Palestine Economic Policy
Research Institute

Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

Executive Summary

Local Economic Development (LED)
for the State of Palestine
Economic mapping of Eastern Tubas

July 2017

This economic mapping report was prepared by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) in the context of the Local Economic Development project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with funds from Austria, Norway, and Sweden, through the Community Resilience Development Programme (CRDP).

Research Supervision: Raja Khalidi

Research Team: Ahmad Uwaidat
Iman Saadeh
Reda Zurba
Ali Jabareen
Wafa Bitawi
Misyef Jamil

Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)
Jerusalem and Ramallah
2017

Executive Summary
Eastern Tubas

Target Area

The eastern rural region of Tubas and the northern region of the Jordan Valley include the localities of Al-Aqaba, Al-Yarza, Al-Maleh, and Kardala, all classified as Area C, with the exception of a small stretch of land located in Bardala and Ein Al-Beida nominally under full Palestinian Authority jurisdiction (Area A).

Political Context

This region is targeted by Israeli policies aiming to systematically depopulate and isolate the area so as to transform it into closed settlement and military zones off-limits to the local population. Since 1967, the occupation authorities have declared most of the northern Jordan Valley a closed military zone and protected green areas, while financing the expansion of existing settlements and the construction of new ones in this area. The Palestinian residents of these areas face discriminatory illegal regulations that do not permit them to construct new facilities and in many cases, force them to demolish their homes or other structures — for instance, old dilapidated buildings, built on registered Palestinian land, have been demolished by the Israeli forces under the claims they are constructed on natural reservation land. Moreover, the Israeli authorities frequently confiscate and destroy agricultural land, displacing tens of Palestinian families and depriving many of them from their main source of income, for the purposes of Israeli military trainings.

In and around these communities, Israel retains full control including law enforcement, planning, and construction. These communities rely on agriculture including livestock breeding as their main source of income. Land confiscations for settlement expansion or military enclosures severely limit the area available for cultivation or livestock herding. Aside from the direct economic consequences of land confiscations and closures in the area, the Israeli policies and practices have severely affected Palestinian communities' ability to develop the existent infrastructure to meet their needs in terms of housing, education, health, and other basic services. Demolition orders foster uncertainty among the Palestinian population and occasionally force people to leave their localities.

Economic Situation

Cultivated agriculture represents the backbone of economic activity in the villages of Kardala, Bardala, and Ein Al-Beida. These communities represent an extension of the Northern Jordan Valley as they are located along Highway 90 in the far northeastern part of the West Bank and are parallel to the Jordanian border up to Bisan Plain inside the Green Line. The region is very fertile and is known for producing vegetables and citrus crops; however, as of the last decade and due to Israeli control of water resources in the area, farmers resorted to cultivating higher-value crops such as vegetables instead of high water-consumption citrus crops. Today, farmers in the area produce tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, chili, squash, eggplants, green beans, cauliflower, cabbage, cantaloupes watermelon, corn, onions, garlic, some citruses, guava, dates, grapes, avocados, and medicinal herbs. There are also rain-fed agricultural crops such as chickpeas, beans, wheat, barley, and corn. Naturally, farmers in the region use modern drip-irrigation techniques for a more efficient use of the already restricted water resources. The area of the cultivated land comprises only a fraction of all land suitable for agriculture; the rest of the area remains unexploited because of Israeli restrictions on agricultural activities or the lack of water resources. Many water wells which traditionally supplied these villages have dried up in the past years, so farmers have become more dependent on supplies through Israeli Mekorot company, the costs of which are shouldered by the Palestinian government.

About half of land owners in the area do not farm the land themselves. Instead, they lease their land as open agricultural lands or closed greenhouses through a sharecropping system. Typically, in the sharecropping system, the owner and the farmer split the returns on the produce in equal shares, while the farmer incurs the production costs including inputs. In case the production costs are incurred by the owner, the returns on the produce are usually split in a ratio of 70% for the land owner and 30% for the farmer.

As previously mentioned, the Palestinian communities in the region depend largely on agriculture as the sole income-generating activity. In the past few years, this source of income has dwindled as a result of: the Israeli occupation policies that have constrained the amounts of water available for agriculture throughout the occupied territory; the increasing input costs of agricultural production; and the climatic changes which the region is experiencing. In order to cope with the decline in farming revenues, farmers are increasingly becoming dependent on low-wage workers or often family members as the sole workers.

Community representatives contend that as much as 70% of the agricultural produce is sold in the Israeli market, either directly or indirectly through local dealers. The remaining 30% is marketed in the local wholesale markets in Qabatya, Nablus, and Beita. The prices for the different crops fluctuate with market supply and demand conditions, but they generally sell for higher prices in Israel than in the West Bank. Because products are usually marketed and sold inside Israel via intermediaries and dealers, farmers do not reap the benefits of the higher prices of their crops in the Israeli market.

While water supply constraints remain the largest challenge for agricultural development, a primary challenge faced by farmers in the area is the increasing cost of production inputs and raw materials such as sterilizers, fertilizers, and pesticides. Furthermore, in light of the absence of effective quality control for these products, especially from governmental bodies, farmers get low-quality products for high prices and are often exposed to fraudulent schemes from suppliers.

Product marketing is another serious obstacle with which farmers in the region have to contend. Marketing becomes challenging in seasons when large areas are planted with similar crops. This leads to an over-supply of products, leading to lower prices. Not to mention that during harvest seasons, Israeli produce usually floods the Palestinian market, thus contributing to more market surplus of Palestinian products not absorbed by local demand.

Lower revenues and the high cost of inputs prevent farmers from investing and developing their lands. As a matter of fact, farmers in the area have limited cash flow, which constraints their ability to buy inputs at competitive prices, and many of them resort to buying the needed inputs on credit, which means that they have to pay 10-15% more.

The Al-Maleh, Al-Aqaba, and Al-Yarza communities, on the other hand, depend mainly on livestock breeding, rather than on plant agriculture, with a few small sub-communities that own or rent limited areas for cultivation.

The estimated size of the livestock in these communities is around 13,000 sheep, 1,400 cows, 15000 poultry, 1600 bee hives, one turkey farm, and 20 camels. The high cost of fodder and the high mortality rate of newborns represent the biggest challenges for livestock producers in these areas. As for water supply, the producers are forced to purchase water tanks, at a cost of NIS 7-15/liter. Further, these production inputs, including fodder and water tanks, are purchased from larger neighboring areas such as Tubas, which adds to the transportation costs incurred by the local producers.

Administratively, the communities are part of the Tubas governorate, even though, the villages of Kardala, Bardala, and Ein Al-Beida are historically considered to be an extension of the Northern Valley of Jericho. The communities are represented by five village councils, with Al-Yarza and Al-Aqaba having one joint village council in spite of not being connected directly through roads. The population of the communities is estimated at 6,000 inhabitants living on an area of about 82,500 dunams (825 hectares), with the exception of Al-Maleh, which is considered to be an open area between the Hamra and the Northern Valley totaling 300,000 dunams. The residential areas constitute around 1,200 dunams, while agricultural land constitutes around 62,280 dunams; the area of the Tubas governorate is around 402 km^2.

Common Concerns

Considering the Tubas governorates' reliance on plant agriculture and livestock farming, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) play central roles in the economic development of the region. The MoA tries to subsidize agricultural inputs, monitor and support the import and export of agricultural products, provide veterinary services, and advise on the implementation of third-party agricultural development projects, mostly by international development agencies. For example, the Palestinian government supported local initiatives to direct funding for the development of the infrastructure in the marginalized village of Al-Aqaba including the opening of new roads and expanding the electric grid. Other projects in the area include the installation of Photovoltaic (PV) solar panels for generating electricity in the communities of Kardala, Bardala, and Ein Al-Beida.

The villages of Al-Yarza and Al-Maleh lack basic infrastructure services such as potable water, electricity, roads, solid waste, and wastewater management. The residents resort to purchasing water tanks to meet their needs. As for electricity, a few solar panels have been recently installed in some areas, but the generated amount is limited and does not fully serve the areas. On the other hand, although water and electricity grids are constructed in Al-Aqaba, Bardala, Kardala, and Ein Al-Beida, the supply of electricity and water is intermittent. In addition, the communities have accumulated large amounts of debt for unpaid utility fees.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the unemployment rate in the region in recent years has been above 40%. Women's participation in the labor force in the rural communities of Tubas is limited to 25% of women aged 15 years or above, while the rate of male participation for the same age group is about 85%.

Several international and local agencies have targeted the area of Tubas with developmental projects including UNDP, FAO, CARE International, OXFAM, PARC, UNICEF, JICA, and others. The interventions included: farmland reclamation, road construction, water grid expansion, water reservoirs and irrigation systems, provision of food production and processing equipment, installation of solar panels for electricity generation, rehabilitation of livestock enclosures, training and other support services to plant and livestock farmers.

Compared to agriculture, the manufacturing and handcraft sectors are negligible. In Al-Aqaba, there exist small plants for processing dairy products and medicinal herbs, while there is almost no industrial activity in the other villages. Aside from small grocery shops and other stores, there are no major activities in these villages. The residents usually commute to Tubas to buy other products.

Development Needs

In all targeted villages, there is a pressing need for infrastructural rehabilitation and expansion, including mostly electricity and water grids and road construction.

With regards to agriculture, which is the main source of income for most residents, interventions aiming to develop the sector could target numerous aspects: effectuating the role of local cooperatives in marketing farmers' produce; expanding and enhancing farmers' access to water resources; and subsidizing the procurement and/or production of fodder and other inputs. These efforts could be supplemented with capacity-building programs for local farmers to develop their agricultural techniques. Lastly, considering the significance of agriculture in the Northern Valley area, specialized agricultural education institutions could prove to be a beneficial resource for local residents.

Aside from the said interventions, the area is in need of expansion in the number of schools, health centers, and municipal buildings.

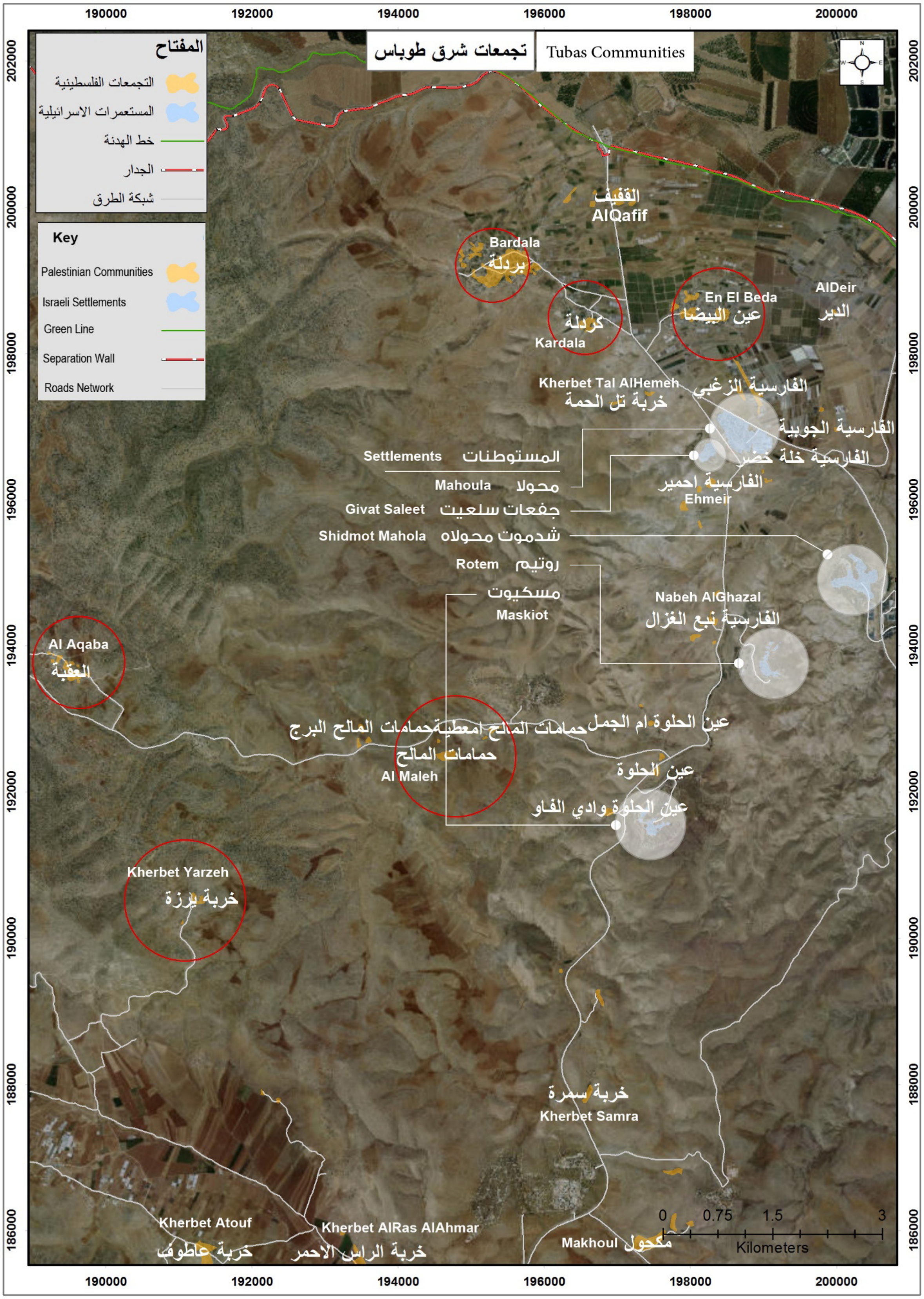
It is crucial to address the fundamental infrastructure needs in this area, including the building of both main roads across Tubas and smaller roads connecting different communities, especially Khirbet Al-Yarza, whose people incur high costs of water and electricity due to its isolation.

An additional area of concerted intervention to benefit all communities and link the region with the rest of the occupied territory is establishing and preserving historic sites and monuments for the purpose of transforming them into tourist attraction in order to promote tourism in the area. The natural beauty of the countryside can promote eco-tourism, which calls for construction of parks, hiking areas, hiking tracks, special tracks for horses and bikes.

Local Economic Development Forum

The MoLG is adopting a decentralized model to address local developmental needs. The Ministry will establish a local economic development forum for East Tubas as well as a local economic development unit integrated in the local administrative bodies. The forum is designated the role of planning development interventions at the local level, including advising on the implementation of these interventions. The forum is also responsible for overseeing the technical and professional performance of the local economic development unit of either the joint services council or the joint village councils or municipalities in the targeted areas. The local economic development unit is mandated with following up on the implementation of the forum's and the local administrative bodies' recommendations. This is to ensure that the plans of the local government units and the recommendations of the forum are streamlined.

Tubas Map


تجمعات شرق طوباس
Tubas Communities
المفتاح
التجمعات الفلسطينية
المستعمرات الاسرائيلية
خط الهدنة
الجدار
شبكة الطرق
Key
Palestinian Communities
Israeli Settlements
Green Line
Separation Wall
Roads Network
القفيف
AlQafif
Bardala
بردلة
كردلة
Kardala
En El Beda
عين البيضا
AlDeir
الدير
Kherbet Tal AlHemeh
خربة تل الحمة
الفارسية الزغبي
الفارسية الجويبة
الفارسية خلة خضر
الفارسية احمير
Ehmeir
Settlements المستوطنات
Mahoula محولا
Givat Saleet جفعات سلعيت
Shidmot Mahola شدموت محولاه
Rotem روتيم
مسكيوت
Maskiot
Nabeh AlGhazal
الفارسية نبع الغزال
Al Aqaba
العقبة
حمامات المالح البرج
حمامات المالح امعطية
عين الحلوة ام الجمل
حمامات المالح
Al Maleh
عين الحلوة
عين الحلوة وادي الفاو
Kherbet Yarzeh
خربة يرزة
خربة سمرة
Kherbet Samra
Kherbet Atouf
خربة عاطوف
Kherbet AlRas AlAhmar
خربة الراس الاحمر
Makhoul
مكحول
0 0.75 1.5 3
Kilometers
190000
192000
194000
196000
198000
200000
186000
188000
190000
192000
194000
196000
198000
200000
202000