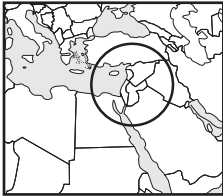


No sustainable development under occupation



Israeli occupation undermines Palestine's environment and minimizes any possibility that it can implement sustainable development. Alarming unemployment rates, weak and inefficient institutions and high dependency on customs revenues and financial contributions from donor countries makes apparent the unsustainability of the Palestinian economy. In addition, the disastrous conditions of the water supply facilities – mostly due to laws enforced during the 1967 Israeli occupation – poses an alarming threat to Palestinians' well being.

Palestine represents a very unusual case regarding sustainable development. In order to address this topic, there are a number of issues that need to be considered, the most important being the lack of sovereignty and control over resources, the absence of legislation or policy plans for development of any kind and the growing importance of donor country funding to the economies of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The lack of legislation and policies, especially with regard to sustainability, is linked to the Israeli occupation, which has ultimate power over the jurisdiction and geographic extension of any possible legislation, and is also a cause of political instability.

The reality of the occupation therefore makes it necessary to take into account the inadequacy of many development indicators when applied to the Palestinian situation. This does not mean that we must exclude Palestine from development statistics, but merely that the indicators that are widely employed are not necessarily valid with regard to this country, and consequently another kind of development measurements must be considered.

Unemployment

The World Bank's 2011 report on the current poverty situation on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip described the Palestinian situation as unique in the world. It noted that the country's unemployment rates are the highest in the world, mostly due to the lack of opportunities, and concluded that the unemployment rates are closely linked to the occupation.

According to this report, 19% of the population was unemployed in 2011, despite the fact that according to official data, 780,000 people were working in Palestinian territory in the first quarter of 2011, an increase of 130,000 compared to the previous year. This means a decrease in unemployment rates of approximately 21.7%. Young men and women are

particularly affected, since in 2009, the unemployment rate among young people was 10% higher than the overall unemployment rate.¹

Social and environmental issues

The situation with regard to health services is daunting. There are 25 public hospitals across the territories, and the number of inhabitants per bed reaches 1,349. The poor condition of the medical facilities makes it inevitable that a large number of patients must be transferred to neighbouring countries for treatment. This resulted in an additional expense of almost 1,484,200,000 Israeli shekels (USD 403,702,400) in 2010, largely due to the lack of sound planning and proper management. In fact, if the existing resources were properly managed, the ministry would be able to build facilities equipped with state of the art medical technology, which would make such expensive transfers unnecessary.

Regarding water supply and sanitation, the 2007-11 Gaza Strip blockade had dire consequences, particularly the severe damage inflicted on the infrastructure. Almost all sewage and water pumps were out of operation due to lack of electricity and fuel; this caused a great shortage of water and also sewage overflow in urban areas.² The blockade impeded the provision of spare parts, so the facilities were not repaired.

Agriculture accounts for 70% of Palestine's total usage of water, followed by domestic (27%) and industrial uses. According to a World Bank 2009 report, the residential water supply for the West Bank was estimated at about 50 liters per capita per day.³ In 2009, 60% of the population of the Gaza Strip

* There are no available data on GEI.

1 See "Amid Palestinian statehood push, a grim World Bank report," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 September 2011. Available from: <www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2011/0914/Amid-Palestinian-statehood-push-a-grim-World-Bank-report-on-the-West-Bank-Gaza>.

2 World Bank, *Gaza Strip Water and Sanitation Situation*, 2009. Available from: <web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/WESTBANKGAZEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22026701~menuPK:294370~pagePK:2865066~piPK:2865079~theSitePK:294365,00.html>.

3 Wikipedia, *Water supply and sanitation in the Palestinian territories*. Available from: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_supply_and_sanitation_in_Palestine>.

lacked access to continuous water supply.⁴ In the West Bank, only 13,000 m3 (out of 85,000 m3) of wastewater was treated in 2009, while in the same year the amount was 65,000 m3 (out of 110,000 m3), in the Gaza Strip.⁵

The same year, Amnesty International reported that up to 200,000 Palestinians in rural communities have no access at all to running water, and the Israeli army prevents them from even collecting rain water, while Israeli settlers have irrigated farms and swimming pools. In fact, the 450,000 settlers counted in this report use as much water as the total population of Palestine. In order to cope with water shortages and lack of infrastructure, many Palestinians have to purchase water of dubious quality from mobile water tankers, at very high prices.⁶

In 1993, the World Bank published a report entitled "Developing the Occupied Territories: An investment in Peace," which described the provision of public services in the occupied territories as highly inadequate, since water, solid waste and wastewater facilities were practically non-existent. Poor waste management contributed to environmental degradation, and the causes go back to the Israeli Administration from 1967 to 1993. Progress in rebuilding these facilities has been almost nonexistent, despite investments by many international donors, mostly due to the flaws and ambiguities in the Oslo Agreement, especially as it has been interpreted by the Israeli authorities. Escalating violence has further worsened this situation.⁷

When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, it declared all water resources to be property of the State of Israel, and since then several military orders have minimized water development in Palestine, fixing pumping quotas, prohibiting rehabilitation of wells or drilling new ones without a permit and confiscating or even destroying all Palestinian pumping stations on the Jordan River. Israel, at the same time, increased its exploitation of the water resources of the West Bank, drilling 38 wells. As a result of this, by 1993 Palestinians had access only to 20% of the

water of the aquifer system underlying the West Bank. The Oslo Agreement did nothing to improve the situation for Palestine. In fact, it was agreed that "existing quantities of utilization" were to be maintained, so Israel's exploitation of 80% of the aquifer was formally endorsed.⁸

It is not yet clear what will be the effect of climate change on Palestinian territories, but some experts predict rising average temperatures and decreasing precipitation, which will endanger even more the precarious state of water supply both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁹

According to a report published by the Research in the Middle East Institute, a number of Palestine and Israeli NGOs believe that "a comprehensive peace process would help in resolving the Israeli violations against the Palestinian environment. The current peace process was not seen as helping the environment."¹⁰ The environment clearly can't wait for serious peace talks.

Legislation issues

Palestinian legislation is extremely complex and contradictory. Some laws, for example, date from the time of the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate, and also from Egyptian and Jordanian dominion via Israeli occupation, which included military orders that were not part of the legislation per se but are still in force. Laws adopted after the establishment of the National Authority in 1994 constitute only 12% of the applicable legislation.

The judicial and legislative situation is clearly linked to the political instability of the country. The separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for instance, stopped the debate over 50 proposed laws.

Also, the updated laws did not abolish the old ones, some of which are contrary to the geographical jurisdiction of the Arbitration Act as enforced by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Jerusalem. There is dire need of updated legislation regarding the private sector for example, in order to regulate,

promote and strengthen the business environment, as well as with regard to health care.

It could be argued that the occupation is still playing a major role in thwarting effective legislation, weakening its ability to provide a framework for development.

In fact, both the legislative and the judiciary systems suffer from the continuing occupation, but also from the fact that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are split. This is one of the most important obstacles regarding sustainable development, since environmental policies are not available because of the lack of dialogue. Another factor that undermines sustainability is that the institutional weakness makes impossible to measure or improve the effectiveness of funding efforts by donor countries.

Donations, politics and sustainability

Different criteria regarding the allocation and administration of funds from donors are a constant source of conflict. Thus, the projects designated beneficiaries often fail to benefit from the funds from donor countries and enterprises. These conflicts are usually increased by the politicization of the services provided.

It should be noted that donors do seek to ameliorate this situation by promoting accountability and strengthening institutional transparency in Palestine, though the results are now being jeopardized by the increasing politicization of Palestinian society. In fact, many donations have the negative consequence of increasing dependence on this kind of funding, especially regarding donations with political goals such as the fund provided to the activities aiming at normalizing the relations with Israel. This kind of dependency also serves to undermine deep social values such as volunteerism, dignity and altruism. All of this has served to deepen social unrest.

Donors have also sought to enhance the capacity of different institutions in the Palestinian community, which was evident in a situation experienced by both civil society institutions and the Government.

4 UN News Centre, *Gaza water crisis prompts UN call for immediate opening of crossings*, 2009. Available from: <www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31927>.

5 World Bank, op.cit.

6 Amnesty International, *Israel rations Palestinians to trickle of water*, 27 October 2009. Available from: <www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/israel-rations-palestinians-trickle-water-20091027>.

7 A. Gray, *Environmental justice for Palestine*, 23 March 2007. Available from: <www.countercurrents.org/pa-gray230307.htm>.

8 Ibid.

9 EMWIS, *A war on water*, 2009. Available from: <www.emwis.org/thematicdirs/news/2009/06/war-water-environmental-problems-israel-and>.

10 See: <vispo.com/PRIME/enviro.htm>.