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Challenging Post-conflict Environments

Sustainable Agriculture

Edited by

ALPASLAN ÖZERDEM

*Centre for Peace and Reconciliation
Studies, Coventry University, UK*

REBECCA ROBERTS

*Centre for Peace and Reconciliation
Studies, Coventry University, UK*

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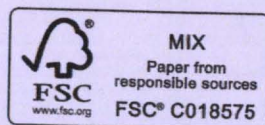
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Olive Trees: Livelihoods and Resistance

Marwan Darweish

Introduction

Palestine enjoys diverse climatic conditions from the Jordan valley desert to the south and east to the mountainous areas and fertile planes in the north and west in which a variety of crops flourish. In the last few decades agriculture has proven to be critical for the fragile political situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) where unemployment, poverty and lack of food security have become a priority to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, Israel has used the Palestinian population as a reservoir of cheap labour for its own economy. Israel controls the Palestinian economy through direct and indirect measures so the PNA lacks independence and sovereignty and consequently is largely dependent on international aid to function and maintain its development and emergency programmes. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Finance (MOF) this assistance is estimated at \$11.7 billion from 1994 to 2010.

Agriculture and olive growing is critical for Palestinian livelihoods which have been based on a subsistence family economy for generations where the majority of agriculture and livestock remain for family consumption. It is estimated that Palestinian agricultural land is covered with some 10 million olive trees organized in rows on the terraces and that some 900,000 dunums, approximately 45 per cent of the arable land in the OPT, are planted with olive trees and account for the majority of fruit trees area.

The OPT is divided into three areas; A and B are under Palestinian civil control and area C under Israeli military and civil control, C is where 62.9 per cent of agricultural land is located so the presence of the Israeli military pose a challenge to farmers. In the Gaza Strip however, 17 per cent of the area has been designated by Israel as a security belt adjacent to the border and this has been increased since Israel's military offensive into the Gaza Strip in late 2008. Palestinians face travel restrictions within the OPT and entering and existing the OPT as Israel has imposed hundreds of checkpoints to control the movement of people and goods. This causes long delays and disrupts the daily life of the population. The difficulty in transporting goods to the cities has had an immediate impact on the income of families and their standard of living (UNDP 2011).

This chapter will explore the economic and cultural significance of olive growing for Palestinians in the OPT in the midst of violent conflict between Israel

and the Palestinians. It will argue that the impact of the Palestinian Israeli conflict on the agriculture sector and olive growing specifically has been damaging. Palestinian farmers relying on the income from the olive harvest struggle to support the household. This chapter will provide a brief discussion of the direct and systemic structural violence and intimidation exercised by the Israeli settlers and army towards the Palestinian farmers such as land confiscation, access to land, injury and death to farmers and damage to their property and crop. The chapter will also highlight the contribution of the olive production sector to the resilience and resistance of the Palestinians to stay on their land, and the obstacles facing farmers in sustaining this sector. The chapter will explore the social and cultural features of olive harvesting and the role it plays in providing cohesion for the society. Finally the chapter will demonstrate the economic contribution of the olive harvest to the economy and resilience of the community under occupation.

No Peace for the Olive Branch

Israel has instituted a dual legal system in the West Bank; one for the Jews and another for the Palestinians. Jewish settlers have freedom of movement, political participation, infrastructure and access to water and land while the Palestinian population is denied its basic civil and human rights. The existence of settlements is a violation of international humanitarian law and causes grave and continuing infringement of the rights of the Palestinians. Since the occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967, Israel has built 132 Jewish settlements in the West Bank in addition to many other unrecognized settlements or 'outposts' as Israel labels them.

Based on a complex legal bureaucratic system created by Israel, some of which was inherited from pre 1967, Israel has confiscated about half of the West Bank land for settlement building. This land was largely privately owned and suitable for farming (Darweish 2010). Physical barriers, fences and roads were built around the settlements but gradually removed to allow further expansion of the settlements. These are different from the barriers that prevent Palestinian farmers from accessing their land. Over the years Palestinian farmers working or using their land adjacent to the settlements have faced harassment, destruction of their property and violent attacks. Palestinian farmers often do not dare enter their land and risk their lives and the lives of the family members. Sometimes farmers only wanting to cross the land must be accompanied by international volunteers or Israeli human rights activists to reduce the chance or severity of attack. One Palestinian farmer gave testimony to B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, 'ever since these settlements were built on our lands, we can't even get to the lands close to them. Every time we come near settlers they attack us..when we approach, they draw their weapons and aim them at us. They throw stones at us and beat us with clubs, all in front of the eyes of the soldiers guarding the settlements.' (B'Tselem 2008: 23)

Settlers' violence and harassment towards Palestinian farmers has been on the increase since 2000, the start of the second Intifada, to prevent them from accessing their land and consequently from cultivating it. Israeli and Palestinian human rights organization such as the Palestinian Rights Monitor, Al-Haq, B'Tselem and Rabbis for Human Rights, and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch have documented various forms of violence and intimidation directed at the Palestinians including shooting at farmers, threats to shoot and kill, stone throwing, destruction of farms, property and equipment, theft and damage of crops, committing arson in the olive groves and more. This is part of a systematic policy of harassment and violence aimed at expelling Palestinians from land adjacent to the settlements, deny them access and to control the land as part of the creeping annexation of Palestinian land all with the silent consent of the Israeli authority. In 2006, heads of some Palestinian local authorities in the West Bank appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court to enable them to harvest their olive trees adjacent to the settlements. The Court held the state of Israel responsible and said that it must take all means necessary to ensure the safety of Palestinian farmers in these areas. 'Protection of the Palestinians must be done in a suitable manner, clear directives must be given to military forces and the police as to how to act, and effective restrictions must be placed on persons who harass Palestinians in breach of the law'. However, the challenge would be the implementation of such a decision and the impact of this directive has been sadly lacking (B'Tselem 2008: 25).

The argument put forward by the Israeli state for the confiscation of Palestinian land and denial of Palestinian access to their land is both expansionist and security driven; Israel argues that the land is needed for future settlement growth and to make the Israeli army's job of protecting settlers easier. Israel's policy includes loss of access to the land on which the settlements themselves were built and land west of the Separation Wall, roads on which only Israelis are allowed to travel, and lands for military use. The Israeli army is required to impose conditions and regulations on the Palestinian farmers' cultivation of their own land adjacent to the settlements and the fence surrounding it or the land west of the Separation Wall. The conditions include a) the recognition of ownership of the land by Palestinians, b) obtaining a set date for entry dictated by the army and c) consent by settlers to enter the land. Setting such conditions precisely reflects the dual legal systems in the West Bank as identified above. Evidently it is very difficult to meet the requirements for Palestinians to enter their closed off land and for this reason they have increasingly ceased trying to access their land. This causes frustration and hopelessness in the face of the bureaucracy set up by Israel. A Palestinian farmer affected by the Separation Wall explained the impact of the regulations: 'Three months with a permit, three months legal struggle to have to renew again, with prohibitive legal fees of 2000 NIS'. The farmer was told he was not given a permit by the Israeli Civil Administration for reasons of security. His three sons have never been given a permit to work on their land despite the fact that one of them has a permit to travel to Israel for business' (Parry 2004).

During the second Intifada the army accused Palestinians militants of using orchards adjacent to the Jewish settlement, and owned by Palestinians, as a shield and hiding place to attack the army and infiltrate the settlements and attack residents. The Israeli Army claim that as a 'defensive measure' it uprooted thousands of olive trees and destroyed cultivated land to increase visibility for soldiers and protect soldiers and settlers. Orders were issued by the army to increase the already enclosed land around the settlements, these became known as 'Special Security Areas' (SSA), covering a radius of about 300–400 meters of land. In 2004, Israel authorized plans and a budget to ring 41 settlements with SSA. As a result thousands of acres of land have been confiscated and trees uprooted and damaged.

The Israeli army held Palestinian farmers responsible for attacks on Israeli settlers for allowing Palestinian militants to use their olive orchards as hiding places from which to launch attacks. An Israeli Commander in the OPT made the argument that farmers are collaborating with the militants to use their land. He explained that 'owners of groves are to blame when their trees are uprooted. If the owner of the grove, whom I assume knows the sniper or the petrol throwers, does not take the measures he must take, then his grove will come down' (Sarafa 2004: 13).

Through this set of complex security measures and regulations imposed on the Palestinian farmers they have been systematically prohibited from free access to their land and as such any benefit from their olive orchards. This policy aims slowly but surely to deny them their rights on the land and make them powerless and dependent; they appear stripped of aspiration and identity and are more impoverished day by day. Despite these obstacles, olives and the olive harvest still play a significant role in Palestinian culture and tradition.

Social Cultural Aspects of Olive Harvest

Olive trees were brought to Palestine from Greece thousands of years ago and today they can be found on almost every hill and mount. Olive trees and the olive harvest have become part of the Palestinian culture and value system and are reflected in religion. Olive trees have a religious significance for all three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as a symbol of peace and forgiveness. The three religions share the story of Noah and the Ark where after the devastation of the flood a dove from the Ark brought an olive branch to Noah as a sign of life and appeasement. Olive trees are mentioned in all three holy books – The Torah, The Bible, The Quran – praising the qualities of olives and the land they grow on (ARIJ 2007).

It is a long tradition that families gather together to bring in the olive harvest from mid September for a period of up to two months. During the harvest season all the family members join together to collect the olives. Members of the wider family; men, women, young and old all participate. There is an archetypal sense of 'Thanksgiving' that peasant and farming communities throughout the world traditionally experience harvesting a valued and treasured crop. There is a feeling

of togetherness where all the members of the extended family may be under the same olive tree for hours each day over a few weeks, from the morning until the evening and everyone in the olive orchard is focused on one objective.

There is an atmosphere of celebration during the harvest season. Usually traditional Palestinian folk songs and contemporary political national songs will be recited during the harvest and all the family members turn into an orchestra of production and wellbeing. Festivals and public celebrations are organized by local councils and farmers cooperatives and unions. More recently these celebrations have begun to reflect political resistance against the construction of the Separation Wall and the confiscation of Palestinian land, as an activist from Stop the Wall Campaign (SWC) explained 'we supported a few olive festivals in the area of Nablus, in 2009, to celebrate the end of the harvest season and encourage farmers' steadfastness in the face of attacks of Jewish settlers.' (SWC 2010)

The annual olive harvesting is an integral part of the tradition and life of the Palestinian family. It embraces different rituals during the harvesting and olives, oil, and 'zaater'¹ are part of the daily breakfast and food generally. Uprooting trees and preventing Palestinians from entering their land has not only caused economic hardship but has also had a psychological impact; this has caused untold damage to the way of life of the community as a whole. In a testimony to B'Tselem a Palestinian farmer described that 'people not only bring forth bread from the earth, they also bring forth rest and relaxation...[it is] two years since school children have taken a hike in the bosom of nature, because the bosom of nature has disappeared beyond the fence, where they cannot go' (2009: 66).

The gathering of all members of the family everyday over a few weeks provides an opportunity to air views about social and political conflicts. Palestinian society is highly politicized and diverse in its views and one family can represent a spectrum of political views sparking in-depth debates and improving understanding over this time together. This is an informal process of consultation and listening to other views in the family to resolve conflicts constructively. It is a consultative and inclusive process conducted under the olive trees. Naturally disputes about land ownership among Palestinians surface during the harvest season and this provides an opportunity to have a dialogue between the disputant parties to resolve it peacefully.

One of the main root causes of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is over land. Olive trees and trees in general symbolize the conflict and connection of Palestinians to the land. They symbolize the rootedness in the land and the right of the Palestinians to be in their home land. Olive trees are 'seen as embodying the qualities of rootedness and durability, attributes Palestinians say they believed it preserved them during years of struggle with Israel.' (Lynfield 2000)

Olive trees have become the microcosm of the Palestinian Israeli conflict and vividly illustrate the destruction and damage resulting from the conflict. The plight of the olive trees can be seen to embody the conflict with the Israeli occupation and the

¹ Middle Eastern herb (Thyme). This condiment made from the dried herb and mixed with toasted sesame seeds and salt.

Palestinian population; they are a symbol of the national struggle for liberation and resistance of the Israeli occupation. Political groups and civil society organizations arrange annual campaigns for trees plantations, harvest and work on the land to support farmers. These actions are seen as a way of expressing belonging to the land and resistance to the Israeli policy of land confiscation. Through plantation and agriculture work the community asserts a clear political position of resistance and steadfastness. A Palestinian farmer from inside Israel explained: 'during the seventies our land was under the threat of confiscation by the Israeli authorities. The land had been used for military training by the Israeli army without our permission. Planting olive trees on the land was an important act to prove our ownership and belonging to the land and to prevent the military training.'²

However in contrast to oppression and control, olive trees are also known to symbolize peace and tranquillity and as way of seeking peace as one may say 'to hold out an olive branch'. Olive branches have been offered as a symbol of peace for thousands of years due to the fact that it takes many years for olive trees to mature and produce fruit and can only be cultivated during long enough periods of stability and peace. After the signing of the Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the PLO in 1993, many Palestinians went into the streets to celebrate and as a gesture of peace they handed olive branches to the Israeli soldiers.

International and Israeli peace organizations express solidarity and support to Palestinian farmers in their struggle to resist the uprooting of olive trees and the harassment they face by settlers and the Israeli army. The Young Men's Christian Association in Palestine organizes international annual olive tree planting to support farmers. Every year volunteers from all over the world join farmers during the harvest season to help and to provide protection from the army and settler attacks. They plant and sponsor olive trees and work on the land as a form of solidarity and support. Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli peace organization, also supports Palestinian farmers when their trees are uprooted by the army or the settlers through purchasing new olive trees and replanting them as an act of solidarity and humanitarian assistance. The aim of the Olive Trees for Peace Campaign project organized by Rabbis for Human Rights is to enhance communication between Palestinians and Israelis and advocate for peace between the two peoples (Cheri 2001: 96).

Olive trees and the olive harvest reflect the political and religious symbolism in Palestinian culture and contribute to its cohesion and resilience. However, this culture and social significance has been threatened by the violence of the settlers and been turned from joy and celebration to fear and intimidation.

Olive Harvest: Fear not Joy

The relationship between the Palestinians and the settlers has been strenuous and frequently openly hostile since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in

1967 and the confiscation of Palestinian land to build Jewish settlements. Direct physical attacks on Palestinian olive harvesters by settlers are only one aspect of a broader system of violence and intimidation. During the few weeks of the olive harvest the level of violence significantly increases against Palestinians farmers and their families. During this period thousands of Palestinian families take part in the olive harvest which sometimes takes place on land adjacent to settlements or on Palestinian farm land traversed by settlers' roads. The conflict between the farmers and the settlers is manifested starkly over the land, the trees, the crop and the harvest (Oxfam 2010).

The olive harvest season is traditionally associated with joy and celebration where all the family comes together has taken on a darker significance. The harassment and constant violent attacks by settlers and the army have changed this atmosphere and made it a more frightening and traumatic experience. Farmers feel threatened by the presence of soldiers on their land despite their supposed role as protectors from settlers' attacks. These are the same soldiers responsible for the oppression and violence that the Palestinian face every day, that harass and hold them at the checkpoints in their daily life and have confronted them in years of conflict. One woman described this situation as follows: 'imagine that we pick the olives with the soldiers' right next to us, how can you feel safe? What can we do if we need to pray or go to the bathroom? We go where they can't see us and relieve ourselves under an oak or an olive tree. We do not feel safe and we are scared all the time. We have even stopped making tea and coffee over an open fire, and we bring it prepared from home. We eat fast to get back to picking and finish quickly' (B'Tselem 2008: 75).

Restrictions and conditions have been set up to prohibit Palestinian landowners obtaining permits to enter and work in their land. They are in a particularly vulnerable position and exposed to extortion by the Israeli security service to gather information about political and military activities amongst Palestinian groups. The Israeli security services exploit this situation to recruit Palestinian collaborators in return for providing entry permits for farmers. As one of the farmer described on Wednesday 8 August 2007 he was supposed to enter the land when he got a call from a civil administration official asking about gunshots in the village. The official asked the farmer for the names of the children who burned the fence and threatened the farmer that if he does not cooperate he will not have a permit to enter the land. The farmer believed that the official wanted to turn him into a spy (B'Tselem 2008: 75).

Uprooting and destroying Palestinian olive trees has been carried out by the Israeli army and Jewish settlers who take the law into their hands. It is well documented that settlers go into Palestinian orchards and vandalize olive trees and set them on fire. According to the Israeli human rights organization who presented photos of the vandalized trees to an expert on olive tree cultivation from the Hebrew University, 'the trees as young as the ones in the photographs would not normally be pruned, and they had therefore evidently been vandalized..and the damaged trees would take eight to twelve years to recover fully and produce as

much as they had before.' A Haaretz journalist commented on this situation saying that 'there is something very human about these stumps of olive trees, hundreds upon hundreds of them, amputated branches reaching skyward as if to ask for help' (Hass 2006).

The Palestinians so far have had their land and olive groves confiscated, been intimidated when they can access it, experienced the destruction of their orchards but the olive groves have also been victims of the Israeli security laws. The construction of the Separation Wall between the West Bank and Israel has caused momentous damage to the Palestinian civilian population and also to farmers. Thousands of olive and fruit trees were uprooted and thousands of acres have been confiscated to make way for the construction of the Wall. The building of watch towers along the Wall and patrol routes has added to further confiscation of land and destruction and uprooting of olive trees. In Qifeen village in the North of the West Bank, for example, 12,600 olive trees were uprooted and more than 100,000 trees 'imprisoned' behind the Separation Wall. Farmers find it extremely difficult to cross to the west side of the Wall to cultivate their land given the restrictions and obstacles imposed by the Israeli army to obtain permits. Uprooting, destroying or confiscating land and trees has had significant effects on different aspects of Palestinian life. According to conservative estimates of Israeli human rights organizations, from March to December 2005 a total 2,616 trees were uprooted, burned, chopped or stolen (Hass 2006).

The impact of the systemic violence and intimidation is far reaching and profound on the livelihood and aspiration of the Palestinian population and in spite of this threats and fear, Palestinians continue to work in their land and enjoy harvest season and profit from the olives.

Economic Fruits

The contribution of the agricultural sector to the national Palestinian economy varies every year, however there has been a gradual increase since 2002; the estimated value was \$487.5 million in 2004 or the equivalent of 11.4 per cent of the GDP of the OPT. Agriculture is the third largest employer in the OPT and in 2005 it employed about 117 thousand persons (15.2 per cent of the population) and double that if the informal work force of women and youth and marginalized sections of society are included. The contribution of the agriculture sector to the livelihood of the Palestinians is particularly important in the absence of viable economy (ARIJ 2007).

The majority of the Palestinian population, some 65 per cent, live in rural small villages which traditionally depend on agriculture. The majority of agricultural holdings in the OPT are small and sufficient to support one family. It is estimated that 88 per cent of the small holdings are held by one household. Consequently, the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Palestinian families are more than ever dependent on their ability to harvest their olives and market them locally, to

Israel and to the neighbouring Arab countries. Olive is one of the most important agriculture industries and is a significant source of income for the rural Palestinian population. The harm caused to this sector by the Israeli policies has harsh consequences for Palestinian livelihoods and standards of living.

The annual olive harvest varies from one year to the other; in 2000 126,000 tons of olive produced 27,000 tons of oil. In 2001 it was a weaker crop of 22,000 tons of olive for 5,400 tons of oil. It is estimated that about 92 per cent of the olive crop is intended for the production of oil and the rest for olive (B'Tselem 2008: 67). In 2007 the total value of agriculture produce in the OPT accounted for 25 per cent of GDP. The olive industry however, in the OPT supports some 70,560 households which accounts for 20 per cent of the total value of agriculture produce and accounted for 5.4 per cent of GDP for the same year (World Bank 2006).³

The importance of the agricultural and olive industry particularly has increased since the second Intifada in 2000 and the wide spread violent confrontations between Palestinians and the Israeli army. Over a hundred thousand Palestinian workers who had been employed inside Israel lost their jobs following the prohibition of entry for labourers into Israel. Consequently, this caused a significant reduction in income to many families as the work in Israel was the main source of earning. The GDP per capita in the Palestinian territories has declined by 36 per cent between 2000 and 2002. This highlighted the scale of the crisis and the need to start looking internally to improve the economic conditions of the population. As a result of the measures preventing Palestinian workers from entry into Israel, many Palestinians who had previously deserted their land to work as cheap labour in the Israeli market, had to return to agricultural work and cultivate the land. Many families started to lease land from large landowners. There has also been a return to old traditions where by families who do not own land harvest fruit and olives for a financial return and a share of the produce (ARIJ 2007).

Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations have documented that the destruction of olive trees escalated with the outbreak of the second Intifada. The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture reported that during the first year some 374,030 trees had been destroyed by the Israeli army and settlers. The impact of the loss of so many productive trees on the income of household and food security is significant especially considering that it takes up to ten years to have a full productive olive tree. As a result of such measures Palestinian farmers incurred losses of \$300 million between September 2000 and June 2001 (Sarafa 2004 13).

Food security status has been negatively affected by the continued instability in the OPT and according to the World Food Programme, 49 per cent of the population in the OPT in 2006 had no food security. Olives, olive oil and bread are considered an important part of the daily diet especially for the low income families and, as such, the olive harvest is central to food security. This has become more critical as now thousands of Palestinian families in the OPT live under the

³ Interview conducted by the author with Adnan Ramadan, organizer of the international Solidarity Campaign with the Palestinians, 2010.

poverty line of less than two dollars per capita a day. It is estimated that in 2007 23.6 per cent of West Bank residents and 55.7 per cent of the Gaza Strip residents live below poverty line (UNDP 2011).

The olive harvest is considered by many poor families who do not own land as a vital means to support their income. Every season members of poor families, especially the young, will go and collect the remaining olives from the trees which the owners did not manage to collect. According to Sami Dauod,⁴ a Palestinian farmer, 'it is a social custom to leave olives on the tree on purpose for people to come later and collect them which is seen as a way of supporting the poor'. It is also a custom that during the process of pressing olives ordinary passers-by can have a taste of the newly pressed olive oil.

It is commonly known that owners of olive orchards will support the poor in the community by supplying them with olives and oil. Some farmer will follow the rules of Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, which is a form of obligatory alms giving to be performed by Muslims which is usually 2.5 per cent of the total olive produce. However, others may use an arbitrary way based on good will, generosity and the success of that harvest season to determine the level of their giving.

In order to support the local olive economy, some local and international organizations have invested in micro finance projects to support women in establishing small businesses for pickling olives and selling them on to local markets. Local women's organizations and other development NGOs supported such programmes because they are recognized as successful projects and contribute to the local economy. The Palestinian Women's Technical Affairs Committees (PWTAC) argued that this is a way to fight poverty and to encourage women's independence and contribution to the household income (PWTAC 2009).

The confiscation of Palestinian land by the Israeli authority directly harms the income of many household families. Farmers face obstacles and restrictions in gaining access to enclosed land adjacent to the settlements. Often access is limited to a few times a year which, from a financial point of view, is not enough to make olive production profitable. One farmer described this challenge as follows: 'to pick 1,000 olive trees, for example, you need five or six adults working seven hours a day for 15–20 days.. we got a permit for one day, 16 October 2007, from 8:30 am to 2:00 pm. This was not enough time'. Stringent conditions set by the Israeli army limited the access for farmers to the enclosed land which means that they can't look after the land and trees which consequently affected the productivity (B'Tselem 2008: 67).

Israel has an obligation under international humanitarian law to compensate Palestinian farmers for harm caused by the occupying authority; however, Israel accepts very limited responsibility for compensation. The Israeli authorities have made the process of claiming compensation bureaucratic and have imposed many

conditions which resulted in the inability of farmers of enclosed land to receive compensation (B'Tselem 2002).

As a result of uprooting and damaging olive trees and other fruit trees many farmers lost their income from agriculture. The impact is greater for poor families and for families who own small orchards who make up the majority of farmers. In Jauiyous, a small Palestinian village in the West Bank, only 216 out of 700 farmers have permits for some of the time, to work on their land behind the wall or adjacent to it. This resulted in half of the green houses in the village being abandoned and the inevitable reduction in productivity and income. This is in addition to the travel restrictions and transport of agricultural goods to the markets. A Palestinian activist organizing visits for international volunteers to support farmers during the harvest season argued 'the Israeli practices can be viewed as economic warfare and an assault on farmer's attachment to their land' (Ramadan 2010 Parry 2004).

Further challenges faced by the agriculture sector in Palestine in the last decade has resulted from an export driven agriculture development, including olives and oil, where the main focus is on export and meeting the demands of outside markets. Farmers in the Gaza Strip were encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture at PNA and other international NGOs and given financial incentives to grow flowers and strawberries for export. In the West Bank international agencies such as the United States AID financially supported farmers to grow herbs and export oil for the European market. This policy pressured farmers to abandon traditional farming and move to new farming sectors which entailed a high risk approach. The fragile political situation in the OPT and the fact that Israel controls the border crossing and the movement within the OPT made the agriculture sector ever more vulnerable. The drive to move to export provided a stark example of such vulnerability when Israel decided to impose a siege on the Gaza Strip from 2006 and restricted import and export. This undermined the resilience of the population and increased the dependency on foreign aid and consequently exposed it to food insecurity and household coping mechanisms were unable to manage in the face of the occupation coupled with this embargo. The population was besieged and faced a dire threat to nutrition with little home grown resources and no trade permitted.

Conclusion

Despite all the difficulties Palestinian farmers' face, as this chapter highlighted, they continue to plant and harvest olive. Olive trees and harvest has political, economic, social and cultural importance to Palestinian society, it symbolizes connection to the land and manifestation of social values and traditions. In addition to the economic value and contribution to livelihoods it supported the resilience of the farmers to stay in their land and resist the occupation.

As described the majority of the Palestinians in the OPT live in rural areas and rely on household employment. There is a need for decision makers in the OPT to develop strategies to support livelihood programmes in the rural areas and

4 Interview conducted by the author with Sami Dauod, director of the Palestinian Hydrology Group in Nablus, 7 November 2009.

especially the development of the agriculture sector as many local and international NGO's are already doing. Olive plantation has proved to be a source of income and human security in the region for hundreds of years. It appears to be imperative to increase the olive plantation and other sectors to create job opportunities and some sustainability in the rural areas. This could provide a significant improvement for the stability and viability of these people faced with the volatile political situation which also requires immense resilience in the face of the Israeli occupation.

This research has highlighted the need to support olive farming in adopting a more sustainable development driven approach rather than a trade and export driven strategy. Given that olive oil and olives are an essential part of the Palestinian diet such an approach will increase food security in the OPT. In the production process, there is a need to invest and improve olive pressing and raise the quality and reliability of locally produced food especially olive oil. The PNA allocated only 1.21 per cent of its budget in 2009 for agriculture and therefore investment in human resources and capacity building in research and training in olive farm management is critical to increase farmers' skills and awareness (Oxfam 2010).

List of Acronyms

OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
MOF	Ministry of Finance
SWC	Stop the Wall Campaign
NIS	New Israeli Shekel

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