

Drought & Conflict: Crises



In the late 1990s, the West Bank and Gaza suffered from terrible drought which resulted in a drastic decline in agricultural productivity and increased hunger and poverty. In early 2000, the second Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising, began and disrupted every aspect of Palestinian life, increasing food insecurity, poverty and joblessness. The second intifada also brought with it a surge in Palestinians working in agriculture, as immobility forced many people to leave jobs in Israel and work on their own land. Currently, an estimated 40 percent of the Palestinian population is engaged in agricultural activities in a region where agricultural production is already difficult given that only 27 percent of the land is suitable for farming due to the climate, soil and topography in the West Bank and Gaza.

The security situation continues to negatively impact Palestinian life. Established labor and commodity market relationships between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza have been disrupted, leading to a high level of unemployment and a sharp decline in private investment. Regional and international trade have also decreased significantly due to the reduced purchasing power of Palestinians,

in the West Bank & Gaza

By Scott McNiven and Alan Ranzer

restrictions on movement of goods, and broken Israeli-Palestinian business ties. With more border closures and the building of the security fence in response to incidents in Israel, economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza continue to deteriorate.

ACDI/VOCA Crises Response

In response to a request from the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, and with funds from the United States Department of Agriculture's 416(b) food aid program, ACDI/VOCA worked with Palestinian officials to develop interventions to alleviate the effects of the drought. The first component of the project was designed to satisfy the immediate concerns of livestock producers by providing coupons to allow for the subsidized purchase of fodder and barley for their livestock.

The program experienced significant success. The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with ACDI/VOCA, completed the emergency coupon subsidy and feed distribution component in January 2002. In just three months, the Ministry distributed over 13,400 subsidy coupons, which were used to acquire fodder for 912,000 sheep and goats in twelve districts. Coupons were redeemed for over 1,000 metric tons of fodder and more than 5,700 metric tons of barley. The feed subsidy program also provided economic stimulus to the livestock sector.

In the second component of the project, ACDI/VOCA focused on mitigating the effects of future droughts by involving local organizations and at-risk agricultural communities in the design, construction and implementation of water conservation technologies. These activities strengthened farmers' response to future drought events, while simultaneously creating over 5,200 new jobs in an economy that has virtually collapsed.

Through partnerships with the Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee (PARC) and the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), close to 400 cisterns have been constructed in the West Bank, benefiting approximately 1,000 farmers and their families. Additionally, PARC installed 90 irrigation water networks for house gardens, benefiting more than 620 people, and reclaimed 94 hectares of rocky land, which were leveled, cleaned and plowed. PHG constructed over 17,000 meters of irrigation canals benefiting 201 farmers and their families. Trainings built capacity among rural inhabitants to better manage scarce water resources. For example, PARC held 21 training workshops exclusively for women, along with 33 training workshops for students, on water awareness and conservation.

In collaboration with World Vision and its partner, the United Agricultural Workers' Committee, by the end of 2002, ACDI/VOCA completed

construction on 65 rainwater collection ponds, benefiting 65

farmers and their family members in Gaza. Well-site engineers also rehabilitated 52 wells, serving a total of 364 farmers and 5,110 other indirect beneficiaries. Sixteen training workshops benefiting over 720 rural inhabitants covered water conservation methods.

In addition to focusing on agricultural production and drought mitigation, ACDI/VOCA is also increasing business services for agriculture in the West Bank and Gaza through a partnership with the Palestine Trade Center, or Paltrade. This effort aims to enhance the competencies of small agribusinesses to overcome challenges associated with post-harvest handling, processing and marketing. With assistance from ACDI/VOCA and in full partnership with local institutions, Paltrade is leading team efforts to design trade development and marketing plans for different sectors, such as olives and olive oil, vegetables and fruit, cash crops and processed food. The plans include local and international marketing activities as well as sectoral and firm-level business development services, such as business plans, equipment and financial linkages, and market and technology information.

For ACDI/VOCA, even under the current crises, agriculture in the West Bank and Gaza does not mean subsistence-level food production but, rather, business potential in production, processing, storage, transport or marketing. Agriculture translates into jobs, salaries and revenue generation and can help ease both social and economic hardships in the West Bank and Gaza.

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Three Palestinians inspect a new irrigation system that allows farmers to better cope with droughts.

