

Reflections on Food Security under the Conditions Prevalent in Area C

By Roubina Bassous/Ghattas



Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact size of the Palestinian population that resides in Area Cⁱ due to the large number of communities whose boundaries overlap areas A, B, and C, it is estimated that, as of 2015, as many as 40,245 Palestinians, 1.4 percent of the West Bank population, live in 73 localities (local government units “LGUs”) that are located entirely in Area C. Area C is thus characterized by a low population density that amounts to an average of 55 persons/km², compared to population densities in areas A and B, which reach up to 1,128 and 734 persons/km², respectively.ⁱⁱ

Most Palestinian communities in Area C are rural in character, reaching up to 99 percent of the total population, and 44 percent are classified as Bedouin. Hence, the Palestinian population in Area C is composed of some of the most vulnerable families and communities in Palestine.ⁱⁱⁱ In terms of social indicators, the farmers and herders who live in Area C tend to experience worse conditions

than the general population because they usually live in small communities located in remote areas that are under-served not only with respect to public services (such as education, water and sanitation, and health care) but also in terms of infrastructure. They are rarely granted permits to upgrade their homes or to invest in agriculture and other businesses.^{iv} Service provision to populations in areas A and B has increased in recent years, but communities in Area C still struggle for access to basic assistance and services such as water/sanitation, primary education, and basic safe shelter.

However, Israel’s continued control over Area C affects not only the communities located entirely in Area C, but also the many thousands of residents of areas A and B who own land in Area C. According to an analysis conducted by the Geo-informatics Department at the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) in 2015, there are over 291 Palestinian villages that have some part of their built-up area in Area C.

Area C has the potential to contribute greatly to the Palestinian economy and its future economic development; however, present restrictions under the Israeli occupation prevent such opportunities from flourishing. Currently, economic activity in Area C is almost exclusively limited to low-intensity agriculture and herding, which are the trades that provide livelihood to the majority of Bedouin and rural communities.

The contraction of the Palestinian per capita GDP by 3.3 percent (in 2014) and the prevailing extremely high unemployment rates are subjecting large sections of the Palestinian population to poverty and food insecurity.

With limited job opportunities and minimal existing potential for job creation, the average unemployment rate in the 73 Area-C localities is 20.1 percent, compared to 17.7 percent in the West Bank, and in some cases it reaches as high as 62 percent, as, for example, in the Al-Buweib Bedouin area. Communities in Area C have a large proportion of children who are being supported by families that have few members in the labor force; on average only 22 percent of the community is economically active. Therefore, the burden of providing for households falls on a proportionally small labor force.

With few economically active citizens and minimal job opportunities, communities are vulnerable to high rates of poverty and a poor quality of life. Poverty rates are relatively high especially among Bedouins; with highest rates reaching up to 83.1 percent in Al-Buweib, Khashem Adaraj (Al-Hathaleen), and Om Adaraj (Arab al-Ka’abneh), respectively (see Table 1).

Access to schools is a primary concern within Area C. Problems that restrict access to quality education are due to inadequate school infrastructure and unsafe or unhygienic facilities. Many schools are far from residential areas,

thus increasing travel time and cost, while restrictions on construction prevent the building of new academic structures. In particular, Jerusalem-area schools, due to urban constraints, lack efficient basic services and have limited space for school classrooms. There is a strong need to rehabilitate and build new classrooms to cater to the under-resourced needs of a young population that has outgrown its confined space. Residents throughout Area C have on average been able to access only a basic level of education, where 52 percent have attained elementary and preparatory education, and only 17 percent have secondary to PhD qualifications (see Table 1).

Table 1
Selected Socio-economic Indicators Reflecting Conditions of Palestinian Communities in Area C

Area C	Unemployment rate (%) (PCBS, 2007)	Poverty rate (%) (PCBS, 2009)	Educational attainment – secondary level and above (%) (PCBS, 2007)	Food insecurity (%) (WFP; FAO; UNRWA; PCBS, 2014)
Rural area	16.4	32.4	17.7	26
Bedouin area	15.9	44.8	10.5	79 (UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP, 2010)
Jerusalem area	27.2	---	17.7	26
Jordan Valley	2.9	30.4	11.9	26
West Bank	17.7	19.4	27.7	19

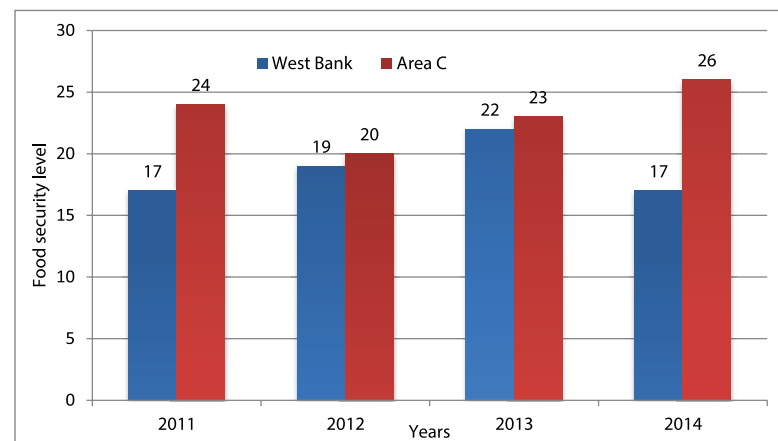
All above factors contribute to a fluctuating food-security status in Palestine. Food insecurity prevails in particular due to a combination of weak agricultural production and unstable economic conditions. A total of 27 percent of Palestinian households, or 1.6 million people, are considered severely or moderately food insecure, according to the latest Socio-Economic and Food Security survey (SEFSec 2014),^v with 47 percent of the people in the Gaza Strip and 16 percent of those in the West Bank considered to be food insecure. The food-insecurity crisis in Palestine is characterized by persistent limited economic access to food and is mainly the result of protracted conflict, the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, and the blockade of the Gaza Strip. The inadequate availability of financial resources, coupled with restrictions on trade as well as access to natural resources (land, water, and sea), has a significant impact on economic access to

Area C is considered a vital and important resource for the Palestinian economy, as it contains about 60 percent of agricultural lands of the West Bank that include permanent crops, arable lands, heterogeneous agricultural lands, and plastic houses. Furthermore, this area contains numerous touristic and archaeological sites, in addition to water resources, such as wells and springs, and many other natural resources, such as metals and salts. It is considered the only area that is suitable for Palestinian urban expansion for most Palestinian communities in the West Bank and the potential food basket for all Palestinians.

food for households, especially for farmers, herders, Bedouins, and female-headed households, as well as the unemployed, disabled, and elderly.

The results of the SEFSec 2014 show that food insecurity has increased dramatically in Area C, with a 6 percent increase since the year 2012; affecting up to 26 percent of Area C households in the year 2014 (Figure 1). Food insecurity in Area C is mainly driven by high rates of poverty that are a result of unemployment and are exacerbated by economic shocks and high food prices. Long-standing Israeli restrictions on access to agricultural areas and on the movement of people and goods have severely undermined the living conditions in Area C and reduced access to livelihoods for many households.

Figure 1
Food Insecurity Levels – a comparison between Area C and the West Bank region



Source: Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFSec survey), PCBS, WFP, FAO, UNRWA, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014

In conclusion, it is important to summarize the key drivers for vulnerability in Area C as: 1) prohibited development and expansion of built-up areas; 2) restricted access to basic services, including health, education, water, and sanitation; 3) controlled and restricted movement and access (segregation wall, Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks, permit system, etc.); 4) forced displacement and house demolition; 5) erosion of livelihoods and lack of economic opportunities and access to food; 6) threats to life, liberty, and security.

Despite all these obstacles, Area C is still fundamental to the geographic contiguity of the West Bank and the economic viability of a Palestinian

state; it is vital and necessary for the development of public infrastructure and the needs of Palestinian communities, not only in Area C but in the whole West Bank. It is necessary to emphasize the need for all stakeholders (Palestinian National Authority, private sector, civil society, and international organizations) to establish coordinated and coherent policies, strategies, mechanisms, and interventions to achieve economic development in Area C.^{vi}

There are many possibilities for job creation within the private and public sectors in Area C, should restrictions be lifted. The World Bank has identified potential direct, sector-specific benefits in the areas of agriculture, stone mining and quarrying, construction, tourism,



Food insecurity. Photo courtesy of ARIJ.

Exposure to food insecurity risks is determined by the frequency and severity of natural and man-made shocks and by their socio-economic and geographical scope. The determinants of coping capacity include the levels of a household's financial, human, physical, social, natural, and political assets; the levels of its production, income, and consumption; and its ability to diversify its income sources and consumption to mitigate the effects of the risks.

telecommunications, and cosmetics. Research estimates suggest that the additional output from these sectors alone would amount to at least US\$ 2.2 billion per annum, which is a significant sum, equivalent to 23 percent of the 2011 Palestinian GDP.^{vi}

The culture of planning in Area C needs to change to make it more integrated, strategic, and participatory. Planning in Area C needs to be "people-centred," and the focus should be more on development opportunities and challenges, phasing, and implementation, and less on rigid separation of land uses.

Roubina Bassous/Ghattas is the head of the Biodiversity and Food Security Department at the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ). She graduated from Birmingham University, United Kingdom, with an MSc degree in utilization and conservation of plant genetic resources. She is an expert in landscape and biodiversity conservation.

ARIJ is a Palestinian research organization that works in the fields of socio-economics, natural resources, biodiversity, water management, sustainable agriculture, and political dynamics of development in Palestine. For more information, visit www.arj.org.

Map 1

Distribution of Palestinian areas located totally in Area C, by locality type and cluster



ⁱ Area C was defined under the Oslo Accords as areas where Israel was to exert civil and security control on an interim basis. Although the 1995 Interim Agreement called for the gradual transfer of power to the Palestinian Authority (PA), this transfer was never implemented. As a result, any construction, such as an animal shelter or a donor-funded infrastructure project, requires the approval of the Israeli Civil Authority that operates under the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Area C comprises 61 percent of the West Bank area.

ⁱⁱ The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), 2015, GIS and Remote Sensing Department.

ⁱⁱⁱ Roubina Ghattas, 2015, Sustainable Economic Development in Area C: Challenges and Opportunities - Human Resources section, The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), Palestine.

^{iv} OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – occupied Palestinian territory), 2013, Area C of the West Bank: Key Humanitarian Concerns.

^v Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFSec survey), PCBS, WFP, FAO, UNRWA, 2014.

^{vi} UNCTAD/PRESS/PR/2014/35 – Original: English, Occupation of the Palestinian Territory Jeopardizes Economic Viability of Two-State Solution, UNCTAD Report.

^{vii} World Bank, 2013, Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy.