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The Effectiveness of Providing Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, and Sanitation) to Bedouin Communities and Remote Areas

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) regularly publishes applied and scientific studies, in addition to brief research papers, as part of an annual series of roundtable sessions on important economic topics of interest to the public and decision-makers. The policy briefs outline the key recommendations of selected scholastic activities, in order to disseminate this information and maximize the benefits derived from this series of sessions.

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**PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)**

Tel No. +970 (2) 2987053/4

Fax No. +970 (2) 298055

info@mas.ps

www.mas.ps

The Effectiveness of Providing Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, and Sanitation) to Bedouin Communities and Remote Areas

Prepared by: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)

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1. Background

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) held its fifth roundtable session this year, to discuss “The Effectiveness of Providing Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, and Sanitation) to Bedouin Communities and Remote Areas”, bringing together a group of stakeholders, experts, and interested parties. The session and background paper were funded with support from the Heinrich-Böll Stiftung.

Bedouin communities in the West Bank are among the most vulnerable population groups, mainly living in Area “C” across the various governorates of the West Bank. The occupation’s systematic policy of settlement expansion relies on establishing random settlements and outposts, which has been recently accelerated, especially after the events of October 7, 2023, through the gradual seizure of Palestinian lands as part of various ongoing confiscation decisions.

Bedouin communities depend heavily on livestock as their primary source of livelihood, which has been constantly targeted in attacks, sometimes through confiscation and sometimes by restrictions on grazing areas. These measures force Bedouin communities to purchase fodder, resulting in financial burdens due to the cost of buying and transporting it to their communities.

Furthermore, Bedouin communities experience significant barriers to accessing essential services, which has led to the deterioration of their social, economic, and health conditions. They are denied their right to safe drinking water, prevented from building electricity networks and sewage systems, and forced to live in temporary housing under the constant threat of demolition by Israel. The occupation forces also prevent the construction of schools and healthcare clinics and refuse to grant licenses for them. Even when schools and clinics are built, they are often demolished, regardless of whether international organizations funded them. All of this compound the suffering of all segments of Bedouin society—children, women, and men—and deprives them of their basic right to live in dignity.

2. Strategic Objectives

The conditions of Bedouin communities and remote areas in the West Bank call for a comprehensive set of strategies and plans. These strategies need to address the severe lack of access to basic services due to restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities, which hinder the establishment of basic infrastructure such as water, education, sanitation, and roads.

2.1 Achieving an Accessible and Inclusive Health System

More than 100 Bedouin communities need permanent health clinics. Currently, these communities depend on mobile health units, which face operational obstacles or are threatened with demolition and removal by the Israeli side. The lack of permanent health facilities forces Bedouins to travel long distances, up to 20 kilometers, to receive basic healthcare, further exacerbating their hardship. Funding for these clinics should be increased to help them withstand direct threats from the Israeli occupation authorities.

2.2 Enabling Access to Education and Withstanding Threats

Targeting basic schools in Bedouin communities with demolition orders constitutes a direct denial of the right to education. There is a dire need to empower students to exercise their right to education and alleviate the difficult conditions they face in accessing primary and secondary schooling. An estimated 70% of schools are at risk of demolition, threatening the right of over 1,500 children to primary education, potentially leaving Bedouin communities without access to schooling.

According to a 2017 assessment, only 6 of the 46 Bedouin communities in the West Bank have primary schools. The remaining primary school students in 20 Bedouin communities still need public transportation to attend schools, while other students from different communities must travel up to 6 kilometers to reach the nearest school.

2.3 Improving Sanitation Services and Reducing Health and Environmental Risks

Bedouin communities in the West Bank are facing a severe sanitation crisis, leading to serious health and environmental risks, especially for women and children, who are disproportionately affected by the lack of safe infrastructure. Due to the lack of centralized sewer systems, most of these communities rely on open latrines or rudimentary wastewater disposal methods. This is caused by stringent Israeli restrictions on planning and construction in Area “C”, which negatively impacts health conditions and limits opportunities to improve basic living conditions. All of this requires plans and strategies that protect the Bedouin population from health and environmental risks.

3. Policy Recommendations

In brief, the living conditions of Bedouin communities and remote areas are intertwined and complex, largely due to tightening restrictions by the Israeli occupation. Protecting and ensuring the safety of the Bedouin population is therefore crucial for providing basic services and improving their overall quality of life. To that end, a number of policy measures can be implemented:

1. Adopting an emergency Inclusive income policy for these communities and remote areas located entirely in Area C, which encompasses around 23,000 people across more than 90 communities and villages. This would ensure providing them with a basic income needed to adequately cover the basic necessities of life at both the individual and family levels. This is especially important given the increasing Israeli restrictions on grazing areas for Bedouin communities, which constitute their primary source of livelihood, as opposed to grazing in the surrounding areas.
2. Developing clear plans by Palestinian ministries that include a portion of their financial and development allocations for areas located entirely within Area C.
3. The importance of establishing popular committees and neighborhood watch groups to protect these communities, thereby strengthening their ability to confront ongoing challenges and threats.
4. Establish a unified and accredited database for Bedouin and remote communities, using a standardized classification and naming system for these areas (Palestinian rural areas), set by local governance units and the Land Authority. Different international organizations and institutions can then use this

- data, which should include comprehensive demographic and geographic information about Bedouin communities, their locations, and the status of essential and basic services provided to them.
5. Creating a unified body to support Bedouin communities and remote areas, and to monitor the provision of primary services there.
 6. Providing tax exemptions for agricultural purchases, medicines, and veterinary services needed by the Bedouin population, given their primary reliance on livestock breeding.
 7. Establishing production lines in pastoral areas for dairy products and their derivatives and introducing them to Palestinian markets.
 8. Urgent international and legal interventions, especially by humanitarian organizations, are needed to curb Israeli violations against the population, their property, and their basic rights to livelihood.

Regarding urgent needs and interventions related to health, education, and sanitation services in particular, the following policy steps should be implemented:

3.1 Healthcare Services

1. Establish 24-hour emergency healthcare centers, strategically located to align with the geographical distribution and accessibility of Bedouin communities. Each center should be supported by a dedicated, fully equipped ambulance.
2. Foster coordination among health committees to streamline healthcare, prevent service duplication, and ensure sustainable service delivery.
3. Provide residents with intensive first-aid courses and emergency medical equipment, along with medications and medical supplies.
4. Promote mental healthcare for Bedouin communities, particularly given their higher exposure to violence, assaults, and settler attacks.

3.2 Educational Services

1. Develop the education sector to meet the needs and conditions of students in remote communities by integrating e-learning technologies into the educational process.
2. Telecommunications companies should provide direct support to Bedouin communities, such as exemptions from the costs of roaming services on Israeli telecom networks, as well as providing them with 3G internet services to enable them from accessing e-learning.
3. Provide introductory and intermediate information technology courses to enhance their understanding of technical issues and how to resolve them without disrupting electronic services.
4. Urge private institutions to provide social responsibility programs that support alternative energy projects in Bedouin communities, and equip them with solar panels to ensure the continuation of e-learning.

3.3 Sanitation Services

1. Put forward proposals for temporary infrastructure projects for specific Bedouin communities, to mitigate environmental damages impacting public health and limit the spread of diseases and epidemics.

2. Collect wastewater and establish desalination plants (though basic ones), to mitigate environmental impact and the spread of health risks.
3. Increase efforts of civil society and international organizations to establish dedicated sanitation facilities, especially since these are frequently subject to demolition. The aim here is to preserve the dignity and safety of Bedouin communities, while meeting their needs.
4. Come up with solutions, even if basic, for providing sewage networks to protect Bedouin communities from diseases and epidemics and maintain a healthy environment.
5. Establish sewage lines and connect them to the existing sewer infrastructure in neighboring villages or the closest surrounding rural communities.