

Press Release by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Palestinian Water Authority on the Occasion of World Water Day - March 22, 2012

The slogan for World Water Day 2012 is 'Water and Food Security' and particular attention is being paid to this issue around the world. According to the UN water database, there are 7 billion people requiring 2-4 liters of drinking water daily per capita and 2-5 thousand liters daily per capita to produce their food requirements. In the Palestinian Territory, around 220 liters of water are available daily per capita, which means that each Palestinian needs nine times the current amount of water in order to produce their daily food.

Water is Key to Food Security

Water is a main pillar of food security, yet many countries are food insecure due to changes in climate and fluctuations in the amount of rainfall.

Arab countries in general, particularly the Palestinian Territory, suffer from water scarcity due to limited water resources. This affects all the vital sectors, especially agriculture, which is essential to ensure food self-sufficiency.

Despite rich soil and optimal climatic conditions for agricultural production, the Palestinian Territory is nevertheless affected by limited access to water resources. This has hampered agricultural productivity and resulted in land degradation and failure to achieve food self-sufficiency. Land and water are the main pillars of food security but the Palestinian Territory is in an unusual situation characterized by an abundance of natural resources yet limited access to those resources, around which the Palestinian-Israeli conflict revolves.

Water resources in the Palestinian Territory consist only of springs and ground water wells. The amount of water discharged from springs in 2010 was 26.8 million m³, while 244 million m³ of water was pumped from ground water wells and water purchased from the Israeli Water Company (Mekorot) totaled 60.3 million m³, of which 4.3 million m³ for agricultural use.

11.8% of the Labor Force Work in the Agricultural Sector

Agriculture, forestry and fishing represent 5.5% of Palestinian GDP and provide employment to about 11.8% of the total labor force. Palestinian agriculture is distinctive in comprising both concentrated irrigated cultivated areas as well as widespread rain-fed cultivated areas that prevails in the highlands of the West Bank. Rain-fed cultivated areas forms 80.0% of the total cultivated area of Palestinian cultivation due to the limited water supply, while irrigated farming forms 19.6%.

Areas of Field Crops, Vegetables and Horticultural Trees (dunums) in the Palestinian Territory According to Type of Irrigation, 2009/2010

Type of Crop	Type of Irrigation			Total
	Irrigated	Rain-fed	Not Stated	
Field Crops	9,189.34	232,746.53	-	241,935.87
Vegetables	109,241.95	16,541.43	1,473.35	127,256.73
Horticultural Trees	59,997.04	478,968.65	3,397.27	542,362.96
Total	178,428.33	728,256.61	4,870.62	911,555.56

Source: PCBS, 2011, Agricultural Census-2010, Final Results- Palestinian Territories.

(-): Nil

Relationship in Gaza Strip between Population Growth and Food Security

Irrigated agriculture is a vital component of total agriculture and supplies many of the nutritious needs for mankind and animals. By 2016, the Gaza Strip population is expected to grow to 1.9 million inhabitants. This will cause a huge increase in demand for agricultural products, while the amount of fresh water allocated for agriculture will be reduced radically to meet the growing needs for municipal purposes, In addition to the salinity of water in the Gaza Strip, where the percentage of chloride in groundwater reach 1000 milligrams per liter, while according to the international recommendation ratio is 300 milligrams per liter, which have a great impact on human health and crops.

The agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip consumes an average of 75-80 million m² of water from groundwater wells annually. The seasonal crop water requirement shows that more than two-thirds of the total cultivated area is irrigated.

Future Scenarios

Israeli actions of ongoing siege and closure of Palestinian cities, burning or confiscation of lands, stealing of agricultural crops, expansion of settlements and expulsion of farmers from their own lands, plus stealing the water to re-sell it back at high prices that farmers cannot afford to use for agriculture, have resulted in lowered food production. With increased demands due to a growing population, this has meant higher prices of food commodities and consumption of food takes up 36.4% of the average household total expenses.

Some scenarios for the future do exist that can be achieved by governmental and civil society organizations. These include identifying allocation priorities of land use activities, developing additional water resources to be used in irrigation from rain-water harvesting systems, use the treated wastewater for irrigate of dry fodder crops, enhancing land reclamation, and above all, increase agricultural production by encouraging farmers to cultivate crop varieties with high productivity and less water consume.

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