difference in land productivity observed and decline in the agricultural sector is due to the impact of Israel's colonial measures on Palestinian agriculture. Israel's restrictions on the importation of fertilizers and restrictions on the movement of farmers, services and agricultural trade entail additional financial and time-related costs. It is estimated that the costs of exporting and importing borne by Palestinian producers are twice as much as those borne by their Israeli counterparts, while procedures for importation require four times the amount of time Israeli importers spend on similar activities.²⁹ The blockade of the Gaza Strip for the past 17 years before the current war led to the contraction of cultivated land in Gaza as a result of Israeli harassment of farmers. At the same time, the restrictions on entry of fertilizers, pesticides, as well as limits on water use have all combined to bring the sector to its knees.

Over the years, Israel used the land classification within the Oslo Accords (A, B and C) to tighten its control over Palestinian land, especially in areas classified as (C) which are under Israel's full control. As a result, by the end of 2021, more than 63% of area (C) has become directly exploited by settlements regional councils. The overall area controlled by Israeli settlements in the West Bank represents 10% of the total area of the West Bank. Whereas the confiscated areas for the purposes of military bases and military training locations represent about 18% of the West Bank, this is in addition to the annexation of land by the apartheid wall that has isolated more than 10% of the area of the West Bank. In addition, and since 1967, the Israeli occupation authorities

26 UNCTAD (2015) the besieged agricultural sector in the OPT. UNCTAD/GDS/APP/2015/1 https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2015d1_en.pdf

27 PCBS and Ministry of Agriculture (2023) Agriculture Census – Final Results - 2021. Ramallah: Palestine.

28 PCBS (2016 & 2022) Palestinian Labour Force Survey: annual reports 2016 and 2022. Ramallah: Palestine.

29 UNCTAD (2015) The besieged agricultural Palestinian sector. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2015d1_en.pdf

have confiscated about 353 thousand dunums of Palestinian lands and classified them as natural reserves in preparation for their seizure. At the same time, settlers' attacks varied from uprooting, destroying and burning trees, leveling operations of Palestinian lands.³⁰

2.2 Palestinian Authority's (PA) neoliberal development policies

The third challenge to relief and recovery lies in the nature of the policies stipulated in the PA's series of development plans issued since 1996, which have been generally neoliberal in orientation, focusing on individual profit based market outcomes with minimal regard for policies challenging settler colonialism on the ground. As a result, investments in the agricultural sector have been minimal, on the assumption that it is a low productivity sector. In line with this reasoning, the PA dedicates less than 1% its budget to agriculture.³¹ This implies that economic development has long been decoupled from any emancipatory political or social program and oriented towards market profit. This leaves land vulnerable to land confiscation with more reliance on the Israeli economy for essential agricultural commodities.

Free trade based on liberal principles which are propagated by the various development plans and PA policies imply that Israeli goods and commodities are freely imported into the West Bank and Gaza with no chance of protection for Palestinian agriculture. As is known in the established classical Lutz's infant industry tradition, protection in the early stages of development, is a pre-requisite for the success of any sector, till it actually stands on its own feet before it is open for competition.³² Such protection has never been available to Palestinian products under the pretext of free open markets.

As in the rest of the Middle East, liberal market-economy policies have resulted in the promotion of the non-tradable rent-seeking sectors on the expense of the productive sectors. For example, the market for land has become a liability for sustainable development in the OPT. The land registration process (Tasweeya) which has been devoid of any production promoting policies, has played a role in raising the value of land as a marketable asset compared to its cultivable productive role. The value added to the development process from trade in land is insignificant compared to its productive role which has economic but also socio-political implications.

2.3 Weak fiscal position of the PA

The fourth challenge in the face of recovery lies in the PA's weak fiscal position. Israel continues to withhold a substantial percent of the PA's customs taxes since November 2021 which has severely damaged the fiscal situation of the PA, and therefore its ability to govern. As a result, public sector employees have only received partial wage payments³³ and they are owed millions of dollars in wages, thus leading many government offices to work remotely in order to reduce the number of public sector employees commuting to work. At the same time health and education services have been adversely affected. A number of PA schools have been running a 4-day school week instead of 5 days. This deterioration in the position of the PA undermines its ability to deliver services and engage fully in the process of recovery and reconstruction in Gaza.

30 PCBS (2022) The confiscation of land is the reason for land day. Press release. Ramallah: Palestine: https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_30-3-2022-land-en.pdf

31 Dana, T. (2020). Localising the Economy as a Resistance Response: A Contribution to the "Resistance Economy" Debate in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 15(2), 192-204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620925274>

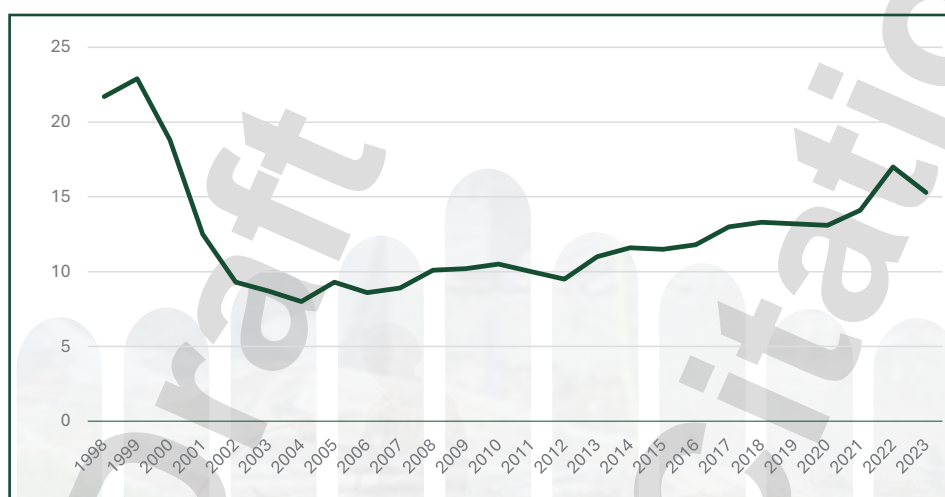
32 Metitz, M (2005) When and how should infant industries be protected?. *Journal of International Economics*. 66 pp. 177 – 196. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/melitz/files/infant_jie.pdf

33 As of February 2024, public sector employees were owed 4.3 times their full monthly salaries by the Palestinian Authority, which amounts to a total of USD 48.4 million for employees in Gaza and USD 102.7 million for the West Bank's civil servants (ILO March, 2024, Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 3).

2.4 Dependence on work in the Israeli economy and lack of control over economic policies

Ever since 1967, Palestinian workers have been engaged in working in the Israeli labour market. Their numbers have fluctuated over time based on political rather than economic considerations. The reliance of the Palestinians on work in the Israeli labour market allows Israel to shut down its market in the face of Palestinian workers, which not only exacerbates unemployment and devastates wages, but puts Israel in a position to bring the Palestinian economy to its knees every time it wished to punish the Palestinians politically.

Figure (3): Percentage of Palestinian workers employed in the Israeli labour market



Source: PCBS, labour force survey, various years.

The lack of control over monetary policy, custom taxes revenues and land zoning implies that the Palestinians have minimal space for maneuvering. This calls for utilizing alternative policy tools that are centered around resisting settler colonialism instead of continuing to attempt to comply with goals imposed on the Palestinians by the international donor community that are usually difficult to achieve under regular conditions and totally impossible under colonialism.

2.5 Inadequacy of food security paradigm under settler-colonialism

The final challenge highlighted by this paper focuses on the continued utilization of food security paradigm instead of other more relevant anti-colonial paradigms, including food sovereignty. The model utilized for food security is based on the 1996 Rome declaration³⁴ which has focused on providing access to food, mostly through trade or food aid. This model, however, tends to ignore the power dynamics that mediate food access. As noted by Nimer of Al-Shabaka 'Critically, reliance on trade makes Palestinians vulnerable to exogenous shocks. The initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this risk, when the disruption of international trade and food imports exacerbated food insecurity. The economy's shutdown caused many to lose their income and, consequently, the ability to afford food.'³⁵

Well before the current genocide in Gaza, Israel has engaged in confiscating land, uprooting trees and restricting Palestinian use of water in the West Bank. In Gaza, Israel has historically

34 <https://www.fao.org/4/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>

35 Nimer, F (2024) Food sovereignty in a Palestinian economy of resistance. Al-Shabaka: <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/food-sovereignty-in-a-palestinian-economy-of-resistance/>

determined how much food Palestinians are allowed to produce by making large swaths of agricultural land unusable. These actions have not only undermined food security, but impacted the core of life and livelihoods sustenance both in Gaza and the West Bank.

Therefore, food insecurity within the OPT is not just a recent war phenomenon, rather it is integrally related to Israel's long standing settler colonial policies, which eroded the Palestinian productive capacity and rendered the OPT dependent on aid and income from workers in Israel. In this respect, Palestinians are totally dependent on external sources for their sustenance in the form of food security. This raises the need for exploring other paradigms for achieving long-term sustainability of life in the OPT. A discussion of which follows in the next section.

3. Priorities for relief, rehabilitation and recovery

A number of plans have been proposed for relief, recovery and reconstruction in Gaza once the war is over. This includes the Palestinian Prime Minister's 'A day after plan for Gaza', as well as UNCT-HCT's 'Early recovery approach and action plan', amongst others.³⁶ The first priority that these plans and others have set forth is the need to provide: (1) immediate life-saving humanitarian relief in the form of food, shelter and basic essential services, (2) rapid damage and needs assessment framework that would be the basis for early recovery and reconstruction work. The plans rightfully call for taking into account universal developmental principles such as Palestinian ownership, gender parity, vulnerable groups' inclusivity, integration of government and civil society institutions' efforts, emphasizing the role of UNRWA to meet the growing needs of refugees across the OPT, etc.

Yet any viable relief, recovery and reconstruction action must be firmly rooted in a broader developmental political economy framework that can address the effects of the humanitarian catastrophe and generate momentum to rebuild Gaza and the West Bank with a view towards decolonization. As such, the Palestinian people's right to development and self-determination should not be replaced by humanitarian and economic assistance, essential as these may be in the interim. The role of the recovery would be to meet the immediate life-saving needs, but to do so in a manner that supports the foundations for sustainable recovery as well as dignified political resolution. Development gains from the process of recovery can be accomplished by fostering a synergy linking relief to development.

How could this be achieved given the paper's particular focus on agriculture, food security and incomes?

Given the shortcomings of the food security paradigm, and its biased power dynamics in favor of Israel and the international community, there is a need to reorient these power dynamics in favor of the Palestinians through addressing the paradigm of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty can be defined as 'the right of peoples to health and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations'.³⁷ Therefore, food

36 UNCT-HCT (September 2024) Early Recovery Approach and Action Plan for Gaza. United Nations Country Team and Humanitarian Country Team In the Occupied Palestinian Territory. [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Palestinian Prime Minister's Office \(September, 2024\) A Day after Plan for Gaza.](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Palestinian%20Prime%20Minister's%20Office%20(September,%202024)%20A%20Day%20after%20Plan%20for%20Gaza.pdf)

<https://www.mofa.pna.ps/ar-jo/mediaoffice/politicalstatement/palestinian-prime-minister-a-day-after-plan-for-gaza>

37 Declaration of Nyeleni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007. <https://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/>

sovereignty promotes agrarian and food rights for peasants through an agenda that centers itself on reorienting food systems around local production grounded in agro ecological principles.³⁸

Food sovereignty emphasizes reclaiming land and resources, creating communally organized production, enhancing the productivity of agricultural land and building the infrastructure needed to support a resistance economy. This perspective starkly contrasts with the cash-crop export orientation strategy currently employed and encouraged by the Palestinian development plans, in which Palestinian farmers are encouraged to grow crops instead of achieving a basic level of self-sufficiency and food sustainability.

A return to tending the land based on utilizing local inputs of agricultural production, ecologically sound pesticides and fertilizers, which aim to enhance the productivity of farming along economic lines is essential. A number of initiatives aimed at ecological farming with organic produce have been established across the West Bank with viable economic returns. These include initiatives such as 'Adel, Khadra', which all take into account the need to maximize profit for farmers, but also work on the backward and forward linkages in agriculture. These initiative have already been experimenting with producing organically based pesticides and fertilizers which can be marketed instead of relying on Israeli or international versions that are much more costly, as well as deprives the Palestinians from their capacity to control the entire value chain process of farming.

How can these initiatives be transformed into a viable sector with sustainable incomes? As noted by Nimer,³⁹ the answer lies on solidarity–resistance based economy, whereby a successful shift to food sovereignty cannot be separated from a broader socio-political movement encouraging Palestinians to support their farmers, even when the price is initially relatively higher. As in the case of the infant industry example cited earlier, locally produced food should be seen as an investment which initially might be more costly, but as production becomes more efficient with rising production, it is likely that prices will decline and a step toward towards a more dignified future. This approach is especially key for strategic crops, such as wheat, fruits and vegetables, that are currently cheaper to procure either from abroad or Israel. Those who can return to the land should be encouraged to do so, with support from the PA through tax policies.

In the Palestinian context of settler colonialism, and particularly since the restrictions on trade with the rest of the world impede the viability of economic enterprises, the best opportunity to expand the productive sectors (agriculture and manufacturing) would be to replace imports of Israeli goods and services by local production. According to MAS, there are more than 36 goods and commodities (agricultural and simple manufacturing) with a total value of \$1,563 million that can be replaced by locally produced products.⁴⁰ By reciprocating Israel's shutting down of its economy in the face of Palestinian products, the PA can restrict the entry of Israeli goods and commodities for which there is a Palestinian alternative.

Given the restrictions on the PA's capacity to alter tariffs for the purposes of protecting the local market (courtesy of the Paris Economic Protocol), official government support and endorsement of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) Movement can be utilized as an economic mechanism to enhance local production and consumption without having to engage Israel in dialogue over trade

38 Wittman H, Annette D and Nettie W (eds) (2010) *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature & Community*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood.

39 Nimer, F (2024) Food sovereignty in a Palestinian economy of resistance. Al-Shabaka: <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/food-sovereignty-in-a-palestinian-economy-of-resistance/>

40 MAS (2024) Import substitution policies for primary goods. Round Table 3. <https://mas.ps/publications/10303.html>

measures. By promoting the boycott of Israeli goods, and not only the small fraction of settlement goods, Palestinians can enhance production of local goods and commodities, lessen their dependency on the Israeli economy and enhance their ability to survive and resist Israel's colonialism.

Strengthening social protection systems will also be vital, particularly by linking short-term humanitarian interventions to long-term sustainable and rights-based frameworks that contribute to a stronger national social protection floor. Further supporting the humanitarian-development approach in social protection is pivotal to delivering resilient social assistance programmes to the many facing poverty and vulnerability, while also sustaining recent advancements in the sector, namely the introduction of social allowances for persons with severe disabilities and older persons, and relaunching efforts towards the establishment of a social insurance system for all Palestinians. Investing in education and skills development is equally essential. This investment not only helps equipping workers with the skills needed for a post-war labour market recovery but is also crucial for the generating dignified income levels that saves workers and their families from poverty.

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