

Agricultural Development Association (PARC)

No Chance for a Smile in Gaza! The Agricultural Situation is a Mess.

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Throughout modern history, agriculture was a main source of living and income for a large segment of the people of Gaza Strip. It represents a major economic activity in Gaza. Citrus fruits, olives, almond, vegetables, strawberries and flowers and field crops are common there. However, nowadays, the agricultural sector encounters many destructive factors and other problems that lead to it to diminish, deteriorate and collapse.



For instance, due to the large increase in population there has been an on-going construction of buildings on the agricultural land, a matter which decreases the farming areas in Gaza Strip. Then, add to this, the Israeli military activities in the green fields in the same area. Moreover, there is the reality that the buffer zone was a strip of land of more or less than 300 meters that runs around the Gaza Strip border with Israel. Nowadays, this buffer zone land strip has been widened -- by the Israeli army -- into area that ranges between 1000-1500 meters. This area constitutes almost 30% of the arable land and water resources. Landowners and farmers of those arable lands cannot, by any means, reach their lands. Thus, they lost the advantage of cultivating it or raising any productive animals on it, while there is a dire need for more agricultural lands. Their land's size is unstable and their water resources used are not safe.

With a population of 1500000 citizens in Gaza Strip, there is a total of around 70000 farmers including 30000 farm workers and laborers. There is 80% of the population under poverty line; they live with international aid from UNRWA and other international & local NGOs. Unemployment rate has reached to 35%. It is also true that 40% of the population have totally lost their financial incomes, 50% lost half of their financial incomes, and that 35%

of the population suffer from malnutrition and anemia. The direct and indirect losses in the agricultural sector in Gaza amount to one million dollars per day.

Recently, the agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip (An area of approximately 175000 dunums) received tough blows and inflicted wide scale damages in all its parts; it was no wonder that there was no exception for the farming areas. It was obvious that there was a deliberate policy to demolish the infrastructure of the agricultural sector in a way that was hard for the poor farmers to recover their business and rehabilitate their farms and greenhouses (Approximately 50000 dunums have been totally damaged). In addition to those losses, the inconsiderate results of the military land incursions inflicted heavy losses upon the small scale and marginalized and poor farmers; sadly, the Palestinian farmers in Gaza Strip paralyzed from rehabilitating their lands. Rehabilitation of land and sustaining plantation need financial capabilities, time and collective efforts that those poor farmers may not endure or afford. Moreover, the damage has knocked down those seasonal and daily framers who work for per diem wages. Nowadays, there are more unemployed farmers than at any other time before, and there is a lower standard of living and malnutrition among the whole population. Those farmers have been forced to return to the long lines of Gaza's unemployed. To many of those farmers, agriculture is the only option they have. There are dozens of hundreds of domestic farmers and laborers who lost their jobs.

The reality that those farms and agricultural areas belong to the private sector makes it hard for its business owners to find some authority to compensate them for any losses they suffer. Undoubtedly, these tragic circumstances and awful situations of the farmers and their families and lands have lead to deteriorate the standard of living in the farming areas as a whole. Therefore, the socio-economic situation suffers from those financial and material losses without having any real opportunity for rising again and compensating their losses and returning to their farms.

Al-Fakkari village can be seen as one live example of the whole agricultural areas in Gaza Strip. In that village, there is some 6000 people living on an area of arable land of 7200 square dunums (A dunum is an area of 1000 square meters.) The vast majority of the citizens are farmers. Approximately 40% of village's land is cultivated with olive tress, different kinds of citrus, and almond, and 60% of it is cultivated with various types of vegetables such as cucumber and tomatoes, potatoes, peace, crops and fruits like watermelon, figs and grapes. There are other plants of wild life in the village. That village is located to the east of the border town of Rafah and adjacent to the 1984 truce border with Israel.

In January 2008 Israel fulfilled several military run over and land incursions flattening small plants and destroying old and high plants. Each time, the Israeli tanks took routs on the vegetable fields destroying greenhouses and all what is green in their own way. Israeli bulldozers opened wide roads on the agricultural fields causing massive damages to the agricultural sector. They bulldozed the crust of the land, the irrigation system, telephone lines and electricity posts, plus other infrastructure. Approximately 25% of the Gaza Strip farmers' plantations have been either uprooted or destroyed by the Israeli military activities.

One of the sad examples came from a witness by Mr. Essayed Said al-Amor (73 years old) as he mentioned that in 1951 he planted twenty seven olive trees in his land, and he took care of them as if they were his children. In January 2008 in one of the Israeli incursions, the Israeli bulldozers uprooted those trees! Also, he added that when he was forced to flee from his birthplace in the Negev desert 1948, he brought with him an ever green sycamore tree to plant it in al-Fukkari village. That tree was also uprooted by the same Israeli bulldozer. That event made the old man cry like a child who cries for losing his toy! He said that the event caused a deep scar in him and inflicted a psychological damage as well. Last week's military land incursion has left an area of approximately two square kilometers of farms as barren as the desert!

The damages in the farmers' cultivable lands, assets and properties have become irrecoverable with the strict Israeli cordon on Gaza Strip. Life needs are running out and there are no supplies for the agricultural sector. What Israel permits into Gaza Strip are the basic needs of life such as flour, sugar, beans, cooking oil, basic medical supplies. (Cf. In 1993 Karni or al-Mintar cross point was built to the east of Gaza city for an approximation of 800 lorries, to pass through into Gaza Strip per day, and for Gaza products to be exported from it. Nowadays, it opens occasionally).

This dire situation added salt to injury. In those days, the farmers are stuck between a stone and a hard rock. On the one hand, the Israeli army activities destroyed their assets, fields and greenhouses, while on the other hand they received no supplies to rebuild their destructed fields. By all means, the current situation meant a total economic collapse in the Gaza Strip. As a result of the current situation, the standard of living has sharply gone down and the level of poverty has terribly gone up from bad to worse. Life of the Palestinian farmer has turned to an unstable one. The majority of the farmers in Gaza Strip live days of mixed feelings between dream and hope on one side, and fear and anxiety on the other. They dream of a fruitful agricultural product of their plantations, and hope of a promising future, but also they feel fearful of the foggy current situation and anxious of the Israeli tanks to run over their plantations turning it into a mess in an hour or two. They do not have a third alternative.

It is no wonder that the agriculture is no longer a profession that minimizes the level of poverty and improves their standard of living, but rather, it is maximizing the scope of the hard situation. In addition to that, products of vegetables, fruits and crops are no longer as available in the local markets as they used to be. It is no longer as inexpensive as it used to be. The Palestinian farmer in Gaza cannot meet the rapid demand for food as the cost of agricultural production has risen to a high level and the requirements of the field, and agriculture, are unavailable! In simple words, the Palestinian farmer faces an uncertain future due to the Israeli closures, policies, incursions, siege and restrictions! On the contrary to all what the peace agreements mentioned, it is noticeable that minimizing production costs cannot be achieved, and raising quantity and quality productivity cannot be met and there are no genuine chances for modernizing marketing services and infrastructure.

In the last six months or so, due to the closure of border checkpoints to Gaza, the Palestinians are longer capable of easily cultivating their lands. Different kinds of saplings, pesticides and fertilizers are no longer available and they are not permitted into Gaza. Plastic sheets for greenhouses and hoses for irrigation are no longer available. Accordingly, a large number of the farmers found themselves forced to plant their lands with wheat and barley instead of the vegetables because they are easier to grow and they do not need the same care, fertilizers and pesticides. But again, this situation means a retreat from qualitative production and an escape from the hardships on their path. This situation means that those farmers will not be able to be themselves and raise their families or create any employment opportunities. They are no longer in a situation of lucrative agribusiness that yields exporting some kinds of farming products (e.g. strawberry and flowers) to Europe and Japan. In the past, those farmers used to produce something for the local community and other percentage of their production for export, but the reality is that the Palestinians have actually lost hopes of improving their agriculture and investing on it. They are not expecting to grow to where they can play a key role in creating development for their communities.

Moreover, the Palestinians loss of the initiative on their land has also destroyed most of the opportunities of other supportive productive projects like cow raising, livestock, diary farms and milk processing plants. Thus, part of diary production projects has turned to be next to impossible.

Having said this, without any doubt, it has become obvious that the future of agriculture in Gaza Strip is ambiguous. The Palestinians will not have sovereignty over their agriculture with restricted access to their land, water resources, open markets and supportive institutions. They have no real hopes of regional and international trade and business. They have no chances for competing with the Israeli and Egyptian farmers plus that the continuous Israeli closures of the border in the face of needs for agriculture jeopardises the agriculture, economy and life of Gaza farming sector.

After all this mess, it is unfortunate that the sector of agriculture in the Gaza Strip is on the verge of collapsing. It needs serious efforts and financial support to be saved and to come back to live. Those efforts must be accompanied by Israel stopping its military policies and practices against this sector which constitutes a nerve of life for the people in Gaza Strip.

Starting from the reality that agriculture is one of the necessary options for living in Gaza Strip, and in its relentless efforts and non-stop attempts to create job opportunities and support other development projects, PARC implements strategic intervention plan to achieve relief (Helping poor and young farmers and women, and needy families) and developmental objectives (Marketing poor farmers agricultural outputs). Its intervention can be seen in main programs orchestrated as follows:

First: From Poor Farmers to Poor Families :

In this project, PARC seeks to help both the farmers and the needy families by buying the products of the poor farmers to set up food baskets and distribute it to the poor and needy families in the community for free. In this approach, usually the food basket contains both fresh food (Farm products) and processed food (Feta cheese, olives, olive oil, kokoss, dried herbs, etc.). The source of the fresh food is the poor farmer whereas the source of the processed food is the working woman.



This project has been in function for more than four years. There are direct beneficiaries as well as indirect beneficiaries in this program. Approximately 6000 families receive those direct aids yearly.

Whereas there are at least 15000 families as indirect beneficiaries from other activities . They receive support from PARC in terms of loans for agricultural needs and livestock projects, land rehabilitation, and other services.

Second: Rehabilitation of Destroyed Agricultural Lands of Farmers:

In this intervention program, PARC supports harmed farmers by providing them with agricultural inputs, seeds, seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides according to given available material, and as much as PARC can afford.



Third: Household Economy (Family gardens and livestock):

In its endeavor to support the community, PARC helps by facilitating for those farmers to plant home gardens and help them found front and back gardens when possible. PARC supports those poor farmers by providing them with seeds, farming inputs and expertise, and by helping them with loans and expertise. In this regard, women receive a wide attention as they raise diary animals and husbandry.



Also, PARC stands for those who like to create an urban agriculture in their homes. It provides them with agricultural inputs and expertise for creating home gardens and enhancing food security at family level.

Fourth: Agricultural Filed Job Creation:



PARC creates yearly hundreds of job opportunities for unemployed farmers and other workers in the field of agriculture according to its available capabilities, circumstances and needs of farmers. In this regard, women are given attention and offered working opportunities.

Fifth: Advocacy and Lobbying:



PARC attempts its best in advocating the cause of the farmers in their hard times. This endeavor is performed at all levels, locally, regionally and internationally. PARC attempts shedding light on the agricultural problems and rights, access to lands, inputs and outputs movement. PARC always brings the cause of the farmers to the light and attempts to secure international awareness of their situation as it really is.

PARC is very much concerned with keeping the scope open for those farmers whose production quantitatively and qualitatively reaches to levels of export, and to open new horizons for them. PARC believes that those farmers must enjoy the freedom of exporting the production of their farms.