The Palestinian Agriculture Sector through 40 Years of Occupation
Prepared by PARC and Partner Organizations, June 2007

Why this report:
The Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), in the Diaspora and in Israel, along with the solidarity movements across the world, are commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the enduring Israeli occupation.

We deemed it important to issue this report out of our national role in enhancing Palestinian peaceful resistance, steadfastness, independence and nation building, in order to (1) shed light on the repercussions of the Israeli occupation's various policies and measures on agriculture and on all walks of the rural life during the past 40 years, (2) pressure all parties concerned to prevent further devastation in this sector and (3) mobilize political and financial support for the sector.

We realize the importance of the agricultural sector in supporting and maintaining the Palestinians' political, national and morale existence due to the fact that this sector comprises the third contributor to the GDP additionally to the generation of employment, particularly female unemployment, besides the provision of food and livelihoods.

Background:
The Zionist Movement has entrenched its project in Palestine through three major mechanisms; control of land, control of labor, and control of the market. These tools effectively are embedded in the continuing aggressive policy against the Palestinian people and their national existence. Furthermore, the policy of land expropriation has been entwined with the policies of all successive Israeli governments, and has lead to consecutive catastrophes and expulsions of the Palestinian people.

Ever since 1948, Israel destroyed and depopulated 531 Palestinian villages and towns\(^1\), the majority of which formed centers of Palestinian agriculture. Almost 726,000\(^2\) Palestinians were deported partially to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while the other part ended in the Diaspora living in refugee camps depending on international assistance provided by the UN agencies, particularly UNRWA. Those who earned their living from agriculture prior to 1948 forcefully turned to another life style and a different livelihood. Then, Israel expropriated more than 80% of the territory of historical Palestine estimated as 26,323 square kilometers.\(^3\)

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1 Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) Diary 2007, page 308
2 Ibid
3 PASSIA Diary 2007, page 304
Israel persisted with its same policy of land expropriation after occupying the rest of the Palestinian lands in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967. It destroyed and depopulated many villages such as `Imwas, Yalu and Beit Nuba, and extended its control and jurisdiction to an additional 6,020 square kilometers.\textsuperscript{4}

**Agricultural indicators:**

The amount of farmed land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WB/GS) is estimated as 1,488 square kilometers, which comprises 25.2% of the total size of the WB/GS.\textsuperscript{5} 10.6% (158.2 km\textsuperscript{2}) of the total agricultural land is irrigated and it is distributed as follows: 5.7% in the West Bank and 72.6% of Gaza's farmed land. In comparison, the irrigated farmed land in the Israeli settlements constructed in the oPt comprises 70% of the total farmed land despite the fact that Israeli agriculture contributes only 2% of the GDP, whereas, the Palestinian agriculture reached up to 12.4% of the GDP in 2004.\textsuperscript{6} It is, however, worth noting that agriculture's contribution to the GDP has fluctuated over the years; it has been influenced by the Israeli policies and system. In 1967, for example, the contribution of agriculture was nearly triple the aforementioned percentage.

Agricultural produce such as olives, olive oil, vegetables, fruits, and cut flowers comprise 25% of total Palestinian exports.\textsuperscript{7}

Furthermore, agriculture generates a good percentage of employment. As of September 2006, 14.4% of the total labor force in the oPt (men and women) were employed in agriculture,\textsuperscript{8} and 32.5% of the female labor force worked in agriculture in 2004.

Palestinian people place a special importance in resorting to their land and agriculture during difficult times and economic crisis, although they have limited access to it. They cultivate the land with a variety of crops and raise animals using the accumulated know how inherited from their parents, grandparents and ancestors. This has been part of their steadfastness and fight for continued existence against continuously destructive Israeli policies and measures. Agriculture was and is still the major dynamic mechanism to ensure food security and livelihoods for the Palestinian people.

Israel realized the centrality of agriculture in the life of the Palestinians, and it targeted this sector as part of its plans to annex the Palestinian economy to its own economy and market mechanisms. Israel’s policies aimed to destroy all potential elements of the productive process, and transform Palestinians from active producers to passive consumers.

\textsuperscript{4} PASSIA Diary 2007, page 308  
\textsuperscript{5} PASSIA Diary 2007, Page 116  
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{8} PCBS, Labor Force, July-Sept. 2006.
Since 1967, Israel has focused its policies and measures on creating facts on the ground and irreversible realities by implementing a series of military orders and administrative measures backed by the force of the occupation army. These policies and orders have been aimed at altering the pre-1967 master plan of the oPt and creating a new geopolitical and economic map. The first and foremost order pertinent to the Palestinian land was freezing the land registration process in 1968, which enabled Israel to start the process of land expropriation and the construction of Jewish settlements on the confiscated land claiming the land to be either no man’s land or state land. It is worth noting, however, that Israel confiscated land for which Palestinian owners presented ample documentation proving their ownership.

On the other hand, Israel started a series of deliberate actions to destroy Palestinian agriculture and transform farmers and peasants to “black” laborers working mainly in Israeli agriculture and in the construction sectors. As such, Israel’s purpose was to neutralize and expel the Palestinian farmers from their land and shake their sense of belongingness to the larger Palestinian picture.

Additionally, Israel transformed the Palestinian market to the second largest consuming market of Israeli products after the United States.

**Israel’s annexation policies:**

Israel consistently followed a policy of controlling and annexing as much Palestinian land and resources as possible, confining the Palestinian population in separate and isolated ghettos, and obliterating the agriculture sector through (1) control of the arable land and pastures, (2) control of water resources, (3) construction of Jewish settlements, (4) fragmenting the oPt by the closure and siege regimes, and (5) installing the Apartheid Wall.

1. **Land expropriation and settlement construction:**

The construction of Jewish settlements in the oPt including occupied Jerusalem comprised the pillar of the Israeli policy to control Palestinian land and natural resources. In addition to inhibiting Palestinians’ individual and collective access to these resources, the Israeli policies aimed at fragmenting the territory and isolating communities, therefore preventing any territorial integrity. All this had a very clear purpose: creating an irreversible reality that would inhibit the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the oPt with full control over its land and resources. This is best proved by Israel’s intensification of settlement construction after signing the DOP\(^9\) in 1993. Israel since then fattened the existing settlements with hundreds of thousands of housing units additional to building new settlements and outposts.

According to the Israeli CBS, there are 247,000 settlers living among 2.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank excluding Jerusalem,\(^10\) and another

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\(^9\) Declaration of Principles known as Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization at the White House in 1993.

\(^10\) Israeli Ministry of Interior and Israeli CBS, 2005
190,000 settlers in and around occupied Jerusalem according to Peace Now.\textsuperscript{11}

The Israeli announced intention to have further land confiscation is to facilitate and ensure the safe and free movement of the Jewish settlers in the oPt by constructing a huge network of bypass roads and tunnels for the sole use of settlers with a total length of 4,177 km. The settlement and road networks were built on land meant for the natural growth of the Palestinian population, as well as on cultivated land.

On the other hand, building permits for Palestinians in all zones A, B, C have been controlled by Israel, which has the right to issue or refuse house permits. As such, Israel issued house demolition orders against tens of thousands of Palestinian houses in the oPt, particularly in occupied Jerusalem.

Jewish settlements have placed the agricultural sector and Palestinian farmers in great jeopardy. Over the past 40 years, well-armed settlers have committed crimes and bloody attacks against unarmed Palestinian farmers and rural families. For example, they have killed 66 farmers (men and women) during the period 2000-2007\textsuperscript{12}. Moreover, settlers commit many sabotage acts especially at acute times of cultivation and harvesting such as burning down the crops, cutting off the trees, and stealing the harvest. During the period 2000-2006 settlers uprooted more than 2 million trees and captured 77,000 dunums of land.\textsuperscript{13} In Gaza, 13\% (36,852 km) of land has been leveled since 2000.\textsuperscript{14} It is worth noting that settlers’ crimes have been committed with a great assistance from the Israeli military forces who either kept silent or were fully involved in these sabotage acts.

2. Control of water resources:

Israel controls 89\% of the water resources that are available for the use of Israel and the oPt. It controls 90\% of the surface water and 65\% of the water from the Jordan River with the rest in the control of the surrounding Arab countries (Jordan, Syria and Lebanon); leaving the Palestinians with none. Furthermore, Israel fully controls four major underground water basins in the east, west and north of the West Bank, as well as the coast of the Gaza Strip. Palestinians are allowed to consume only 245 million cubic liters of water a year. The individual Palestinian consumes about 105 cubic litres compared to more than 400 cubic litres of water used by the Jewish settlers even though they use the same water resources.\textsuperscript{16}

Nearly 10\% of the people of the West Bank in 220 population communities do not have access to fresh water as there is no water network infrastructure reaching to their communities. They have to buy water from brokers at a price five times higher than the price others pay for water supplied by networks.

\textsuperscript{11} PASSIA Diary 2007, page 310.
\textsuperscript{12} Palestinian National Information Center, February 2007.
\textsuperscript{13} Cited in PCBS, PASSIA Diary 2007.
\textsuperscript{14} Cited in the Palestinian Human Rights Center, PASSIA Diary 2007
\textsuperscript{15} PASSIA Diary 2007, page 116
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid
(NIS 15 compared to NIS 3). This has placed the Palestinian farmers under Israel’s mercy in using their own water resources, and has severely limited the cultivation of their land.

Israel has also imposed many restrictions on the drilling of wells and on the installation of grey water treatment stations to produce alternative irrigation water. The aim has been to keep the control of the water resources in Israel’s hand and to create more obstacles for the Palestinian agricultural sector. Additionally, Israel has followed a systematic discourse of massive destruction of water infrastructures; it has leveled 33,792 dunums\(^{17}\) of irrigation networks in the oPt, 2,529 dunums of which were in Gaza, besides destroying 1,362 water cisterns and tanks, 35 of which were in Gaza. It has also destroyed 979,230 meters of major water pipes throughout the oPt, 68,155, of which was in Gaza during the period 2000–07.\(^{18}\)

3. **Closure and siege:**

Israel imposed a general closure on the oPt in March 1993 through which it restricted the movement of people between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and between them and occupied Jerusalem, in addition to restrictions of movement between the oPt and Israel.\(^{19}\) Consequently, Palestinian workers (male and female) could not reach their work places; out of 146,000 workers who used to work in Israel (116,000 from WB and 30,000 from GS) only a few tens of thousands received work permits on an irregular basis.

Since 2000, Israel has tightened its closure regime depriving Palestinians of their livelihoods. Israel has erected permanent checkpoints, some of which have been transformed to well equipped and manned terminals, in addition to temporary checkpoints, roadblocks and gates. The latter were installed on the Apartheid Wall and some were identified as agricultural gates. The Israeli army controls all these points and have placed the Palestinians entirely under their mercy. Farmers and peasants have had the hardest time ever in their lifetime. The Israeli soldiers have been know to deliberately close these gates and deny farmers access through the checkpoints at the most acute times of the agricultural cycle particularly, at harvest times. Farmers have not been able to take their harvest to the market, which has caused double losses for farmers who have spent a lot of money on cultivation and production inputs. This is apart from the fact that farmers have to buy food from the market to meet their household needs and thus assuming more financial burdens.

An OCHA report indicated that the oPt witnessed an increase in the number of checkpoints and road blocks by 44%, reaching up to 547 checkpoints during the period November 2005 and November 2006.

The World Bank was subject to Israeli criticism after it published a report, stating that the restrictions imposed on people’s movement including the Wall, checkpoints and the bypass road network aimed at protecting the Israeli

\(^{17}\) 1 dunum = 1,000 square meters.

\(^{18}\) Palestinian National Information Center, February 2007

\(^{19}\) PASSIA Diary 2007, page 303
settlers and enhancing their economic growth at the expense of the Palestinian people.\textsuperscript{20} The report also stated that Israel is extending its policy of movement restriction and siege to almost 50\% of the West Bank, which has been fragmented to ten economic enclaves. The World Bank also attributed the economic problems particularly the rise of the unemployment and poverty levels among the 2.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank to the Israeli “security” measures. In another report, the World Bank stated that the continuing closure and siege will place the Palestinian subsistence agriculture in grave jeopardy.\textsuperscript{21}

The World Bank representative in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, David Craig, said that the Palestinian economy could improve only if an integrated economy is established and the freedom of movement is restored.\textsuperscript{22}

The Palestinian socioeconomic situation has dramatically deteriorated since 2002, when Israel started to construct the Wall and the associated regime, which has fragmented the West Bank territory to isolated ghettos and enclaves. Consequently, the GDP decreased by 30\% and poverty increased by 30\% during the period 1999–2004.\textsuperscript{23}

Subsequently, the United States, Canada and most European powers imposed a severe, inhumane regime of sanctions against Palestinians under occupation following the formation of the democratically elected Palestinian government in April 2006. In the words of the UN Special Rapporteur John Dugard, sanctions were imposed on the occupied rather than the occupier, the first time an occupied people has been so treated.\textsuperscript{24}

In parallel, Israel withheld the Palestinian tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and estimated as US$600 million a year. All these situations led to extreme misery and an excessive economic crisis that places the entire Palestinian Authority and economy under great threat of collapse.

Despite of the establishment of the temporary international mechanism (TIM) to channel aid to the oPt, and in spite of the increase in the size of the international humanitarian aid, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate as has been stated by the international aid organizations. For example, in its recent report, Oxfam International revealed that its partner organizations' projects in water, agriculture and health sectors consequently are now in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{25}

On the other hand, the international embargo, and the TIM bypass the Palestinian institutions, particularly ministries, undermining these and stripping them off their roles and responsibilities. They also paralyzed and inhibited the

\textsuperscript{21} World Bank, 15 Months Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis-An Assessment, 2002.  
\textsuperscript{22} World Bank Pessimistic on Palestinian Economy, May 2007.  
\textsuperscript{23} Oxfam International, Poverty in Palestine, the Human Cost of the Financial Boycott, April 2007.  
\textsuperscript{25} Oxfam International, Poverty in Palestine, the Human Cost of the Financial Boycott, April 2007.
Palestinian institutions from facing the recent challenges particularly the general strike initiated by various branches of the 152,000 civil servants sector, which is employed by the Palestinian Authority. Consequently, nearly one million people have severely suffered from this general strike.

An UNRWA report stated that the number of the Palestinian in acute poverty (living on less than 50 cents a day) has risen to reach more than one million.

4. Policy of separation and racial discrimination:

At a time when the world, particularly Germany, celebrated the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989; and the people of South Africa defeated the Apartheid regime in 1994 with the full support of the international community, Israel continues to initiate discriminatory policies and regimes against the Palestinian in the oPt. One of its major projects is the Apartheid Wall, which Israel started to construct in 2002 in the West Bank including occupied Jerusalem and is expected to be 730 km long upon its completion. The Wall will rob 46% of West Bank lands, in addition to isolating 10% of the West Bank and 28.5% of the Jordan Valley territory. It will isolate 97 villages and communities of 372,999 people:

- 56 communities in the east located between the Wall, the settlements and the bypass roads with an estimated population of 361,679;
- Eight villages of 5,015 people located between the Wall and the Green Line (1948 Armistice Line);
- 14 villages of 6305 people placed under threat of depopulation.

Israel has intensified its closure regime controlling people’s movement by establishing nearly 73 gates, out of which only 38 gates are working now. Through controlling these gates, Israel denies farmers and peasants access to their farms west of the Wall unless they are issued special permits for this purpose. Yet, Israel imposes a severe regime on permit issuance; it requires farmers to provide legal documents that prove their ownership of the land. On many occasions, farmers have been turned down and thus been unable to access their lands for cultivation and harvesting. This has led to the emergence of the landless farmer phenomenon.

A survey of 57 Palestinian communities around the Wall conducted by OCHA in 2006 found out that six farmers out of ten could not reach his land because of the Wall. It also indicated that 60% of the rural families have been entirely isolated and separated from their land. In the meanwhile, Israel provided permits to only 40% of rural families to access their land, and 30 out of 57 communities could not reach his land in a direct and systematic way. The survey stated that the 57 communities complained about the unsystematic

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26 United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Prolonged Crisis in the oPt: Recent Socio-Economic Impacts, November 2006.
27 The Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Campaign, Stop the Wall Newsletter, January 2007.
28 Ibid
29 Ibid
opening of the agricultural gates (26 gates), which were open only 64% of the planned time schedule.\textsuperscript{30}

Israel's construction of the Wall continues in flagrant violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of July 2004. The Wall has fragmented the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem into separate and isolated ghettos that inhibit the socioeconomic and territorial integrity on a future Palestinian state. It has also separated Palestinian family members and prevented Palestinians from reaching their work and health and education facilities. This is apart from its psychological impacts and other damages to be collected and assessed by the UN Register of Damage.\textsuperscript{31}

The Apartheid Wall is destroying the wide agricultural productive and social structure in the rural areas transforming it to landless hired labor force, which means creating belts of neo-slavery around the Wall in the 21st Century.

The Israeli government has also decided to establish industrial zones around the Wall. The assistant to the “Defense” Minister Afrayem Sneih, announced that three industrial zones will be established on the sides of the Wall and two others will be established within the territory of the settlements. He added that these zones will be a joint venture with Palestinian businessmen. It is expected to employ thousands of Palestinians by broker companies, which will deduct large amounts reaching to 37% of the workers' total wages. If this plan is implemented, it will bring a catastrophe to the Palestinian people because it will (1) underpin the Wall and maintain it for ever in defiance of the ICJ Advisory Opinion and the UN resolution, (2) fatten a very thin class of the Palestinian private sector at the expense of the Palestinian higher interest, and (3) since these industrial zones are border projects, there won't be any official Palestinian capacity to protect the environment or workers' safety and rights. Palestinians do not know what type of industries and businesses will be launched in these zones.

\textbf{5. Annexation and subjugation:}

The consecutive policies by the successive Israeli governments over forty years of occupation have aimed to subjugate and annex the Palestinian agricultural sector to the Israeli economy. Palestinian agriculture relies on Israel for production inputs including seeds, seedlings, fertilizers, pesticides irrigation networks and equipment, green houses, know how, infrastructure and services such as grading, filling, storage, marketing and transportation.

In addition, Israel continues to dump its agricultural and nonagricultural products in the Palestinian market. Consequently, prices of Palestinian produces keep falling below the cost price. This coincides with the declining of the purchase power among the Palestinians due to the continued economic crisis caused by the Israeli tight closure regime and the imposition of the international blockade on the Palestinian Authority.

\textsuperscript{30} OCHA, Barrier Stops Palestinian Accessing Land, November 2006.

\textsuperscript{31} General Assembly Resolution ES-10/15 issued on 2 August 2004.
Israel, as an occupying power, is responsible for improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. However, it has systematically neglected the vital services and infrastructures of the oPt particularly the agricultural infrastructure. Agriculture has been left with no budgets and financial support, no improvement of the existing underdeveloped infrastructure, poor technical and administrative cadre, etc. All of this besides Israel's control of the terminals and outlets has led to an extremely weak agricultural sector and many of the export-oriented produce such as citrus, vegetables and cut flowers have been drastically affected. The Palestinian export of fresh produce has fallen to one third.

Israel has left a weary sector through all of its measures and policies, however, the Palestinian Authority has also not given proper attention to it; very tiny financial support has been allocated to the sector, and insufficient planning has been conducted leading to an imbalance between offer and demand. Therefore, the agricultural sector has continued to be weak and underdeveloped.

The Israeli persisted policies have not only undermined the sustainable development process in the oPt, but also inhibited agricultural organizations and institutions from planning and implementing projects of medium and long-term impacts. Many of these institutions have suspended their long-term projects and focused on the relief and humanitarian aid projects that meet the practical (not the strategic) needs of the people. As such, their performance has dramatically fallen behind.

The impact on the socioeconomic structure in rural areas:

The pursuit for containing agriculture, being the core of the rural economies and the pillar of the Palestinian economy, was the target of the Israeli policy toward the agricultural and rural sector. Israel has followed a clear policy according to which it connected the Palestinian agriculture to Israel's interests in terms of focusing on globally sold crops and transforming farmers to "cheap" laborers in the Israeli market. Consequently, the wide social and productive class of farmers and peasants has decreased drastically, and vast parts of this class have been pushed to the "border" labor market to work in industries devastating to the environment and the human being. Thus, Israel has transformed rural areas to a social and demographic "natural reservation."

The Palestinian rural areas and the agricultural sector have become a garbage dump as Israel leaves the sewage and solid waste of the settlements to run in to the Palestinian land and particularly farmed land.

On the social level, the Israeli policy has enhanced passive values and trends such as exclusion, isolation, and egotism. It has also encouraged conservatism and tribalism among the rural people.

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32 It is worth noting that the Ministry of Agriculture was allocated 0.69% of the Palestinian Authority’s budget for the year 2005.
Over the past forty years, the Israeli coercive and devastative policies have persistently destroyed the local human and natural resources of the agricultural sector through:

- Expelling farmers and stripping them of the tools and mechanisms that comprised farmers' cultural and socioeconomic environment, and transforming them to a reserve labor force after they were productive and proactive elements in achieving social and food security. Palestinian farmers, as such, have become part of the market mechanisms;
- Tearing of the social consistency in an attempt to tear of the collective consciousness and solidarity by isolating a wide sector of farmers from their national and social context when they were separated from their land;
- The dysfunction of the environmental system in the rural areas as a result of the continuing destruction of the flora and fauna of the oPt and to dump solid and chemical waste, as well as Israeli settlements' sewage in the oPt;
- Exhausting the demographic and economic structure of the rural areas and placing alternative Israeli demographic and geopolitical master plans and zoning.

**Recommendations:**

In light of the aforementioned facts and challenges facing the Palestinian agricultural sector, and based on the internationally recognized human rights based approach to sustainable development, we wish to put the following recommendations:

1. Enhancing the status and role of the rural and agricultural sector in the Palestinian national policies;
2. Enhancing the strategic function of the agriculture sector in producing and reproducing the social capital and food security;
3. Activating the popular national and international effort in resisting the Wall and pressuring Israel to abide by the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the Wall and the call to stop the construction and dismantle the parts that were built;
4. Pressuring the international community to lift its blockade and sanctions against the Palestinian people;
5. Lobbying the Palestinian Authority, the civil society organizations, and the international community and donors to support the agricultural sector by increasing their budgetary support and pressuring Israel to lift its unfair siege and closure;
6. Introducing remedy interventions and good governance practices in the institutions involved in agricultural and rural development;
7. Introducing new strategic plans, which would take into consideration medium and long-term goals and decreasing the number of short-term
projects so as to push forward the wheel of sustainable agricultural development.

Conclusion:

The Israeli unbending pursuit to wipe the agricultural sector out of the Palestinian economy, and to dismantle the tight ties between farmers and their land, did not succeed to obliterate the historical symbiosis between Palestinian farmers and their land. Despite the severe policies and measures against this sector, farmers have persisted on working the land and challenging poverty and starvation in a very courageous manner. They have been able to create a paradigm of resistance in a spirit of solidarity, mutual support and an unvanquished will to survive.

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- Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC)
- Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU)
- Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS)
- Youth Development Association (YDA)