



ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS SERIES

THE ROLE OF PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

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About the study

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Cover photo: A scene from central Gaza Strip during the olive harvest and heritage activities marking the start of the olive-picking season, on October 23, 2022.

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Introduction

Within the framework of the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON) and in cooperation with the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), this study includes a set of objectives aimed at strengthening core concepts at the Palestinian level, namely food sovereignty, climate justice, and a just environmental transition. To this end, the research team carried out a mapping of active civil society organizations (CSOs) in the field of food sovereignty that cover a wide range of progress in Palestine. In addition, this study provides an explanation and an understanding of the relationship between CSOs and policymakers in occupied Palestine and the challenges they face when confronting Israeli occupation, in order to develop participatory approaches that promote good governance, accountability, and impartial transformation processes.

The study also addresses the reality of the agricultural sector under colonial policies, in addition to studying the economic and political dimensions associated with controlling local resources. The research plan also includes topics related to contemporary challenges, especially after the events of 7 October 2023, and their impact on food security.

This study is important because it is an essential tool to build alliances that implement strategic interventions with various Palestinian and regional NGOs; analyzes how Palestinian civil society and policymakers understand the concept of just environmental transformation; and takes possible steps to entrench the concepts of governance, environmental justice, and sustainability in environmental policies.

Methodology

The study relies on a composite methodology: The first part is exploratory, surveying NGOs active in food sovereignty, while the second part is descriptive and explanatory, analyzing the reality of governance, accountability, sustainability, and related policies. In addition, it studies the reality of food sovereignty in Palestine and interprets the relationships that influence it. Data was collected

through 30 in-depth individual interviews in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, mostly face-to-face and some via video conferencing.

In collecting primary data for the mapping of organizations, the researcher relied on the Palestinian Ministry of Interior's data on NGOs registered in the agriculture and environment sectors, as well as research and community-based organizations working in the field of food security and food sovereignty. The team also distributed an electronic questionnaire to 30 of the 208 organizations for the purpose of measuring specific relationship indicators between relevant variables.

Studying food sovereignty in a colonial context, the researcher used qualitative tools through in-depth individual interviews with actors in the agricultural and food sector, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Union of Food and Agricultural Industries, Ma'an, the Environmental Organizations Network, the Youth Partnership Forum, Agricultural Relief, the Coalition of Agricultural Institutions, the Urban Agriculture Forum, and other organizations and activists. The researcher also developed quantitative and qualitative measurement indicators that were included in the interview questionnaire and online form (Appendix C).

The Concept of Palestinian Food Sovereignty

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as the ability for people at all times to have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their nutritional needs and food choices that enable them to lead

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active and healthy lives.¹ In fact, since 1974, the UN and its international agencies, such as the World Food Program (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), have embraced the concept of food access as the dominant framework for international policy in this area.²

La Via Campesina, a transnational umbrella for peasant organizations around the world, defines food sovereignty differently: every country has the right to maintain and develop its capacity to produce its own staple foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity.³ This move was made on behalf of farmers' social movements on the occasion of the 1996 World Food Summit, one year after the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The concept was put forward as an alternative to neoliberal policies and a more effective tool to fight against hunger and capitalist domination in globalized trade and agricultural systems.⁴ Since then, a food sovereignty school of thought developed as opposed to the food security school. The food sovereignty school emerged as an oppositional concept to global neoliberalism in agriculture in the late 20th century. It challenges the hegemony of corporations that prioritize profit over people, while simultaneously emphasizing the need to reshape food systems that respect local traditions, the environment, and human rights.⁵

Although the fundamental difference between food sovereignty and food security is clear, they are often confused in many societal contexts.⁶ The difference is that food security focuses on the ability to purchase food and make it readily available to citizens, while food sovereignty means autonomy and the ability to exercise full control over all aspects of the food system, according to the state's needs and traditions. Sovereignty means that the state controls its agricultural and commercial decisions based on its national interests, free from dependence on others.⁷

Many studies have addressed the issue of food sovereignty within the Palestinian context, indicating that it can be achieved through political and social will, even under occupation. Some of these studies have identified key elements of food sovereignty, including food self-sufficiency, the right to determine production and consumption patterns, and ensuring the well-being of both farmers and consumers. These studies emphasize the need for access to healthy, high-quality food in line with local heritage and culture, maintaining a balance between agriculture and industry, as well as between rural and urban areas, and ending resource domination by commercial companies and agents. The importance of prioritizing support for small-scale producers, farmers, and cooperatives, and combating chemical processing and genetically modified products is also highlighted.⁸

Near-consensus emerged from field interviews that the idea of "food security" has been widely criticized as inadequate, and even masking dependency and vulnerability relations.⁹ When food aid is provided in an emergency context (as in Gaza) without empowering communities to produce their own food, this relationship turns into indirect slavery; people remain dependent on others for their sustenance, without any real capacity for independence.¹⁰

The question of food sovereignty in the Palestinian context is a complex issue related to the nature of the concept of "sovereignty" under colonialism,

1 Azzam Mahjoub and Mohammed Munther Belghaith, "The Right to Food and Food Sovereignty: Background Document", The Right to Food: 2019 Report, Arab NGO Network for Development, 2019, p. 51, <https://tinyurl.com/8ybxm972> [Mahjoub and Belghaith, "The Right to Food"]

2 Interview with Abbas Melhem, executive director of the Palestinian Farmers Union, 22 July 2025.

3 Giuliano Martinello, "Paradigm Shift: Moving towards Food Sovereignty: Theoretical and Practical Reflections", The Right to Food: 2019 Report, Arab NGO Network for Development, 2019, p. 127, <https://tinyurl.com/8ybxm972>; An international movement that brings together millions of peasants, smallholder farmers, medium-sized farmers, landless people, women, rural youth, indigenous peoples, migrants, and agricultural workers from around the world. The movement conceptually advocates for peasant farming for food sovereignty as a means to promote justice and social dignity and strongly opposes corporate-led agriculture that destroys social relations and nature.

4 Mahjoub and Belghaith, "The Right to Food"; The concept of food sovereignty emerged from a CSO forum running in parallel to the World Food Summit, which reflected a more radical CSO position compared to the official government position at the summit.

5 Interview with George Karzem, researcher and activist in environmental and development fields, director of the Environmental Studies, Media Unit at Ma'an Developmental Center, and editor-in-chief of Environment and Development Horizons magazine, 30 April 2025.

6 Interview with George Karzem.

7 Interview with George Karzem.

8 George Karzem, National Food Sovereignty, Ma'an Development Center, 2015, pp. 11–12, <https://tinyurl.com/8r6h9d3s> [Karzem, National Food Sovereignty]

9 Interview with Abbas Melhem.

10 Interview with Abbas Melhem.

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and questions the possibility of achieving food sovereignty while under occupation, where resources and production inputs are controlled. This debate brings us back to the essence of the definition of food sovereignty as “the right to determine policies and the ability to produce and develop basic foods in accordance with the cultural and productive characteristics of society”. Despite the absence of a Palestinian state and the occupation’s continued theft of land, water, and agricultural inputs, Palestinians still have room to maneuver by developing and enhancing their food production and seeking to disengage from the Israeli market by moving away from dependence on its economic system, or what is known as the “steadfast economy”.¹¹

In light of the escalation of occupation policies, this study argues that food sovereignty is not just a possible option, but an urgent national necessity. The bet today is on building a resistant economy that would minimize dependence on the occupation and large monopolistic companies. The goal is not limited to adapting to the status quo: emphasis is placed on strengthening the steadfastness of farmers and society, as part of projecting liberation

and recovering stolen resources. Hence, the role of individuals is not limited to owning the means of production, but to adopting consumption patterns that support small farmers and local producers who contribute to sustainable agriculture. Believing in the idea of food sovereignty and practicing it on a daily basis, whether in production or consumption, are practical steps towards materializing this concept.

According to researcher George Karzem, the concept of food sovereignty is based on seven interrelated principles: (1) Food is a basic human right; (2) achieving food self-sufficiency locally; (3) equitable land reform and redistribution of resources favoring small farmers; (4) sustainability and biodiversity; (5) supporting local food systems and reducing dependence on global markets; (6) rejecting industrial agriculture based on genetic engineering and chemicals; and (7) participatory governance to ensure poor and marginalized groups partake in food decisions.¹² Karzem has developed a set of elements that should constitute a starting point when thinking about food sovereignty in occupied Palestine under the colonial context.¹³

Table 1: Dimensions of National Food Sovereignty

Axis	Dimensions
Economic	Achieving food self-sufficiency through local production. Taking into account the benefit of all parties: farmers and consumers. Smallholder farmer, cooperative, or public sector food production, with fair pricing.
Socio-political	The right of individuals to determine their own dietary patterns, accounting for rural diversity. Confronting international commercial hegemony and monopolistic seed control. Restoring balance between countryside and city. Combating commodity dumping from foreign and Israeli companies. Reviving traditional agricultural techniques and local knowledge.
Health	Producing healthy food that is compatible with local heritage and culture, and avoiding exotic foods.
Ecological	The rejection of intensive industrialized agriculture, genetic engineering, and excessive chemical use.

11 Abdalaziz Al-Salehi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty in Light of the Colonial Context, Dalia Foundation for Community Development, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/ye2xpm8> [Al-Salhi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty]

12 Interview with George Karzem.

13 Karzem, National Food Sovereignty.

These themes emerge as a set of main headings that can be described as the pillars of national food sovereignty in Palestine: the right to produce, ecological agriculture, water harvesting, local seeds, and consumer responsibility.

The Right to Produce

This highlights the essence of the food production crisis in occupied Palestine, especially agricultural production, which is represented by the colonizer's control over Palestinian land, water, and production inputs that limit the realization of food sovereignty. The Palestinian trade balance also suffers from a severe deficit, with imports amounting to about 6 billion dollars compared to exports of only 0.5 billion dollars (12 times higher).¹⁴

The trade deficit itself is no exception, but its seriousness in the Palestinian case lies in its nature and source; it is a worsening structural deficit caused mainly by the import of basic consumer goods that do not contribute to the development of local production. In this way, the deficit becomes a factor that deepens economic dependence rather than contributing to development and strengthening productive capacity.

The data shows that allocations for the development and support of the agricultural sector are severely limited, causing its continuous decline year after year. This is especially evident in the livestock sector, where issues with sheep and cattle breeding have worsened, and red meat prices have risen sharply, prompting the private sector to resort to imports. Although imports may alleviate the crisis temporarily, they have negative long-term effects. The reliance on them causes a decline in local production and a decrease in the number of livestock, exacerbating agricultural sector weakness without actually reflecting lower prices for the consumer. This crisis persists in composite form: declining production without market stabilization.

There are periods where Palestinians reach self-sufficiency in some types of vegetables, but this abundance is seasonal and temporary. For the rest of the year, they resort to imports, which causes significant increases in price during times of low local production.¹⁵

14 Interview with Ashraf Samara, researcher at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 23 June 2025.

15 Interview with Ashraf Samara.

The dependence on imports is a structural obstacle to the development of agricultural production, which is exacerbated by the Israeli occupation imposing severe restrictions on access to land and resources, which impacts agriculture more severely than any other sector. The lack of government investment in local production, over successive budgets, reflects a chronic neglect compounded by occupation-imposed financial, political, and security constraints.¹⁶

Ecological Agriculture

For several reasons, experts believe that ecological agriculture is more economical than chemical agriculture. First, it does not rely on chemicals, which in traditional agriculture constitute a large percentage of the costs, which may reach 30% or 40% of total expenses, depending on the region.¹⁷ An agroecological system is cost-effective thanks to its independence from external inputs and consumes less water, which reduces operational expenses. Agricultural diversification is an element of economic security as it limits losses when the production of one crop declines. By contrast, monoculture is prone to losses and recurring market vulnerability, as seen in cases of surplus production and price collapse for crops, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, and others.¹⁸ In ecological farming, diversification within the farm, along with the stability of product quality, ensures the continuity of profit and minimizes price fluctuations, giving it a real and sustainable economic advantage.¹⁹

Hydroponic Harvesting

Palestinians can rely on traditional water harvesting mechanisms that have been practiced for hundreds of years. The current increase in water harvesting projects is important, as the sector is witnessing a significant expansion in the construction of dams in the eastern parts of the West Bank, such as Wadi al-Auja, Wadi al-Faraa, and Wadi al-Maleh.²⁰ Water harvesting is limited to collecting rainwater through these dams, but faces great challenges due to the

16 Interview with Ashraf Samara.

17 Interview with Saad Dagher, engineer and activist in ecological agriculture, 12 July 2025.

18 Interview with Saad Dagher.

19 Interview with Saad Dagher.

20 Interview with Abdulrahman Tamimi, director general of the Palestinian Hydrologists Association, 24 June 2025.

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restrictions and obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupation, which limits development possibilities for this vital sector.²¹ One of the most prominent and widely used Palestinian agricultural practices is the construction of collection wells and water ponds.²² They are used to collect rainwater and store it for use during dry periods. Other modern water harvesting techniques exist in theory but are, unfortunately, not commonly deployed in practice. Four dams, however, have been built in the West Bank to support water harvesting, but these have not been successful and arguably have had a limited impact.²³

It is sometimes claimed that ecological farming consumes more water than monoculture, but this claim lacks scientific evidence. According to several studies, ecological agriculture adopts methods that conserve soil and reduce evaporation, making it more water-efficient. Research indicates that it can consume between 50% and 80% less water, and, in some cases, the need is reduced altogether.²⁴ This claim is likely due to misconceptions or misunderstandings about the nature of ecological agriculture. Mainly, it is based on practices such as soil covering, intercropping, and reducing evaporation, which all contribute to rationalizing rather than increasing water consumption.²⁵

Indigenous Seeds

Indigenous seeds are a cornerstone of food sovereignty, as they can be reproduced and used locally without relying on hybrid or genetically modified seeds. However, the proliferation of hybrid and imported seeds dominates the Palestinian market today. Commercial companies often promote chemical farming, while indigenous seed production remains limited, and the number of commercial producers is very small.²⁶ There are still no companies involved in the production or commercialization of indigenous seeds, so their use remains largely confined to farmers who keep them for self-consumption or exchange them within small, local networks. This poses a major challenge to promoting food sovereignty and reliance on local

resources.²⁷

Experts point out that indigenous seed production is low-cost. Each farmer can produce their own seeds from the previous season without buying new ones, making it an economical option and promoting food sovereignty. Hydroponic harvesting techniques, such as ponds or collection wells, are relatively expensive due to their reliance on labor or heavy equipment. This makes them more expensive in Palestine, compared to other countries. However, investment in them remains important, particularly in the face of long-term water crises.²⁸

An indigenous seed bank union was first established in 2003, the culmination of more than 10 years of effort in the field. The seed bank has made significant progress in agriculture in the southern parts of the West Bank (Hebron and Bethlehem) and the Gaza Strip, where agriculture is largely rain-fed, making indigenous seeds best suited for production. These seeds are non-GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) and naturally selected, and are offered at nominal prices to smallholder and women farmers in Palestine.²⁹ The Hebron Indigenous Seed Bank contains about 40 varieties of multiplied and preserved indigenous vegetables, in addition to new varieties of medicinal and wild herbs that farmers supply to the Union to preserve and produce them as a national heritage.³⁰

Agricultural Relief established an indigenous seed bank in the village of al-Khader in 2010, an extension of the indigenous seed development program it had started in 1992. The Ma'an Development Center established a seed bank in Marda/Salfit in 1993, but it was destroyed by the occupation army in 2001. The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ) had a program to develop indigenous seeds for field crops such as wheat, barley, and legumes.³¹

Vivian Sansour named her initiative the “Palestinian Indigenous Seed Library”. Similarly Saad Dagher started the Popular Bank for Indigenous Seeds in Bani Zeid al-Sharqiya to increase the production of indigenous seeds and distribute them free of charge to farmers.³²

21 Interview with Abdulrahman Tamimi.

22 Interview with Saad Dagher.

23 Interview with Saad Dagher.

24 Interview with Saad Dagher.

25 Interview with Saad Dagher.

26 Interview with Saad Dagher.

27 Interview with Saad Dagher.

28 Interview with Saad Dagher.

29 Al-Salehi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty.

30 Al-Salehi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty.

31 Al-Salehi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty.

32 Al-Salehi, Palestinian National Food Sovereignty.

Colonial Context and Food Control in Occupied Palestine

Before the displacement of Palestinians in 1948, the number of agricultural workers and wage earners amounted to about 550,000, or 55% of the total population.³³ Legal researcher Rabea Eghbariah documented a set of Israeli laws enacted by the occupation in the early stages of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. He focused on laws that deprived Palestinians of their agricultural, plant, and animal practices, which restricted their work in a variety of ways. Most notably, the “Plant Protection – Goat Damage” law of 1950, also known as the “Black Goat Law”, banned the raising of Palestinian black goats on environmental grounds, while the goats on settler farms were white. In practice, these laws aimed to impose a Zionist production mode in animal husbandry that serves settlers, replacing local production and bringing Palestinian land under the control of this consumption pattern.³⁴

In 1976, “Green Patrol” was formed. It was known for its brutal application of the Black Goat Law in the Negev, which was accompanied by many human rights violations.³⁵ The Israeli courts and the laws of the occupying state even went after akkoub and thyme, using food and nature as tools to control Palestinians. This form of colonization sought to dismantle the relationship between Palestinian land and their identity, on one hand, and to empower it and its resources to the occupation, on the other.³⁶ It was not until 2005 that Ariel Sharon, then Israeli Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, amended the list of “protected plants” to include the akkoub, a thorny seasonal plant commonly found in the Batuf, Negev, and Nablus regions in particular; its thorns are removed and served as a popular Palestinian

dish.³⁷

Eghbariah documents these examples as part of the occupation’s comprehensive war on Palestinians and their agricultural production, targeting both physical and cultural dimensions. Picking thyme and akkoub has become a crime for which dozens of Palestinians are fined annually. These policies also reveal a long-term structural impact on Palestinian food, as the new generation lose their foundation for independent national food production.

In parallel with the occupation’s war on indigenous Palestinian crops and the wider agricultural sector, both animal and plant-based, the economic policies of the occupation, from the declaration of its establishment in 1948 until the mid-1950s, were clearly biased towards agriculture. Most of the investment spending in the general budget was directed towards agricultural projects, agricultural manufacturing, and water projects, reflecting the occupation’s tendency to expand agriculture into occupied Palestine.³⁸ From here, we start talking about this issue in its larger dimensions, as the occupation controls 85% of the area of historic Palestine.³⁹

Post-Oslo Transformations

After the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the signing of the Oslo Accords, the land was classified into areas A, B, and C to tighten control over Palestinian lands. Especially in the 3,375,000 dunums of area C, where about 2,642,000 dunums of the area are directly exploited by the “Israeli” occupation, which constitutes 76.3% of area C.⁴⁰ The territorial colony councils control 63% of Area C. The reported influence of the Israeli settlement areas (including those closed areas allocated for settlement expansion) reached about 542 km² at the end of 2021, representing about 10% of the area of the West Bank. The areas confiscated for military bases and military training sites represent about

33 Ghazi al-Sourani, *Social and Class Transformations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Critical Vision*, Rose Island Books, 2009, p. 101.

34 Rabea Eghbariah, “Why is Israel Afraid of Wild Thyme and Akkoub?” (trans), Arab 48, May 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/4fxpz6tt> [Eghbariah, “Why is Israel Afraid”]

35 Eghbariah, “Why is Israel Afraid”.

36 Eghbariah, “Why is Israel Afraid”.

37 Eghbariah, “Why is Israel Afraid”.

38 Ahmad al-Sayed al-Najjar, *The Zionist Usurper Economy and the Captive Palestinian Economy* (trans), Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2023, pp. 116-117.

39 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), “H.E. Dr. Awad Highlights the Forty-Seventh Annual Commemoration of Land Day in Statistical Figures”, 30 March 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2t3bexph>

40 PCBS, “H.E. Ms. Awad Highlights the 43rd Annual Commemoration of Land Day in Statistical Figures”, 30 March 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yc86rtey> [PCBS, “H.E. Ms. Awad Highlights”]

18% of the area of the West Bank. In addition, the Annexation and Expansion Wall, which isolated more than 10% of the West Bank area, affected more than 219 Palestinian communities. Since 1967, the Israeli occupation authorities have confiscated about 353,000 dunums of Palestinian land and, in preparation for their seizure, classified them as nature reserves.⁴¹ Area A is about one million dunams, area B is about 1,035,000 dunams, and the area classified as “other” is about 250,000 dunams and includes: nature reserves and H1 and H2 in Hebron, which were divided within the Hebron Protocol agreement. In 2018, the Israeli occupation approved the confiscation of about 508 dunums of Palestinian lands, in addition to the seizure of hundreds of dunums belonging to Palestinians by expanding Israeli checkpoints and establishing military checkpoints that protect Israeli settlers.⁴²

In addition, the occupation controls water resources in historic Palestine. The occupation’s disregard for international laws is also revealed when Palestinian per capita water consumption is compared to Israeli per capita consumption – three times higher than that of Palestinians at approximately 300 liters per day. For Israeli settlers, this rate doubles to more than seven times per capita.⁴³ According to a B’Tselem report, settlements consume between 100 and 230 liters per day. Mekrot, an Israeli water company, reports that settler consumption exceeds that of Palestinians, reaching almost three times their daily consumption.⁴⁴

Before 7 October 2023, the Israeli occupation prevented Gazans via a buffer zone spanning more than 1,500 meters wide, along the eastern border of the Gaza Strip, thus Israel controls about 24% (365 km²) of the Gaza Strip.⁴⁵ Moreover, during successive wars on the besieged Gaza Strip from 2008 to 2014, with continuous attacks to this day, vast agricultural

areas estimated at 50,000,000 dunams and 34,500 dunams, respectively, were devastated, with almost the destruction of infrastructure, irrigation networks, and agricultural wells, and nearly 75% of Gaza’s agricultural lands. They were targeted more than once, especially within the boundaries of the area known as the “restricted access area”. In addition, the agricultural sector has been battered in several other ways, most notably by spraying chemical pesticides and opening dams located east of the Gaza Strip to flood agricultural lands. In January 2020, 2,000 dunums of vegetable crops were destroyed as a result of spraying. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates that losses amounted to 1.25 million US dollars. The Ministry of Agriculture also reported losses over the same period caused by dams being opened, estimated at 0.5 million dollars, which destroyed 920 dunams of planted vegetables.⁴⁶ Now, it is impossible to say with certainty what the future losses are for the Gaza Strip, and what the financial, agricultural, health, and educational sectors need after the October 7 genocide of civilians. Until the war ends, interventions at all levels will need to be assessed.

Food Sovereignty in Palestinian National Policies

The PA, the Palestinian private sector, and NGOs are involved in the food security system at different levels. Before delving into which NGOs are active in terms of food sovereignty, it must be recalled that food-related issues are primarily and naturally a matter of the agricultural sector, both plant and animal. Each sector (governmental, private, and NGO) includes a range of organizations that directly intersect with the agri-food sector.

41 PCBS, “H.E. Dr. Awad, Highlights the Forty-Sixth Annual Commemoration of Land Day in Statistical Figures”, 30 March 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/pwsawewy>

42 PCBS, “H.E. Ms. Awad Highlights the 43rd Annual Commemoration”.

43 PCBS, “The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) Issue a Joint Press Release on the World Water Day”, 21 March 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2zxtb9fr>

44 B’Tselem, “Undeniable Discrimination in the amount of Water Allocated to Israelis and Palestinians”, 12 February 2014, <https://bit.ly/34D-J2TH>

45 PCBS, “H.E. Dr. Awad Highlights the Forty-Four[th] Annual Commemoration of Land Day in Statistical Figures”, 30 March 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5yr2fhns>

46 Ali Wafi and Saad Eddin Ziada, “The Necessity of Food Sovereignty in Gaza in Light of the Corona Pandemic”, within Advocating Environmental Rights in Gaza during the COVID-19 Pandemic, PENGON, Friends of the Earth Palestine, and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Palestine Jordan, August 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ycyk9tbz>

The Palestinian Government Sector and the Food File

The Ministry of Agriculture is the main body responsible for formulating policies and strategies related to food.⁴⁷ There are a number of ministries working on policies for the development of the agri-food sector in Palestine. The Ministry of Agriculture works closely with the Ministry of National Economy, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Local Government, the Water Authority, and the Environmental Quality Authority as governmental bodies under the PA,⁴⁸ in addition to the Agricultural Credit Fund, the Risk Prevention Fund, and the Cooperative Labor Authority as supporting bodies.

It can be said that food-related policies in occupied Palestine are based on a strategic plan developed by the government, in addition to complementary strategies developed by CSOs.⁴⁹ These strategies are integrated with the overall government strategy and identify a set of different interventions in the agricultural and environmental sector for implementation.⁵⁰

Some believe that official bodies, most notably the Ministries of Agriculture and Economy, are making efforts to develop food policies, but these policies remain mostly general and abstract, as the term food security is used without scrutinizing its connotations or implementation mechanisms. They focus on “availability” and “access” to food without sufficiently addressing production and its technical and procedural implementation methods.⁵¹

Some respondents point to the absence of clear, organized national food policies, whether at the level of production or import and export, or areas that are subject to the Paris Protocol, which restricts the movement of the Palestinian market and prevents the building of an independent food policy.⁵² The National Council for Food Security suffers from a

lack of actual tools to implement integrated policies due to political and structural constraints imposed by the occupation and other internal realities.⁵³

Lack of Effectiveness in National Policies

Since the establishment of the Zionist entity, the main issue in accessing and utilizing resources lies in the occupation and its policies towards Palestinians and their resources in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, Palestinian policymakers also have a great responsibility, as their program was supposed to focus on steadfastness until a political solution is achieved that guarantees an independent state. In 2019, UAWC showed that the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP declined from 36% in the 1970s to about 25% in the 1980s, then to about 13% in the early 1990s. This decline continued further to 8.2% in 2000, 6.1% in 2009, and 3% in 2017.⁵⁴ It is also important to highlight the continued drop in the proportion of workers employed in agriculture, going from 14% in 2010 to just 6.7% in 2017.⁵⁵ Agricultural activity has also recorded the lowest average real daily wage at 89 shekels in the West Bank and 22 shekels in the Gaza Strip.⁵⁶ This indicates that Palestinian agricultural production, both plant and animal, has declined, meaning that there is a change in the type of food and its value for current and future generations.

In addition, the agricultural sector does not receive a large budget in terms of spending by the Palestinian government, nor does the government emphasize it as a key sector. According to the Ministry of Finance’s statements for the years 2019 to 2024, Table 2 shows the government spending allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture.

47 Interview with Abeer Butmeh, PENGON coordinator, 29 April 2025.

48 Palestinian Investment Promotion Authority, Agriculture Sector: Aquaculture, Red Meat Fattening, Medicinal Herbs, Combined Agricultural Activities, Animal Feed, Arabic version, p. 8

49 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq, lobbying and advocacy officer at the Agricultural Relief Foundation, 26 April 2025.

50 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

51 Interview with Omar al-Taiti, project coordinator at the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, 22 May 2025.

52 Interview with Izzat Zeidan.

53 Interview with Izzat Zeidan.

54 PCBS, “Key National Accounts Indicators in Palestine for 2015-2016” (trans), <https://bit.ly/2xpSS7q>

55 PCBS, “Proportion of Workers in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Sector Out of Total Workers in All Sectors in Palestine by Region and Gender, 2017” (trans), <https://bit.ly/2KUtbUY>

56 PCBS, “On the Occasion of the International Workers’ Day, H.E. Dr. Ola Awad, President of PCBS, Presents the Current Status of the Palestinian Labour Force in 2022”, 30 April 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/pbm946vs>

Table 2: The Share of the Ministry of Agriculture in Total Spending from 2019 to 2024

Year	Total Spend (million NIS [†])	Total budget (%)
2019	158,420	0.96%
2020	139,014	0.87%
2021 (as of Nov.)	142,575	0.88%
2022	153,300	0.9%
2023	156,100	0.87%
2024	118,200	0.67%

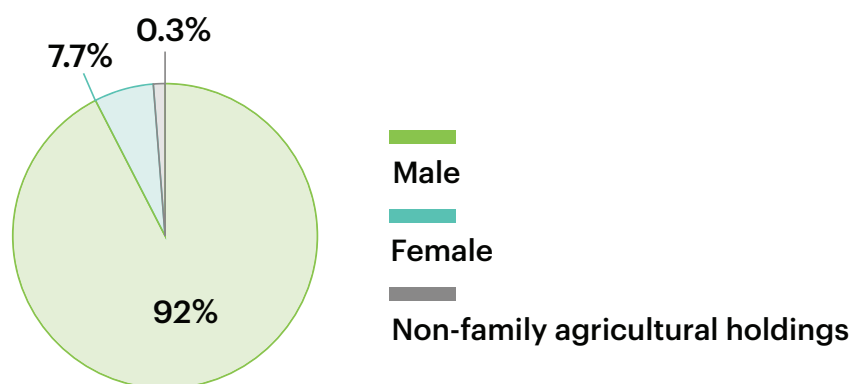
Note. From the annual government spending reports for the years 2019 through 2024 published on the Palestinian Ministry of Finance website.

† NIS = New Israeli Shekels.

The budget allocated to the agriculture sector reflects a lack of spending. Investment in the sector is declining due to the associated risks, especially in light of the absence of protection funds for smallholder farmers. Similarly, the budget allocated to the Environmental Quality Authority does not exceed 0.10% of the total public budget.⁵⁷ All of this puts the greatest burden on NGOs to work more extensively in the agricultural sector, especially when necessary resources from the competent authorities are absent.

In its latest agricultural census, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) revealed that the number of agricultural holders in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip amounted to about 140,568 during the 2020/2021 agricultural year, including 115,814 holders (82.4%) in the West Bank and 24,754 holdings (17.6%) in the Gaza Strip.⁵⁸ The number of male holders amounted to 129,389 (92%), female holders amounted to 10,809 (7.7%), and 370 non-family holders amounted to 0.3% (Figure 1).⁵⁹

Figure 1: Relative Distribution of Agricultural Holders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Gender, 2020/2021



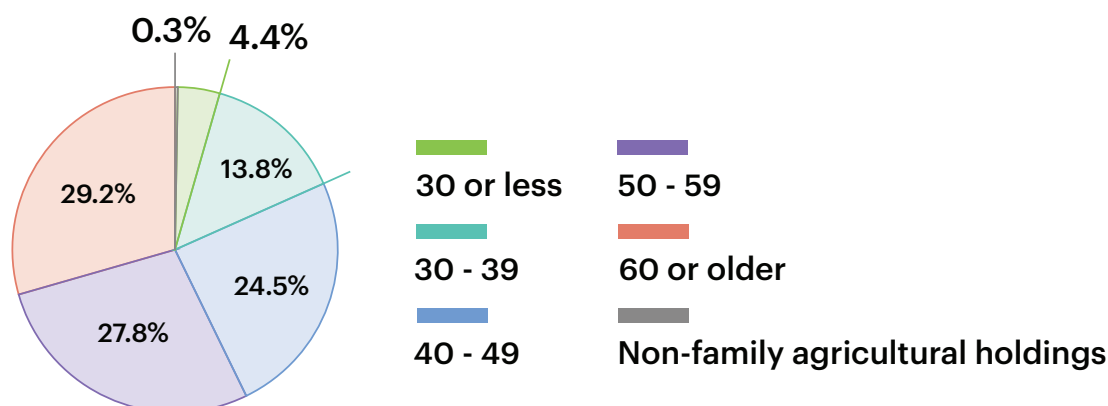
57 The annual report on government spending in 2021 through October, published on the Ministry of Finance’s website.

58 PCBS, Agricultural Census 2021: Final Results, November 2023, p. 42, <https://tinyurl.com/4tt2af6> [PCBS, Agricultural Census 2021]; PCBS defines an agricultural holder as a civilian, a group of persons, or a legal entity that makes key decisions regarding the use of available resources and exercises administrative control over the operation of the agricultural holding. The holder has technical and economic responsibilities for the holding and may assume all responsibilities directly or assign day-to-day management responsibilities to a paid manager. Thus, it is important to note that tenure does not necessarily imply ownership of the land or agricultural benefit.

59 PCBS, Agricultural Census 2021, p.41.

Of the total holders, the highest concentration were aged 60 or older (29.2%), followed by those aged 50-59 years (27.8%), and as we move with each age group, the percentages fall as well (Figure 2).⁶⁰

Figure 2: Relative Distribution of Agricultural Holders in Palestine by Age Group, 2020/2021



The Cooperative Sector under the Umbrella of the Ministry of Labor

The cooperative sector falls under the umbrella of the Cooperative Work Authority – a registered body under the Ministry of Labor. A previous concept paper titled “Cooperatives in the Colonial Context” revealed that the number of cooperatives in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip amounted to about 900 cooperative societies, of which about 790-770 are in the West Bank.⁶¹ However, the exact figure fluctuates due to the presence of cooperatives during registration, closure, and termination phases. The Labor Sector Strategy for 2021-2023, issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Labor, states that there are only 670 cooperatives in the West Bank, more than half of which are inactive and employ only 530 paid workers.⁶²

Cooperatives are divided into six federations. In terms of numbers, the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives Sector is considered the largest; however, the largest in terms of capital investment is the Federation of Housing Cooperatives.⁶³ The survey authors obtained an updated list for 2025, revealing 146 cooperatives in the West Bank and a maximum of 16 agricultural cooperatives in the Gaza Strip due to the difficulty in obtaining accurate information during the war (see Annexes A and B).

The Private Sector and the Food Industry

From field interviews, it is clear that food policies are shaped by a partnership between the government and local community, in which the government is primarily responsible for providing food, in cooperation with the private sector, which is the main producer of foodstuffs. Thus, food production and distribution are subject to constant coordination between the public and private sectors.⁶⁴

60 PCBS, Agricultural Census 2021, p.42.

61 Abdul Aziz Al-Salhi, Cooperatives in a Colonial Context: A Conceptual Research Paper, MASARAT, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/rshs27eh> [Al-Salhi, Cooperatives in a Colonial Context]

62 Ministry of Labor, Labor Sector Strategy 2021-2023: “The Road to Decent Work and Employment Opportunities Improvement”, State of Palestine, April 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/yv5mst7z>

63 Al-Salhi, Cooperatives in a Colonial Context.

64 Interview with Salah al-Baba, councilor to the director general at the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, 26 April 2025.

The number of food industry establishments (agricultural and non-agricultural) at the end of 2017 amounted to about 3,038 establishments, of which 2,251 are in the West Bank and 787 in the Gaza Strip. The number of food industry establishments has increased by 47.4% since 2010. It is worth noting that the vast majority of food industry establishments (more than 70%) are micro enterprises and employed an average of 1-4 workers in 2017.⁶⁵ According to the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), the preferred classification for the food industry in Palestine is divided into eight groups:⁶⁶

1. Meat processing and preservation: It includes the production of livestock and poultry meat of all kinds (fresh, chilled, frozen, dried, salted, and smoked). In addition to the production of edible meat products, the classification also includes the production of leather, wool, feathers, slaughterhouse operations, and meat preparation.
2. Processing and preserving fish, crustaceans, and mollusks: Includes freezing, canning, drying, and smoking of fish and aquatic life. In addition, fish products suitable for human and non-human consumption, and seaweed processing are included.
3. Processing and preserving fruits and vegetables: This includes the manufacture of foodstuffs based on vegetables, fruits, and nuts. In addition to preserving vegetables and fruits in various ways, such as freezing, canning, salting, and others, and making juices, fruit jams, and salads.
4. Vegetable and animal oils and fats industry: This includes the manufacture of raw and refined vegetable and animal oils and fats, the manufacture of flour from oil seeds and kernels, the manufacture of margarine, and the extraction of inedible animal fats and oils.
5. Dairy industry: It includes the manufacture of liquid and powdered milk, curd, labneh, cheese,

butter, cream, ice cream, yoghurt, and other dairy products.

6. Manufacture of grain mill products, starch and starch products: Such as milling grains such as wheat, barley, oats, and rice, as well as the milling of products for legumes such as lentils, chickpeas, and beans, and breakfast cereals. In addition to the manufacture of starch from various grains, and the manufacture of glucose and gluten syrups.
7. Manufacture of other food products: These include bakery products, sugar, sweets of all kinds, pasta, vermicelli, coffee and tea products, ready-made soups, baby food, spices, salt, and others.
8. Feed for farm animals, such as livestock, poultry, and pet food.

It is very important to note that in the food manufacturing process, raw materials account for the largest share of operational costs. In 2017, the cost of raw materials accounted for 63.4% of the total costs incurred, followed by workers' compensation (15%), fuel and hydrocarbons (6.8%), and electricity and water accounted for the lowest percentage, 5.2% and 0.63%, respectively.⁶⁷ This is in relation to food manufacturing operations in large factories, which rely on large holdings in production to obtain production inputs. As for small-scale farmers, they face other challenges in terms of production inputs and costs.

These prominent Palestinian food products could be attractive to the private sector: dates, dairy, cheese, fodder, poultry, livestock, bread, and pastries.

According to the Federation of Food Industries in Palestine, a commodity is classified as essential or non-essential through statistics collected by the PCBS, which relies on consumer data and needs to categorize food products according to these criteria. The food industry contributes 4% of Palestine's GDP and is part of the "manufacturing sectors", which collectively account for about 22% of the output of Palestinian industries.⁶⁸

According to the Federation, the number of food factories in Palestine is estimated to be around

65 Wafa Al-Bitawi, Developing Competitiveness and Increasing the Share of the National Product: The Palestinian Food Industry Sector (trans), Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), 2019, p. 19, <https://mas.ps/publications/2855.html> [Al-Bitawi, Developing Competitiveness]; The reference year for the population and establishment census is 2017.

66 Al-Bitawi, Developing Competitiveness.

67 Al-Bitawi, Developing Competitiveness.

68 Interview with Bassam Ghalioun, director general of the Palestinian Federation of Food and Agricultural Industries, 7 May 2025.

3,000. This figure includes bakeries, which are classified as food industries because they rely on importing flour from abroad and transforming it into products, such as bread. Factories producing foodstuffs, such as biscuits, chips, mortadella, and other processed products, are estimated at 500 factories in the West Bank alone, and the rest are bakeries and similar facilities.⁶⁹

As one of the most important industrial sectors in occupied Palestine, the food industry employs more than 23% of the workforce, making it a vital sector for employment. More broadly, the industrial sector generally contributes about 10% of GDP, while the agricultural sector contributes about 3%. The gross value added of the food industry is estimated at about 500 million dollars, reflecting its importance in supporting the national economy.⁷⁰ The food industry plays an essential and vital role in achieving food security and safety. Today, it is the second largest industrial sector in terms of size after the stone and marble sector, but it is the most important in terms of strategic impact, especially in light of the challenges related to food security, as we are witnessing in the Gaza Strip.⁷¹

The Relationship between Civil Society and Its Role in Influencing National Policies to Achieve Food Sovereignty

When addressing the historical and political context of occupied Palestine, it is important to note that multiple contexts characterize Palestinian reality resulting from the continued Israeli colonization. The land is divided into four main areas: The 1948 territories (the Palestinian interior), Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. This geographical and

political division has created different environments that have influenced the formation of civil society and the political, economic, and social paths taken by its institutions. Therefore, civil society in historic Palestine cannot be viewed as a unified bloc, as their organizational structure and legal framework depend on the region in which they operate.

In general, NGOs in Palestine are an extension of popular movements that emerged in the early 1980s and were in direct contact with political and partisan activity, and their roles overlapped with national parties and liberation movements.⁷² The work of these organizations stemmed from a relentless popular quest for civil rights under Israeli colonial control, and their development coincided with the growth of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the multiplicity of its factions, making them part of the overall national struggle.

It was previously estimated that in 1994 there were around 1,400 NGOs in occupied Palestine, but this number declined after the establishment of the PA; MAS estimates that 800 organizations disappeared as a new generation of organizations emerged.⁷³ According to a literature review, this was due to the PA's call to integrate NGOs into the then-emerging PA institutions.⁷⁴ However, it can also be argued that the new political reality after Oslo isolated Palestinian institutions in the 1948 occupied Palestinian territories and Jerusalem from the map of Palestinian institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as the Palestinian national project pinned its hopes on a state within the borders of 4 June 1967. With this project incomplete, even the institutions of so-called "East Jerusalem" are now outside the map of Palestinian institutions.

In the latest data obtained through mapping, the number of registered NGOs is 3,353, but a large part of them are inactive. It is important to note here that all registered bodies, whether NGOs or grassroots organizations, are treated as charities according to Law No. 1 of 2000 on Charitable Associations

69 Interview with Bassam Ghalioun.

70 Interview with Bassam Ghalioun.

71 Interview with Bassam Ghalioun.

72 Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, *The Emergence of a Globalized Palestinian Elite: Donors, International Organizations and Local NGOs*, Muwatin, 2005, p. 56, <https://tinyurl.com/td3nmk65>

73 Gianfrancesco Costantini et al., *Mapping Study of Civil Society Organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Final Report*, SOGES, May 2011, p. 21, <https://tinyurl.com/pf6fcyru> [Constantini et al., Mapping Study]

74 Constantini et al., *Mapping Study*, p. 22.

19 The Role of Palestinian Civil Society Organizations in Food Sovereignty

and NGOs.⁷⁵ The law does not distinguish between charities and grassroots organizations, so the issue remains based on customs, data, and available information about each existing body. It can be said that this number is large according to the area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but this is due to several reasons:⁷⁶

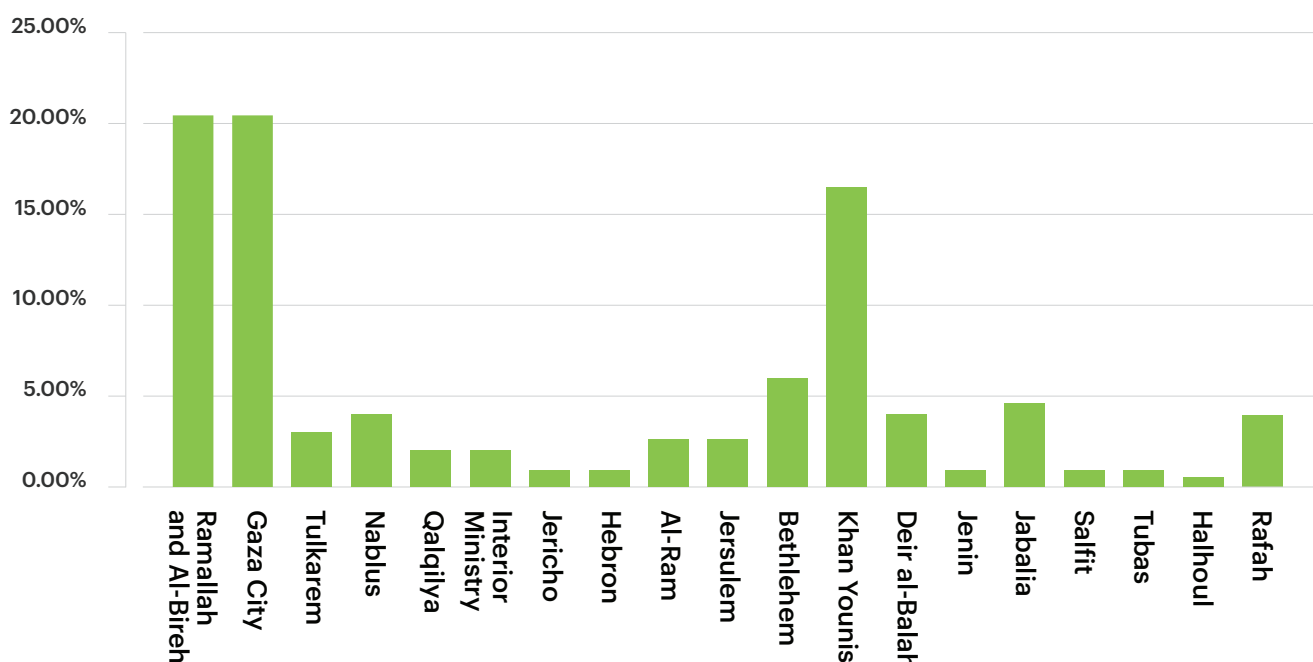
- The culture of voluntary work is historically ingrained in Palestinian society. At the moment of the transition from voluntary grassroots work to institutionalization, many voluntary movements were registered as associations.
- The ease of registering an association – any seven individuals can register an association for a nominal amount.
- Conceptual confusion between cooperatives and associations. Some originally wanted to establish cooperative associations but because of a misunderstanding of the difference in jurisdiction between associations and cooperatives, they were registered under associations.

Of the 3,353 registered NGOs (some of which are inactive), 157 are registered under the Ministry of Agriculture’s jurisdiction, and 51 are registered

under the Environmental Quality Authority’s jurisdiction.⁷⁷ However, this does not mean that agricultural and environmental organizations are the only ones working on issues of food production and food sovereignty. In food security, for example, organizations working under the umbrella of social development are active. In terms of agriculture and agricultural production, there is a good set of organizations registered under the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Women that focus on agricultural production and food processing. In this survey, however, we focus on organizations under the agriculture and environment sector, as the field of food and food production falls under the agricultural sector.

The data reveal that about 50.4% of agricultural NGOs are located in the West Bank and 49.6% are located in the Gaza Strip. The highest percentage in the West Bank is concentrated in Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate at 20.5% of the total number of organizations, then Gaza City (20.5%), and Khan Younis (16.5%). Notably, the cities of Hebron and Jericho did not exceed 1% each, knowing that Jericho is located in Central Jordan Valley and Hebron is the largest governorate in the West Bank (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of Agricultural NGOs according to Geographical Area



75 Interview with Israr Helana, director of the general directorate for Non-Profit Organizations at the Ministry of Interior, 24 April 2025.

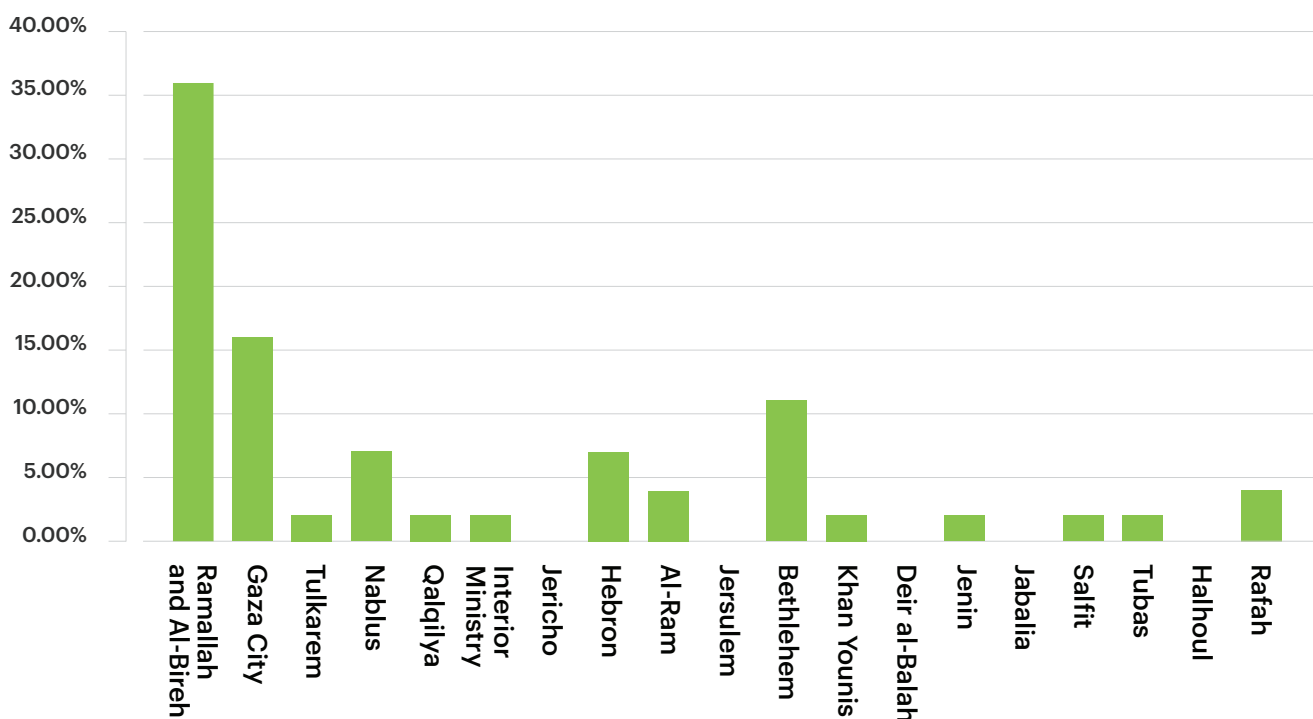
76 Interview with Israr Helana.

77 Data obtained by the authors from the General Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations during the period of implementation of the study.

As for environmental NGOs, according to data obtained by the research team, about 78% are located in the West Bank and 22% in the Gaza Strip. The highest percentage was concentrated

in Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate (36%), then Gaza City (16%), and Bethlehem (11%) – see Figure 4.⁷⁸

Figure 4: Environmental NGOs according to Geographical Area



Despite the continued work of these institutions and their activities on the ground, NGOs face great challenges related to funding scarcity, in addition to Israel’s measures to end NGO activity, especially those that expose the occupation’s litany of monitoring and field implementation.

Regarding the issue of food and food production, NGOs have played a pivotal role in this issue, especially since the agricultural sector (both animal and vegetable) provides the food. If we track the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, at least in the last five years, we find that its budget does not reach 1% of the total general budget, most of which is spent on salaries and wages. Thus, the development of the agricultural sector, both plant and animal, is subject to the interventions of the private and non-governmental sectors.

Table 3 shows the most prominent Palestinian NGOs working in the field of food sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

78 Interview with Israr Helana.

Table 3: The most Prominent Palestinian NGOs in Food Sovereignty

Ma'an Development Center	Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ)	Land Research Center (LRC)	Agricultural Relief Society
Environmental Education Center	Palestinian Hydrologists Group (PHG)	Rural Women Development Association	Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)
Popular Campaign to Stop the Wall	Palestinian Green Building Association	Environmental Media Center	Association of Arab Agricultural Engineers
Palestinian Farmers Union	Green Life Association	Natouf Society for Community and Environmental Development	Arab Center for Agricultural Development (ACAD)

In addition, a number of organizations are active within the framework of food sovereignty, but are not affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture or the Environmental Quality Authority. These include the Dalia Community Foundation, the Socio-Economic Policy Observatory, the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, etc. In addition to a group of NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Development, the Higher Council for Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Economy are active in working to achieve food sovereignty. In this survey, we relied on agriculture and the environment as jurisdictions for NGOs.

In terms of coalitions and networks, there is the Coalition of Palestinian Agricultural Institutions, comprising six Palestinian environmental, climate, and agricultural NGOs interested in natural resources and their management: Agricultural Development Association (PARC), UAWC, PHG, LRC, Ma'an, and ARIJ.⁷⁹ The Coalition carries out joint campaigns and interventions, with key partners including the Swedish organization We Effect and the network of environmental organizations PENGON.

On the environmental level, PENGON, a coordinating body of 16 Palestinian NGOs working in the environmental field, was established in 1996 in response to an urgent need to unify efforts and

enhance coordination among them in addressing environmental issues. It aims to develop the roles of partner organizations and strengthen their relationships with local and international organizations working in the environmental field.⁸⁰

As part of the study, the research team distributed an electronic questionnaire to 29 organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, most of which (54.5%) are based in Ramallah and al-Bireh. A large proportion (88%) replied that the most prominent challenges in the food sector, after the occupation's control of resources and crossings, are related to unsupportive local policies and legislation, followed by consumer culture (64%), and the migration of producers and farmers (60%).

The survey results indicate that 89% of NGOs attribute the absence of clear and comprehensive policies on environmental justice in food production to the lack of a legal framework, weak institutional coordination, and the effects of occupation. Although some scattered sustainable agriculture initiatives have emerged, they lack a unified framework linking environmental protection to the rights of small farmers and rural residents. Political constraints and restrictions imposed by the occupation limit the possibility of formulating and implementing fair and effective environmental policies.

The results of the survey also showed that all of the organizations see friendly NGOs as the most

⁷⁹ PNGO Portal, "PACI with PENGON-FoE Palestine Launch the Environmental Campaign 'We Effect'" (trans), 8 June 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/57cb3kph>

⁸⁰ PENGON, "About Us", <https://www.pengon.org/articles/view/1/en>

effective partners, whereas 40% see the government as an effective partner, and 32% see unions and federations as effective partners.

Eighty-eight percent of NGOs reported that their interventions focus primarily on food production, followed by agricultural policies and legislation (56%) and climate and environmental issues (48%). Ninety-two percent believe that policies should be developed to encourage crop diversification, 84% emphasize the importance of focusing on water and chemical-free agricultural practices, and 80% focus on supporting local seeds.

NGOs and Government Partnerships

Through field interviews, government and NGO specialists confirm that NGOs play a growing role in food production and participate in the formulation of relevant policies, especially before the outbreak of the recent war in Gaza. Organizations such as Agricultural Relief and UAWC have contributed to supporting agricultural and livestock production, developing agricultural infrastructure, and strengthening the role of local productive units, including women's cooperatives.⁸¹ They have also been active in initiatives related to food security and agricultural planning, in coordination with local communities and official bodies.⁸²

However, some believe that the pattern of partnership between the civil sector and the government does not rise to the level of true partnership in policymaking, remaining mostly executive rather than participatory, especially in the absence of a serious official will to involve civil society in a systematic and sustainable manner.⁸³ Some private sector actors, particularly investment companies, have also tried to undermine the work of these institutions by monopolizing some vital sectors.⁸⁴

Interviewees indicate that the relationship between NGOs and the government sector in Palestine is characterized by limited and irregular cooperation that varies according to the sector, the nature of

the issues, and the political and economic context. Despite the existence of communications channels, participation is mostly limited to formal or symbolic involvement.

The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture believes that the exclusion of NGOs from policymaking processes is not the result of a direct decision, but rather a natural consequence of structural imbalances within the institutions themselves, including limited human resources or their preoccupation with areas that do not intersect with official policy priorities.⁸⁵ Here, NGO capacity and professionalism are crucial in their involvement in policymaking, followed by the availability of financial resources to effectively implement these plans.⁸⁶

On the other hand, some actors believe that exclusion is often systematic. The government tends to implement policies in a centralized manner, which ignores or involves CSOs at a late stage of the political process, minimizing any real impact. Although consultative meetings are sometimes held when strategies are prepared, representation is limited and not inclusive. Civil society is seen as a pro forma partner rather than an actor in policy design and evaluation.⁸⁷

In the agriculture sector, and among previous experiences, there were attempts to involve CSOs in a more meaningful way, especially by the Ministry of Agriculture, through periodic and irregular meetings to discuss the sector's recovery policies. However, these initiatives did not turn into stable and sustainable mechanisms, ceasing altogether after 7 October. Political and security developments have overshadowed the continuity of this type of coordination.⁸⁸

In the same context, some organizations emphasize that the difference in language and priorities between civil society and the government is an obstacle to building truly participatory policies. Officials often operate from an administrative-political perspective, while organizations are driven by a societal and value-based commitment that responds to the needs of the most marginalized groups. This disparity sometimes results in a clash, such as when drafting joint position papers or policy

81 Interview with Saad Ziada, executive director of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees in the Gaza Strip, 5 May 2025.

82 Interview with Salah al-Baba.

83 Interview with Saad Ziada.

84 Interview with Saad Ziada.

85 Interview with Salah al-Baba.

86 Interview with Salah al-Baba.

87 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

88 Interview with Saad Ziada.

initiatives.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, some NGOs try to create opportunities for influence through community lobbying initiatives. Examples include food sovereignty projects such as local agricultural awareness-raising practices, organizing dialogues with official bodies, and engaging academics and researchers in formulating alternative visions for existing policies. However, these initiatives remain limited to the capacities and relationships of the organizations and lack the structural support that would enable them to become true partners in governance.⁹⁰

Who Are the Underprivileged?

Before delving into the question of who is most affected by existing policies and realities, it is necessary to review a set of indicators related to Palestinians as a whole. Returning to general indicators, the poverty line for the reference household in Palestine in 2017 amounted to about 2,470 NIS (about 671 USD), while the extreme poverty line for the same reference household amounted to about 1,974 NIS (about 536 USD).⁹¹ The poverty rate among Palestinians in 2017, according to monthly consumption patterns, was about 29%, in the West Bank (14%) and more than half in the Gaza Strip (53%); and about 17% experienced deep poverty, in the West Bank (6%) and the Gaza Strip (34%).⁹² At the time of writing, these figures are before the COVID-19 pandemic and before the war on civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, whose ripple effects have yet to be measured.

It is very important to note that the average monthly expenditure per Palestinian individual amounted to about 170 Jordanian Dinars (JD – approximately 240 USD), in the West Bank about 220.1 JD (approximately 310 USD), and in the Gaza Strip about 91.2 JD (approximately 128 USD).⁹³ In addition, the average monthly household expenditure was about

935 JD (about 1,319 USD). Notably, 31% of this expenditure is allocated to food needs.⁹⁴

As part of the policy review and field interviews, existing food policies and practices in occupied Palestine reflect a structural bias towards the private sector and large investors, with clear marginalization for the most vulnerable local farmers and producers, especially women, camp residents, and marginalized areas. The testimonies show that public policies do not serve an equitable or developmental agricultural structure, but rather perpetuate the logic of the market and neoliberal trends in dealing with the agriculture and food sector. Large companies and food factories are the main beneficiaries of government incentives, receiving multi-year investment at the beginning of their projects.⁹⁵ In contrast, small-scale producers, including cooperatives and individual farmers, are not empowered to survive or compete, leaving them as permanent losers in the system.⁹⁶ Home-based production by women in villages is excluded from official statistics, despite their actual contribution to community food security, which creates an unfair and incomplete picture of this sector's reality. In terms of the groups most vulnerable to food insecurity, several key groups stand out:⁹⁷

- Camp residents who have been forcibly separated from their land since the Nakba have become permanent consumers with no productive capacity.
- Entirely purchase-reliant urban dwellers who face high risks during crises.
- Women working in home production, whose work remains unrecognized and unsupported by official policies, despite being an economic pillar for a large number of families.

The policies adopted do not specifically serve small farmers or poor rural communities and tend to favor large investors capable of operating under difficult political and economic conditions. Access to agricultural resources and support is geographically concentrated in some areas, while others are marginalized, deepening the food security gap between populations.⁹⁸ The Jordan

89 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

90 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

91 PCBS, "About 13.5 Million Palestinians in the Historical Palestine and Diaspora", 11 July 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/2zbvptwd>; According to PCBS, the reference household consists of five members: two adults and three children.

92 PCBS, "Levels of Living in Palestine, 2017", 15 April 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/2sy4ac52> [PCBS, "Levels of Living"]

93 PCBS, "Levels of Living".

94 PCBS, "Levels of Living".

95 Interview with Omar al-Titi.

96 Interview with Omar al-Titi.

97 Interview with Omar al-Titi.

98 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

Valley is a glaring example of neglect in planning and development, despite its frequent reference in policies as a strategic area. The reality is that there has been no real intervention to support farmers or to protect land or infrastructure. In fact, some private investments have transformed agricultural land into commercial and tourism projects, dismantling traditional agriculture, marginalizing local farmers, and creating a new economic pattern that excludes groups that have historically been a cornerstone of food security in this region.⁹⁹

This shift towards small-scale agro-capitalism serves limited interests, expanding the local agricultural structure, and weakens Palestinian society from achieving any form of sovereignty or food security, especially under occupation and political fragmentation.

Popular Incubator, Local Initiatives, and Social Movements

Researcher George Karzem points out the importance of adopting alternative models in the relationship between consumers and farmers that promote healthy and environmentally friendly agricultural production.¹⁰⁰ Proposed models include organizing local networks in which consumers buy products directly from local farmers, especially organic farming, within cities and villages, based on successful practical experience. It also proposes supporting food sovereignty by cultivating drought-resistant plants adaptable to local climates, reviving traditional crops, or introducing new heat-tolerant varieties that require less care, as these provide economic, health, and environmental benefits to farmers.¹⁰¹

Building an alternative food production model requires a comprehensive reorganization that takes into account several interconnected dimensions. On the one hand, integration between the producers themselves must be promoted through crop diversification and geographical distribution that covers the needs of different regions, as well as the exchange of expertise and agricultural equipment. On the other hand, the relationship between

producers and consumers must be regulated; this would strike a balance between supporting small-scale farmers, ensuring the sustainability of their work, and enabling consumers to have access to high-quality products.¹⁰²

When these relationships are built on solid foundations, an alternative production system based on community and commercial exchange can be established, parallel to the mainstream market and progressively independent of it, allowing independent agricultural practices to emerge outside the logic of profit. There are already existing initiatives and community farm experiences that embrace ecological and local agriculture with food sovereignty as their main goal.¹⁰³

Youth Partnership Forum

The Youth Partnership Forum is a program that brings together youth clubs and centers that are among the most prominent grassroots social forces on the ground. They aim to unify their efforts and strengthen their role in the areas in which they are active. The forum works as a productive framework parallel to official bodies, bridging gaps related to food production and enabling youth and women to achieve a form of self-sufficiency that paves the way for food sovereignty in the future.¹⁰⁴

The Youth Partnership Forum was launched under the auspices of the Popular Artist Center. The work began in the early 2000s, coinciding with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, and focused on cultural and artistic activities in youth clubs and centers in the West Bank.¹⁰⁵ However, direct interaction with communities revealed an urgent need to expand the nature of the work beyond the cultural aspect to include economic, social, and volunteer dimensions.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the shift towards a holistic approach that integrates various aspects of community life and establishes a deeper approach to development and cooperative work.

The initiatives evolved to include community farming and youth cooperatives, as well as a comprehensive review and evaluation in 2017, with dozens of centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

99 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

100 Al-Salhi, *Cooperatives in a Colonial Context*.

101 Al-Salhi, *Cooperatives in a Colonial Context*.

102 Al-Salhi, *Cooperatives in a Colonial Context*.

103 Al-Salhi, *Cooperatives in a Colonial Context*.

104 Interview with Rami Massad, coordinator of the Youth Partnership Forum, 28 April 2025.

105 Interview with Rami Massad.

106 Interview with Rami Massad.

This came amid political and economic change, most notably the escalation of settlements and the lack of investment in productive sectors, especially agriculture, which received a small portion of the budget compared to the heavy focus on the security sector.¹⁰⁷ This reality highlighted the need to shift from a consumer economy to a productive economy and raised questions about the possibility of resisting economic dependency without providing real Palestinian alternatives.

The program's organizers observed profound social changes, most notably the decline in the spirit of collectivism and a rise in individualism, which affected the community's ability to mobilize and resist. In response, cooperative agricultural initiatives that started with one or two farms expanded to about 30 initiatives in the West Bank, including 16 youth and women's initiatives (see Appendix?), contributed to enhancing food security, sovereignty over resources, and rebuilding a solid and resilient community fabric.¹⁰⁸

La Via Campesina - Palestine

Founded in 1993, La Via Campesina is an international movement of millions of peasants, landless agricultural workers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, fishermen, migrant agricultural workers, small- and medium-sized farmers, rural women, and peasant youth from around the world. The movement is based on a strong foundation of unity and solidarity and defends peasant agriculture in order to achieve food sovereignty.¹⁰⁹

In Palestine, La Via Campesina is extended through the movement's coordinating body. UAWC hosts the movement and coordinates its office in the MENA region.¹¹⁰ There is also a close partnership between PENGON and La Vía Campesina.¹¹¹

Friends of the Earth - Palestine

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) was founded in 1971 on the initiative of four organizations from France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the

United States.¹¹² Over time, FoEI has evolved into a global federation of 70 national groups, which grew out of annual gatherings of environmental activists from different countries who agreed to cooperate in joint campaigns on critical environmental issues, such as nuclear power and whaling.¹¹³

PENGON is the official representative of FoEI - Palestine. In other words, PENGON is FoEP, and this name is used because the network is an accredited member of the international organization, and therefore represents Palestine at the global level within this framework.¹¹⁴

FOE's work in Palestine is based on field and community activity through awareness campaigns, lobbying and advocacy, and project implementation. PENGON and FoEP's role is to coordinate, direct, and unify efforts around key environmental and sovereignty issues, including food sovereignty, ecological agriculture, and local seeds.¹¹⁵ FoEP is an umbrella platform that unifies the efforts of environmental parties and seeks to influence policies and practices through advocacy, community campaigns, and local and international cooperation. This enhances Palestine's environmental presence globally while supporting environmental and agricultural issues on the ground.¹¹⁶

107 Interview with Rami Massad.

108 Interview with Rami Massad.

109 La Via Campesina, "About La Via Campesina", <https://tinyurl.com/yt249kth>

110 Al-Salhi, *Cooperatives in a Colonial Context*, p. 43.

111 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

112 Friends of Earth International, "Who We Are", <https://tinyurl.com/v74bd42n> [FoEI, "Who We Are"]

113 FoEI, "Who We Are"

114 Interview with Abeer al-Butmeh; PENGON is an effective example of a coalition of civil society organizations in Palestine, with 16 organizations working together on environmental lobbying and advocacy to influence public policy and defend environmental rights. This coalition is a living example of forces joining for environmental justice and shows how CSOs can coordinate with each other to form a collective and cohesive lobbying force.

115 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

116 Interview with Abeer Butmeh.

International Funding and Aid: Its Impact on Food Sovereignty

With regard to international organizations and institutions that support agri-food production within a developmental path, reference must be made to the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), an Arab regional financial institution based in Kuwait that focuses on financing economic and social development projects, through financing public and private investment projects, and providing technical assistance and expertise.¹¹⁷ The Fund began supporting various basic sectors in occupied Palestine in 1984, specifically in the social services sector, agriculture, irrigation, rural development, water, and sanitation.¹¹⁸

Notable donors include the European Union (EU) with its various programs, the Dutch government, the German Development Bank KfW, GIZ, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, We World-GVC (Italy), AECID (Spain), the Swedish Cooperative Center We Effect, Sida, ACPP (Spain), and Save the Children. In addition, many other international organizations enable Palestinians, at different levels, to achieve development goals globally as partner-funders, such as FAO and Oxfam. Even during the genocidal war in the Gaza Strip, many of these organizations worked to implement a range of interventions in the agriculture sector (see Annex 6).

International intervention in Palestine, through grants and aid, is a central factor in shaping the relationship between NGOs and the political and economic environment in which they operate. Despite the importance of this intervention, in terms of providing financial support, it is not without concerns related to the nature and objectives of this provision, and the extent to which it is consistent with the priorities of Palestinian society and its quest for food sovereignty.

It is noticeable that most donor interventions focus

on relief rather than contributing to structural shifts in the economic or food structure. This aid mostly responds to immediate needs without laying the foundations for sustainable development that promotes Palestinian food or economic independence. Nonetheless, some initiatives have succeeded in going beyond the relief logic. For example, joint public-private projects, such as sanitation projects co-supported by the EU, which reflect the possibility of achieving effective development partnerships and joint planning between the actors. However, the success of these initiatives is still conditional on the readiness of the local community and the strength of the role of the state in monitoring and sound rational implementation.¹¹⁹

Specialists point out that donor interventions often focus on technical solutions, such as improving agricultural supply or rationalizing demand, and ignore the political and social dimensions and structural issues in governance. These interventions are based on funders' priorities rather than Palestinian needs; they lack continuity, local and international coordination, and overlook the dynamic reality of Palestinians, sometimes rendering environmental and climate justice as an "intellectual luxury". This raises questions about the effectiveness of using funds and whether they contribute to building national policies or are limited to short-term projects without a comprehensive development vision.¹²⁰

Some experts point to the lack of serious oversight of the disbursement of international grants. Donors such as the World Bank and the EU provide funding with preconditions that may not be locally compatible or with food independence goals. While funding may empower CSOs, it does not necessarily bring about real shifts in agricultural policies or the development environment. Competition for funding also forces organizations to engage in pro forma activities that do not address structural issues in the agricultural sector.¹²¹

Some argue that the failure of some funded projects, despite their theoretical quality, is due to the lack of follow-up and sustainability mechanisms, as temporary projects, such as desalination plants or infrastructure development, are left without

117 Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, "About AFESD", <https://www.arabfund.org/introduction/>

118 Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, "List of all Projects", <https://tinyurl.com/a8nws7vy>

119 Interview with Salah al-Baba.

120 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

121 Interview with Omar al-Titi.

maintenance or continued funding. In addition, weak environmental culture and infrastructure make it almost impossible to implement sustainable environmental projects without deeper changes in public culture and governance: citizens will not be motivated to participate in protecting an environmental project or public utility if they do not feel that the public interest directly affects their lives.¹²²

Despite these challenges, some successful models have emerged that can be built upon, such as the GGP project, which was supported by Palestinian organizations with European funding and includes multiple components, such as infrastructure, advocacy, and community development. However, the main challenge faced by the project – like others – is sustainability, which reopens the debate about the need to integrate these initiatives into national policies with a long-term vision.¹²³ Some argue that the EU should completely revise its approach by supporting policies that originate from within Palestine and push for the participation of grassroots organizations in governance and priority-setting.¹²⁴

On the other hand, some donors, such as USAID, promote the private sector and large corporations, without paying enough attention to small farmers or food sovereignty. Small-scale projects or limited funding may make an impact in local communities, but they remain insufficient to bring about large-scale national transformation. Experience shows that foreign funding – in its current form – remains an insufficient tool unless it is accompanied by political dialogue, a change in the culture of governance, and a genuine partnership with civil society.¹²⁵

Responses to the questionnaire, distributed to a sample of NGOs active in the study, showed a wide variety of international donors that provided funding for food security-related programs. These actors can be categorized into three main categories, each with its own character and role:

- UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, FAO, WFP, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), focus on technical development, food security, and relief, and are mostly implemented through

official institutions, which may limit the space for direct political influence of CSOs.

- Government-supported entities (European and American), such as USAID, Swedish, Spanish, Norwegian, Belgian, Dutch, and EU funds, are the most widespread, in terms of volume, but are often conditional or guided by security and economic strategies that do not always intersect with food sovereignty and environmental justice agendas, from an emancipatory perspective.
- Independent international NGOs, such as Oxfam, CARE, Save the Children, Islamic Relief, Global Communities, and other foundations, have shown a greater appreciation for their roles in funding community initiatives, especially those that promote agroecology and empower vulnerable groups. However, some of these organizations rely on government funding, which may affect their flexibility to support radical alternative policies.

This diversity of funding sources reflects a series of opportunities for support, on the one hand, and limitations on the autonomy of agendas, on the other. Some organizations noted the need to disengage from conditional funding, which is often limited to promoting food security, but often pushes neoliberal agendas that do not take into account the colonial context in Palestine.

Strengthening the autonomy and influence of Palestinian civil society requires expanding the funding base and redirecting it towards supporting food sovereignty. This would empower local actors during the policy formulation and implementation process and build environmentally just alternatives within an emancipatory vision.

Starvation as a Tool of War: The Reality of Food in Occupied Palestine

Since 7 October 2023, Palestine has witnessed one of the largest waves of systematic violence led by the Zionist colonial system, which took on the character of genocide and ethnic cleansing, especially in the Gaza Strip. Civilians there have been subjected to

122 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

123 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

124 Interview with Hassan al-Mahariq.

125 Interview with Omar al-Taiti.

mass killings accompanied by the mass destruction of infrastructure and basic necessities of life. At the same time, the West Bank has been subjected to widespread attacks in the form of raids, mass arrests, and the demolition of infrastructure. According to data available as of June 2025, some 42,979 people were killed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and more than 104,714 were injured, of whom nearly two-thirds (66%) were women and children.¹²⁶ These attacks also resulted in the displacement of more than two million Palestinians inside the Gaza Strip as a result of the destruction of approximately 360,000 housing units, the targeting of Palestinian camps in Jenin and Tulkarem, and the destruction of infrastructure in Tubas.

Going back to November 2023, data shows that between November 24 and 7 December 2023, more than 90% of the Gaza Strip's population (about 2.08 million people) face high levels of malnutrition resulting from acute food insecurity, which is categorized at stage 3 or higher (crisis or worse), according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Of these, over 40% of the population (939,000 people) were in an emergency situation (IPC Phase 4) and more than 15% (378,000 people) were in a disaster situation (IPC Phase 5).¹²⁷ As of 2 September 2025, the number of deaths resulting from starvation imposed by the Israeli occupation reached 361, including 130 children.¹²⁸

In the West Bank, the occupation state increased the number of concrete gates and military checkpoints between October 2023 and early 2025, reaching 898.¹²⁹ In a new update, Quds News Network reported that the number of gates had reached 1,000 across the West Bank,¹³⁰ in addition to arresting thousands of Palestinians, increasing the pace of settlement building, and controlling agricultural lands.

¹²⁶ PCBS, "Home", last updated October 13, 2024. <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/>

¹²⁷ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), "Gaza Strip: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for 24 November - 7 December 2023 and Projection for 8 December 2023 - 7 February 2024", <https://tinyurl.com/2p9w5c75>

¹²⁸ Al Jazeera, "Gaza Records Highest Number of Starvation Martyrs in One Day" (trans), 2 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3fmz5cdt>

¹²⁹ Palestinian News and Information Agency (WAFA), "898 Military Checkpoints and Gates Besiege Palestinians in the West Bank", 22 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2k2cw4ts>

¹³⁰ Quds News Network, "Iron Gates in the West Bank ... from Manufacturing Poverty to Assassinating Political Identities" (trans), 12 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3av33pn9>

Challenges to Realizing Food Sovereignty in Occupied Palestine

Food policies in Palestine face structural challenges resulting from a complex political and economic reality. At the center lies the Israeli occupation, which imposes direct restrictions on the basic elements of food production: land, water, and human resources. Crossings are under Israeli control, water is unequally distributed, and agricultural land is confiscated or its use is restricted, hindering the development of the food production chain and rendering national policies meaningless.

The Occupation as a Structural Obstacle

Respondents and specialists unanimously agree that the Israeli occupation is the biggest obstacle to achieving food security and food sovereignty, as it destroys agricultural infrastructure, targets land and crops, and prevents access to Area C, causing systematic famine in the Gaza Strip and chronic food fragility in the West Bank. Dependence on imports, up to 95% for basic food commodities such as wheat, leaves Palestinians vulnerable to the vagaries of international markets and foreign policies and weakens the local community's ability to meet its needs self-sufficiently. In addition, Palestinian economic policies are inconsistent with the lack of sovereignty; Palestinian society does not control borders or the movement of goods. This prevents the development of an independent national agricultural policy capable of adapting to climate challenges and environmental shifts.

Overlapping Policies and Unfair Competition

The lack of coordination between government agricultural policies and the private sector has resulted in unfair competition, weakening the ability of farmers and NGOs to survive, especially in light of dominant monopolistic companies and settlement interference in the local market. The internal

political division since 2006 has also hindered the implementation of unified national policies. Policies differ between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which undermines their effectiveness in any strategic national planning, including five-year plans being prepared with CSO participation active. As foreign products enter the Palestinian market without adequate oversight or protection, including those from settlements, small and traditional local industries are weakened, diminishing the chances of achieving a resilient and sustainable economy that respects environmental and climate justice.

Weak Official Farmer Protection and their Ability to Adapt to Climate Change

There are no official policies to protect small-scale producers from market or climate fluctuations, which increases their vulnerability and makes them susceptible to heavy losses, as happened with watermelon and olive farmers. The shortage of storage facilities, refrigerators, and centralized grain silos weakens their ability to maintain surplus production, resulting in price fluctuations and large losses, especially during bumper seasons.

Fragmented Institutional Efforts and Poor Coordination

NGOs operate under difficult conditions and with limited resources, often with individual or uncoordinated efforts, making the impact of their interventions limited and unsustainable, especially with short-term funding. Many projects end as soon as the funding ends without follow-up or maintenance plans, and what has been accomplished deteriorates, as has happened in some desalination plants.

The Challenges of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

The Palestinian agricultural sector is directly impacted by climate shifts, including recurrent droughts, floods, and changing rainfall patterns,

which increase pressure on water resources and threaten land productivity. This situation calls for adaptive strategies based on climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable water management, and the adoption of environmentally friendly production techniques.

Political Economy Determinants

The unstable structure of the Palestinian economy and Israeli control over markets and resources reinforce inequality and weaken the ability to achieve environmental and climate justice. The lack of Palestinian control over basic economic policies (such as customs, taxation) and water resources undermines the ability to design support programs for farmers and local industries and prevents building a resilient economic system in the event of crises and climate risks.

Recommendations

Despite the significant challenges in Palestinian agriculture under occupation, opportunities exist to promote food sovereignty and support smallholder farmers. Revitalizing underutilized land and enabling farmers to return to production contributes to improving their income and strengthening the local resilient economy. Establishing these paths are summarized under the following recommendations:

At the policy level:

- Increase the share of the Ministry of Agriculture in future government budgets.
- Strengthen institutional coordination between relevant ministries and agencies to support food sovereignty.
- Develop policies to protect the prices of agricultural and livestock production inputs, while addressing the limitations of tax refunds for small farmers.
- Direct efforts towards enhancing local production and reduce dependence on imported products, especially Israeli ones.
- Target funding for the Jordan Valley to revitalize it as a Palestinian food basket and address its water salination.

- Formulate progressive and enforceable policies, activate environmental laws, and establish “environmental police” to hold polluters accountable.
- Develop an agricultural water tariff law and tighten monitoring of agricultural electricity tariffs.
- Encourage water harvesting and the use of rainwater and recycled water, while emphasizing the natural right to water.
- Activate the consumer protection law, regulate fodder prices, and increase storage capacity for fodder and grains.
- Reconsider farmer subsidies and allocate them to smallholders.
- Use indigenous seeds and promote cooperatives to provide inputs at affordable prices, while developing cooperative laws and protecting them from targeting.
- Rebuild destroyed cooperative headquarters and provide the necessary infrastructure.

At the level of NGOs:

- Enable NGOs to move from relief work to strategic food sovereignty projects and build local and international partnerships to support sustainable agriculture.
- Standardize the definition of Palestinian food sovereignty and link it to the production of basic foodstuffs locally, with a focus on water as a prerequisite.
- Complement urgent humanitarian interventions (food, shelter, and health), especially in Gaza, in parallel with rehabilitating agricultural land, and invest it in productive projects, such as agriculture, composting, greenhouses, and water harvesting.
- Lobby for fair financing tools and review institutional policies that include marginalized groups.
- Secure flexible international funding free from political conditions and seek to adopt an independent Palestinian vision for financing the agricultural sector and cooperatives.

Funds, Insurances, and Exemptions

- Effectively operationalize agricultural insurance and risk-prevention fund.
- Reconsider the establishment of social/agricultural banks to support the poor.
- Increase exemptions and legal procedures to facilitate the registration of cooperatives in favor of small farmers.
- Quickly develop tax refund mechanisms for production inputs.
- Establish a national fund to support agricultural and artisanal cooperatives to ensure continuity during crises.

Strategic Planning

- Prepare alternative plans to manage agricultural production during wars and displacement, instead of random responses.
- Encourage urban and peri-urban agriculture in cities and surrounding areas.
- Invest in treating and reusing wastewater for irrigation and protecting soil from war-related pollution.
- Identify suitable land for strategic products and provide technical and material support.
- Protect local crops (oil, dates, and watermelons) through taxes on foreign goods and encourage local consumption.
- Develop supply chains for milk and recycle agricultural waste to produce fodder and fertilizer.
- Coordinate and diversify initiative and cooperative crops to prevent production hoarding.
- Protect small farmers from the exploitation of middlemen in marketing.
- Adopt laws and policies to regulate the sale of land and prevent agricultural land conversion for non-agricultural use.
- Prioritize the consumption of small farmer products and encourage local agriculture to replace imports.

Community (Networking and Initiatives)

- Invest in treating and reusing wastewater for irrigation and protect the soil from war-related pollution.
- Address restrictions related to inheritance, financing, and ownership to ensure gender justice in reconstruction.
- Expand actor networks in the resilience economy and strengthen the interrelationship between production and consumption.
- Provide salt- and disease-resistant “mobile seed kits” to support farmers in times of crisis.
- Achieve self-sufficiency in basic vegetables with the possibility of exporting their surplus, despite the limited sufficiency of wheat and barley.
- Transfer agricultural expertise among smallholders, especially in water harvesting and localized seeds.
- Intensify community initiatives to market farmers’ products and awareness workshops on agriculture and on the importance of returning to the land.
- Encourage the use of local resources and non-hybridized local seeds.
- Expand the application of water harvesting, create agricultural ponds, and protect the soil from erosion.
- Increase voluntary activities and popular markets to promote direct exchange between consumers and producers.
- Support cooperatives and organize their production sector.
- Invest in the media and social media to promote these efforts.

Appendices

Appendix A: West Bank Field Interviews

No.	Name	Organization	Interview Date
1	Izzat Zeidan	Coordinator, Coalition of Agricultural Organizations	26/04/ 2025
2	Salah Al-Baba	Director General and Guidance Counselor, Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture	26/04/2025
3	Hassan al-Mahariq	Advocacy Unit Head, Agricultural Relief Society	26/04/2025
4	Rami Massad	Art Center Coordinator, Youth Partnership Forum	28/04/2025
5	Abeer Butmeh	PENGON Coordinator	29/04/2025
6	George Karzem	Editor-in-Chief, Environment and Development Horizons; Studies Unit Director, Ma'an Development Center	30/04/2025
7	Bassam Abu Ghalioun	Director General, Palestinian Food Industries Federation	07/05/2025
8	Omar al-Taiti	Project Coordinator, Union of Agricultural Work Committees	22/05/2025
9	Ashraf Abu Hayyeh	Human Rights Lawyer, Al-Haq	21/06/2025
10	Ashraf Samara	Head, Economic Statistics Department, Palestinian Bureau of Statistics	23/06/2025
11	Abdulrahman Tamimi	Director General, Society of Hydrologists	24/06/2025
12	Saad Dagher	Engineer and activist in environmental agriculture	12/07/2025
13	Raed Daabi	General Manager, Seeds for Development Association	17/07/2025
14	Aisha Hamouda	Gender Unit Head, Palestine Workers Union	22/07/2025
15	Abbas Melhem	President of the Farmers Union	22/07/2025
16	Jad Isaac	Executive Director, ARIJ Center	31/07/2025
17	Yousef Al-Turk	Former Chairman, Cooperative Work Authority	31/07/2025
18	Jamil Dababat	North Bureau Head, Wafa News Agency	12/08/2025
19	Hanin Zeidan	Director General, Rural Women's Development Association	17/08/2025
20	Nidal Abu Al-Rub	Research, Studies and Exploration Department Director, Energy and Natural Resources Authority	8/26/2025
21	Insist Helena	Director General, Charitable Societies Department, Ministry of Interior	22/04/2025

Appendix B: Gaza Strip Field Interviews

No.	Name	Job title	Interview Date
1	Ahmed Sourani	Executive Director, Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Forum	27/04/2025
2	Hussam Al-Khatib	Director of Projects, Ministry of Agriculture	06/05/2025
3	Saad Ziadeh	Executive Director, Union of Agricultural Work Committees	06/05/2025
4	Munther Salem	Director General of Water Resources, Water and Environmental Quality Authority	10/05/2025
5	Amjad Shawa	Director of the Network of NGOs and coordinator within its Food Cluster	12/06/2025
6	Ali Wafi	Agricultural Engineer and Project Manager, Agricultural Relief Organization	19/07/2025
7	Fadi Shaltouni	Director. Work Authority Development Cooperative, Ministry of Labor	27/07/2025
8	Jalal Ismail	Engineer, Energy Authority	19/08/2025
9	Asma Masoud	Gender Officer, FAO	21/08/2025
10	Ahmed Halas	Director, National Institute for Environment and Development	19/08/2025

Appendix C: Questionnaire

- How is food-related policymaking currently taking place in Palestine?
- How would you characterize the challenges faced by the food sector in Palestine?
- Who benefits from current policies and practices (in terms of sectors, regions, or societal groups)? Who are the winners and losers? Who has been marginalized and is vulnerable to food insecurity as a result?
- How would you describe the familiarity of CSOs with the concept of food sovereignty and food security?
- When are civil society organizations involved in policy-making processes: What form does this engagement take? What are the effects (intended and unintended) of this engagement (positive or negative)?
- Why are CSOs sometimes excluded from policymaking related to food production?
- How do CSOs want to engage in the policymaking process? What resources (material and non-material) do CSOs need to be able to play a greater role in shaping public policies related to food sovereignty? | What resources (material and non-material) do CSOs need to be able to play a greater role in shaping public policies related to food sovereignty?
- How do international actors (such as the World Bank, EU, US, and other bilateral donors) currently support or engage with the food sector in Palestine? Is their support limited to technical solutions (such as increasing supply or improving demand), or do they include “equity” considerations and good governance reforms in their interventions? In particular, how does the EU currently interact with CSOs in terms of policy development? Are there any EU-funded projects worth examining in terms of lessons learned?

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About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.



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