

FACTSHEET

Improving access to water is a key to reduced poverty in the occupied Palestine

The West Bank Case



Water is a basic human right that cannot be realized under the current policies in the occupied West Bank. Palestinians cannot sustainably develop their water resources due to **two main challenges** that exist under the context of occupation:

1. Discriminatory Water Sharing Agreements

- The basis of water access between Israel and Palestinians is fundamentally unequal. The denial of Palestinian water rights has become a permanent feature under the Oslo Interim Accords that left Israel in control over almost all shared water resources. Under these accords **only 20 percent** of the Mountain Aquifer, which represents the only significant freshwater resource in the West Bank, was allocated to the Palestinians.¹
- In the West Bank, Palestinians have **access to less water per capita** today than they did in 1993 due to Israel's continued exploitation of the shared mountain aquifer, and the restrictions it imposes on the development of essential Palestinian water infrastructure.
- Palestinian water allocations from these shared resources have remained **capped at 1995 levels** (Oslo II Agreement), despite Palestinian **population having doubled since then**.
- Palestinians in the West Bank currently utilize **no more than 10 per cent** of the shared water resources, while Israel exploits the rest.²

¹ B'Tselem, *Issues under the Oslo Accords*, 2011.

² Palestinian Water Authority, *Palestine: The Right to Water*, 2012.

- The average domestic consumption rate among Palestinians living in the West Bank is **70 liters per capita per day (l/c/d)**. The “absolute minimum” recommended by the WHO is 100 l/c/d.³
- In Israel, the average water consumption is **4 to 5 times higher** (300 l/c/d).⁴ Under customary international law, these same water resources should be shared equitably and reasonably.

2. Israeli Restrictions on Palestinian Planning

- The illegal Israeli planning regime denies **Palestinians the right to plan, develop, and manage** their water and sanitation infrastructure in accordance with their needs. In addition, Israel makes it difficult for the third parties such as international or national humanitarian or development agencies to implement their work in Area C according to their mandate.
- In Area C⁵, **double restrictions on the development of WASH infrastructure apply**. In addition to the approval of the “Palestinian-Israeli Joint Water Committee” - needed for all WASH developments in the West Bank according to the Oslo II Agreements - development in Area C also requires a permit from the “Israeli Civil Administration” as part of the Israeli military



administration of Area C.

These permits are notoriously difficult to obtain. In the recent years, “Israeli Civil Administration” has **refused 97% of Palestinian submitted applications** for building in Area C.⁶

- Largely due to permit restrictions preventing the rehabilitation and development of essential water infrastructure, **Palestinian water abstraction rates from the West Bank Mountain aquifers have fallen from 138 million cubic meters (MCM) in 1999, to 113 MCM in 2007⁷ to 86.9 MCM in 2011.⁸**

- **Palestinian reliance on water purchased from**

Israel has increased in the West Bank. In 2004, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) purchased 38 MCM from Israel. In 2012, this had increased to 57 MCM (53 MCM for the West Bank and 4 for the Gaza Strip)⁹.

- The effective **impossibility to obtain a permit** leaves Palestinians with the unattractive choice between not developing or developing without a permit and risking demolition. In 2014, there were **42 separate demolitions of Palestinian-owned WASH structures, and further 21 WASH structures have been demolished in 2015** (until June 16).¹⁰
- The demolition of WASH infrastructure has placed Palestinians at **increased risk of disease and illness**, prevented herding and agricultural communities from practicing their livelihoods and led to significant numbers of displacement. International humanitarian law and international human right law **explicitly forbid the destruction of infrastructure vital to public health and water supply**.

³ Amnesty International, *Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water*, 2009.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Area C constitutes more than 60% of the West Bank and is under full Israeli military control and civil administration.

⁶ From 2010 to 2013, 97% of Palestinian applications for building structures in Area C were denied by the ICA.

⁷ World Bank, *Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development*, 2009.

⁸ Palestinian Water Authority, *Annual Status Report on Water Resources, Water Supply, and Wastewater in the Occupied State of Palestine*, 2012.

⁹ Palestinian Water Authority, *Status Report of Water Resources in the Occupied State of Palestine*, 2013.

¹⁰ Data provided by UN OCHA.

Humanitarian impacts and implications for the economy

- The demolition of essential Palestinian water and sanitation infrastructure – such as wells, cisterns, rainwater tanks, latrines and sewage treatment units – has been a consistent feature of Israel’s occupation, and remains a **primary cause of Palestinian displacement, particularly in Area C.**



About 113,000 people living in 70 communities, 50,000 of them in Area C do not have access to the piped water. They rely on rainwater which they store in cisterns and on water sold by private dealers and brought to communities by trucks. Water consumption dips to 20 liters per person per day in communities without water infrastructure, which is the minimum amount recommended by the WHO for “short-term survival” in emergency and disaster situations.

- Palestinians that have no access to water infrastructure and have to rely on water purchased

from private vendors **pay up to 400% more per liter of clean drinking water** compared to the price of water from the network.

- In the summer months, the monthly household expenditure on water in communities that buy water from tankers is **between 1,250 and 2,000 NIS¹¹, about half of the entire monthly household expenditure.¹²**
- Olive oil production in the oPt has enormous economic potential, both in terms of increased economic revenue and job opportunities. Virtually all olive fields are currently rain fed due to the lack of access to water for irrigation. Several pilot projects have shown that **irrigation can double fruit yield and triple oil production per tree.¹³**
- Area C includes some of the most fertile land in the West Bank. If businesses and farms were permitted to develop, this would add as much as **USD 3.4 billion (35%) to the Palestinian GDP.¹⁴**
- **Food insecurity in the West Bank remains at 19%.¹⁵**

While it is also affected by global phenomena such as environmental degradation and rising food prices, food security in the oPt is largely dependent on the lack of Palestinian food sovereignty. Food sovereignty measures the extent of control a state has over its own food resources. Control of water resources is a key component of food sovereignty



¹¹ 1 USD is about 3.7 NIS

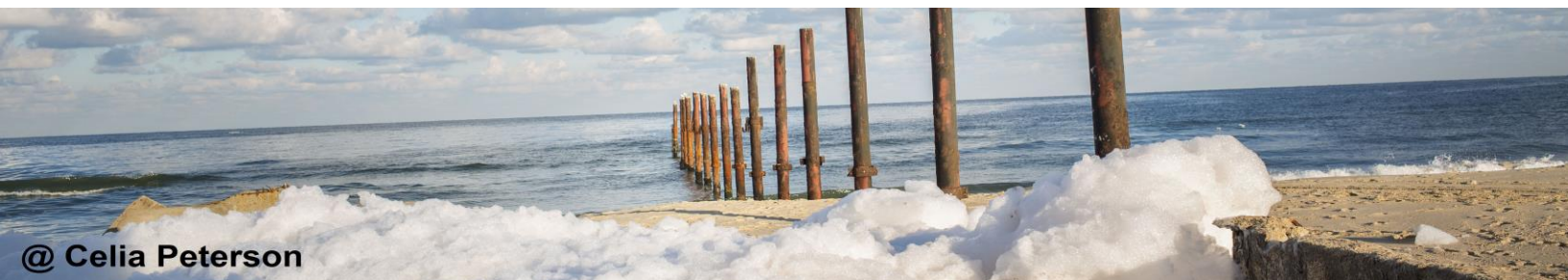
¹² Ibid.

¹³ EWASH, *Olive Production and Irrigation*, 2015.

¹⁴ The World Bank, *Palestinian Access to Area C Key to Economic Recovery and Sustainable Growth*, 2013.

¹⁵ UNRWA, *Food insecurity in Palestine remains high*, 2014.

The Gaza Strip case



The 1.8 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip are in dire need of a solution to the water crisis. The whole Gaza's population is forced to rely on a small portion of the Coastal Aquifer, a shared water resource with Israel and Egypt, as their only water source. Gaza's share of the aquifer is not enough to serve the needs of its population, and as a result of the lack of substantial alternative water resources **the Coastal Aquifer is being over-exploited by up to three times its sustainable yield.**¹⁶ Decades of over-pumping and pollution due to wastewater, agrochemicals and seawater intrusion have left the aquifer in danger of irreparable damage.

WASH situation in Gaza

- Currently up to **96% percent**¹⁷ of the water from the Coastal Aquifer is unfit for human consumption, and the UN and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) estimate that the aquifer **will become completely unusable as soon as 2016.**¹⁸
- Gaza's population is expected to increase by half a million within seven years and the PWA expects **demand for fresh water to increase by 60% by 2020.** Additional quantities of water are therefore needed to meet the demand.
- Today, **more than 90% of Gaza's population buys desalinated water** from private vendors for drinking while still using the saline water from the aquifer supplied by service provider for sanitation and household purposes.
- The shortage of water is compounded by the **shortage of electricity**, which is crucial for running and maintaining the water and wastewater facilities.
- Due to power shortages and the restrictions imposed on materials needed for the maintenance and upgrades of WASH infrastructure, Gaza's wastewater treatment facilities are also operating at reduced capacity. As a result, up to **90 million liters of raw or partially treated sewage are released daily into the Mediterranean Sea from Gaza.**¹⁹

The 2014 war, the blockade and their impact

- Damage caused to major water and sanitation infrastructure during Protective Edge operation in 2014 is estimated to amount to **US\$ 34 million.**²⁰

¹⁶ UNSCO, *Gaza in 2020 - A Liveable Place?*, (2012).

¹⁷ PWA, *Water Crisis Deepens: Without Sustainable Solutions, Future at Stake*, 2015.

¹⁸ UNSCO, *Gaza in 2020 - A Liveable Place?*, (2012) and information collected from Palestinian Water Authority on 29/01/2014.

¹⁹ PWA, *Water Crisis Deepens: Without Sustainable Solutions, Future at Stake*, 2015.

²⁰ CMWU, *Damages Assessment Report (DAR)*, 2014.

- **Over 33,000 meters of water and wastewater networks have been damaged.**²¹ 5% of the main lines (which transfer water from the carrier lines to the distribution lines inside the cities), 3% of the distribution lines (which carry water from the main



lines to the households), and 12% of household connections have been damaged.²²

- **12% of the water wells have been destroyed or damaged,** mainly in Gaza City, Beit Hanoun, and Deir al Balah municipalities.²³ **12 wastewater pump stations and 4 wastewater treatment plants** were also partially damaged.²⁴ Wastewater treatment plants in Beit Lahiya and Gaza City are still not fully functioning because of unrepaired war damages to the plants themselves or to the pressure lines, which pump the sewage to the sea.

- As a result of unrepaired war damages and the lack of fuel, the **Gaza Power Plant**, which provides electricity to operate water and wastewater facilities, is **only operating at half of its capacity.**

Humanitarian impacts and implications for the economy

- 90% of the population in Gaza buys desalinated drinking water. Not only is the quality of water sold by private vendors not regulated, but also its price is prohibitive to the extent that **households in Gaza end up spending up to a third of their income on water.**
- The average price charged by private vendors for potable water is **30 shekels per cubic meters - 10 times the price charged for municipal water, which costs 3 shekels per cubic meter.**²⁵
- 1 year since the 2014 ceasefire, **120,000 people in Gaza are still not connected** to the water network.²⁶
- Due to the lack of fuel and power shortages, 85 per cent of the agricultural wells normally operated with electricity cannot be used for farming purposes. For this reason, at **least 14,000 hectares of land planted with fruit trees and vegetables are at risk of drought.**²⁷
- Moreover, due to the aquifer overuse, farmers all over the Gaza Strip are left with no other choice than to use high salinity water for farming, which makes them either **change their traditional crops or drastically reduce their farming activities.**
- Up to **90 million litres of sewage**, untreated or partially treated, are released into the Mediterranean Sea from Gaza on a daily basis. This has tremendous impact on the environment, health of the population and fishing industry.
- In Gaza, the level of **food-insecurity remains at 57 per cent**²⁸. The blockade on Gaza continues to stifle the local economy and prevents any meaningful recovery or development of the most productive sectors such as the agriculture sector. The latter highly depends on a secure and non-impeded access to water.
- **80% of the Gaza population relies on humanitarian assistance.**²⁹

²¹ Ibid.

²² UN OCHA, *Gaza Initial Rapid Assessment Report*, 2014.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ CMWU, *Damage Assessment Report (DAR)*, 2014.

²⁵ Data provided by CMWU (water provider in the Gaza Strip), 2015.

²⁶ Data provided by WASH Cluster in Gaza, 2015.

²⁷ UN OCHA, *The Humanitarian Impact of Gaza's Electricity and Fuel Crisis*, 2014.

²⁸ UNRWA, *Food insecurity in Palestine remains high*, 2014.

²⁹ Oxfam, *Gaza in Crisis*, Updated in 2015.