



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND FOOD SECURITY (SEFSEC)

SURVEY REPORT 2 – GAZA STRIP

November 2009

DATA COLLECTED BY THE PALESTINIAN CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS
(April – June 2009)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food insecurity has become increasingly prevalent in the Gaza Strip as a consequence of lacking economic opportunities and progressive limitations imposed under Israeli control. The livelihoods crisis has been further aggravated by a 28 month blockade restricting commercial access for the import and export of goods and people towards labour markets. As a result, the Gaza Strip is currently undergoing a de-development in which the shrinking of the private sector and a stagnated economy is reeling the population into high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The removal of restrictions on Gaza's borders by the Government of Israel is an essential prerequisite as to start the revival of the economy and allow free access to agricultural areas within Gaza, as well as unrestricted fishing in Gaza's territorial waters¹.

While the final results of the Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFsec) in the West Bank are diverse and multifaceted indicating a more diverse and fragmented environment, findings from the Gaza Strip show that the majority of households are characterized by high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The disaggregation of data by social categories therefore shows that households have generally been hit by the same shocks. Over three quarters of the population is food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity which means the large majority of the population is widening its consumption gap, over-stretching its coping mechanisms and relies heavily on aid subsidies to sustain its level of food security. The evidence shows that the population is being sustained at the most basic or minimum humanitarian standard. The protracted closure since June 2007 provides actors with limited scope for improving employment, livelihood sustainability and, as a consequence, food security in the Gaza Strip. Despite the high coverage of assistance in the Gaza Strip which enables an acceptable level of food consumption for most of the population, the prevalence of food insecurity remains high due to widespread absolute poverty and lack of purchasing power to buy food and cover other essential needs.

1. Socio-economic factors: prices, employment and income

- Tightened security restrictions and the recent military offensive in Gaza have affected the supplies of food commodities causing fluctuations in food prices. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the Gaza Strip increased by 1.6 percent over the 1st half of 2009.
- Average daily wages have not increased parallel to consumer prices which has implications on Palestinian's purchasing power and their living standards. Nominal daily wages in the Gaza Strip in the first two quarters of 2009 have increased by 6.7 percent however; in real terms, wages have decreased over the same period by 5 percent.
- Climatic circumstances particularly low rain precipitation, irregular distribution of rain water and rainfall delay has reduced the recharge rate of the Gaza aquifer. The over-extraction of the Gaza aquifer has also resulted in the intrusion of sea-water. This is further compounded by sewage leaking into the ground water affecting the availability of safe drinking water and agricultural productivity.
- Unemployment in Gaza has increased by 15.1 percent between the first and second half of 2008, it slightly stabilized in the first two quarters of 2009 but at a very high level (around 36%) and significantly differs between governorates. In the second quarter of 2009, the highest level of unemployment was recorded in Khan Yunis, at 44.1 percent. The lowest level of unemployment rate recorded in the second quarter of 2009 was in Gaza City at 31.6 percent.

2. Food Security

- Food security exists when all people, at all time, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food insecurity exists when this access is jeopardized. Food insecurity in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip is a result of food price inflation, livelihoods deterioration/destruction and erosion of coping mechanisms. In the Gaza Strip, import and export restrictions, and increased restricted access to agricultural and fishing areas further undermine the food system, artificially sustained by large scale food assistance.
- Overall, food insecurity affects 60.5 percent of households in the Gaza Strip while an additional 16.2 percent are considered vulnerable to food insecurity. Only 23% of total households in the Gaza Strip are considered marginally secure and food secure.
- In contrast to the West Bank, food insecurity in the Gaza Strip is more prevalent amongst the non refugee population (64.2%) compared to the refugee population (58.1%). Further, there is a higher prevalence of food insecurity level amongst households in rural areas at 67 percent compared to households in refugee camps at 62 percent and urban households at 60 percent. This data has to take into consideration the distribution of population within the rural, urban and refugee camps which is further detailed in chapter four.
- Rafah is the governorate most affected by food insecurity, with 66 percent of total Rafah households suffering from food insecurity. This is followed by the governorate of Gaza at 63 percent and Khan Yunis at 62 percent.
- A total of 9 percent of households in the Gaza Strip are headed by females. Of those, 68 percent are suffering from food insecurity. This is compared to 91 percent of

male headed households of which 60 percent are food insecure.

- Similar to findings in the West Bank, households with a high proportion of female and child members tend to be more likely to fall under the category of food insecure.
- The Gaza average dependency ratio is 7.2 members in a family relying on one breadwinner. The average dependency ratio for food insecure households is 9.46 members relying on one breadwinner.²
- In Gaza, an average household spends 56 cents of every US dollar earned on food.³ Food insecure households spend 58 cents of every dollar.

3. Livelihoods and Access to Food

- According to the broad definition of employment, 36 percent of heads of food insecure households are unemployed. While unemployment is clearly a factor contributing to food insecurity, the fact that 64 percent of household heads in food insecure families are in jobs shows that in many cases low and/or unsteady salaries are one of the causes of high food insecurity prevalence.
- The private sector represents the highest source of employment for food insecure households. A total 69% of food insecure households are employed in the private sector.
- Government wages and salaries represent the highest source of stable and reliable income for the majority of households.
- Irregular wage work and self employment represents the highest source of households that are food insecure at 38 percent and 21 percent respectively. Regular wage work represents the highest source of income of food secure households but also the second highest source for those who are food insecure. This means that the type of employment, salary scale and reliability of income is a prerequisite for household food security.
- In most cases, food insecure households are employed in elementary occupations (35 percent) and crafts (15 percent). A high percentage of the food secure and marginally secure households are employed in services and sales. This sector employs 43 percent of the food secure and 48 percent of marginally secure households. The second highest type of employment for food secure and the marginally secure are as specialists (30 percent of food secure and 22 percent of marginally secure households).

4. Impact of War on Livelihoods, Food Security and Coping Mechanisms

- 26 percent of food insecure households followed by 14 percent of marginally secure reported that their income decreased after the war. The majority of surveyed households reported that their income remained unaffected by the war. The low impact of the war on income is likely a result of a lift in the restriction on basic humanitarian assistance allowed into Gaza resulting in an effective food aid and cash aid distribution⁴.
- Household overall expenditure patterns show that 20 percent of the food insecure followed by 7 percent of the marginally secure, 5 percent of the vulnerable and 3 percent of the food secure reported a decrease in monthly expenditures after the war. These figures are signalling that households' expenditure gap is not being fully met by assistance and is actually widening despite the coverage of assistance, due to increased food prices and the persistent lack of income-earning opportunities.
- Across the food security groups that reported a decrease in income after the war, the majority of those households agree that the decreased income was resulting from the loss of wage income as a direct impact of the Cast Lead Operation and 28 month of blockade.
- The highest reported loss in source of income for food insecure after the war is within the private sector falling from 30 percent to 25.7 percent. At the same time, the highest reported increase in the source of income is on humanitarian aid from 69 percent to 73.2 percent.
- The majority of food security groups who reported a decrease in expenditure agree that the decrease was on food expenditures. These are 96 percent of the food insecure, 85 percent of the vulnerable, 92 percent of the marginally secure and 75 percent of the food secure.
- Out of the total number of households reporting a decrease in expenditures on food, 59 percent of food insecure households are reducing the quantity of food they purchase while 94 percent of food insecure households are reducing the quality⁵. 58 percent of the food insecure households are reducing both the quantity and quality of purchased food.
- Additionally, a total of 53 percent of the households surveyed are purchasing food on credit. Seven percent of the food insecure reported that they increased purchasing food on credit. This is followed by 6 percent of the marginally secure, 5 percent of the vulnerable and 4 percent of those who are food secure.

5. Humanitarian Response

- Seventy-one percent of the total population in the Gaza Strip indicated receiving assistance with the remaining 29 percent not receiving assistance.
- Out of those populations who receive assistance 66 percent of them are receiving one type of assistance while 34 percent of them are receiving two or more types of assistance.
- 92.3 percent of households who receive one type of assistance are receiving food assistance while 3.2 percent are receiving cash and another 3.2 percent are receiving medicine.
- Among households who received two types of assistance, 98 percent of them received food and 2 percent receive cash as the first type of assistance. As the second type of assistance, 66 percent receive cash assistance and 25 percent receive medicine.
- Generally, assistance is well targeted, reaching a total of 84 percent of the food insecure households in the Gaza Strip.
- In the aftermath of the war 53 percent of food insecure households received one kind of assistance, 23 percent received 2 types of assistance, and 8 percent received 3 or more types of assistance. 43 percent of the vulnerable families received one type of assistance, 10 percent received two types of assistance and 5 percent received three or more types of assistance.

- This is in comparison to the food secure groups in which 35 percent received one type of assistance, 9 percent of them received two types of assistance and 2 percent received three or more types of assistance. During the same period, among the households marginally food secure 36 percent received one type of assistance, 10 percent received 2 kinds of assistance and 4 percent received three or more types of assistance.
- The survey results show that there is an under coverage of 16 percent of the food insecure households who do not receive any assistance and a leakage of 8 percent of the food secure who are receiving assistance. While food secure households may be in need of other types of assistance, the data shows that some of them are receiving food parcels.
- Findings show that 26 percent of food insecure non refugee households compared to 9 percent of food insecure refugee households did not receive any assistance. Further findings show that 5 percent of food secure non refugee households compared to 10 percent of the food secure refugee households received assistance. These figures may indicate a level of mistargetting of assistance or a result of a lift in households' food security levels thanks to the assistance received.

6. Recommendations for action

- This survey indicates that food insecurity within the Gaza Strip remains high. The impacts of the war has added additional strain to a 28 month blockade in which livelihoods are further deteriorating while the food insecurity levels have remained the same. Greater efforts are thus needed to lift the blockade and create long term sustainable solutions in order to prevent further economic deterioration causing the erosion of livelihoods as a result of the lack of employment opportunities within the Gaza Strip.
- Until economic growth, stability, a decrease in poverty levels have been achieved within the Gaza Strip food and cash distributions remain essential in the short term to assist households experiencing hardships. It is also important that all households facing deep poverty levels are properly targeted. In addition, the vulnerable, representing 16 percent of all households, and marginally secure, representing 6 percent of all households, should receive adequate assistance to avoid further decline towards food insecurity.
- Evidence show that higher food insecurity levels exist among the non-refugee population (compared to the refugee population) and among female headed households (compared to male headed households) and families with a high ratio of children or dependent adults. Food and cash assistance must therefore ensure targeting of hardship cases of all social categories keeping in mind the gender dimension within all humanitarian responses. Aid should ensure equal access to humanitarian assistance to those social categories identified as most vulnerable while at the same time ensuring the different needs are addressed, including for example support of agricultural inputs to farmers whose assets were damaged during the war and the removal of access restrictions on the number of nautical miles for fishermen.
- Considering the high level of food insecurity and with the declining quality of foods purchased, continued support for the local production of fresh foods (vegetables, fruits, poultry, meat and fish) for local consumption is required. Support for poor to poor programmes is important in tackling the prevalence of food insecurity and in supporting the social or kinship networks within the Gaza Strip which play a key role in the inter-household redistribution of income and aid.
- As aforementioned, national government salaries being the important source of reliable income for households requires a steady pipeline of funds for PA salaries to sustain households who rely on those regular incomes to prevent them from falling deeper into poverty.
- Furthermore, a steady pipeline of funds for both food and cash assistance but also one that ensures a package of assistance that would lift people out of their food insecurity levels is highly important in positively impacting the conditions of households in Gaza. Interventions to support safety nets should be further expanded (e.g. urban voucher, school feeding programmes, cash handouts, and employment creation where possible, etc.).
- Addressing the aggregate consumption gap for all the food insecure and vulnerable populations but also reviewing the volume of assistance per household to meet all their needs, is of critical importance.
- Improved nutrition surveillance activities, including nutrition data analysis, are especially relevant given evidence of the decrease of food quality and quantity used as a negative coping mechanism by the food insecure and vulnerable population.
- There is a need to fine tune agency targeting mechanisms in order to prevent leakages in the aid distributed to meet the needs of all the population who rely on these packages and to sustain their consumption patterns, particularly those with a high ratio of child or dependent adult members.
- Support to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in monitoring the socio-economic and food security indicators is essential for adapting programme interventions to the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions impacting the living standards of Palestinian households and filling a critical information gap. In the next round, the same methodology should be used for both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Regular funding needs to be secured to ensure the situation is monitored systematically rather than a one-off survey, with the aim of institutionalizing the SEFSec within the regular Palestinian statistics information system.

End Notes

¹UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Locked in: the humanitarian impact of two years of blockade on the Gaza Strip, August 09.

² The dependency ratio is defined as the number of household members dependent on one breadwinner. Socio-Economic and Food Security Assessment in the Gaza Strip WFP/FAO November 2009

³ PCBS defines the worse-off households to be those with a food expenditure ratio exceeding 44 percent.

⁴ The definition of income in the SEFSec survey includes: revenue from wage employment, income from self-employment, private business and home production; rents from land, buildings, etc.; dividends; cash and in kind assistance; social security transfers; and remittances/help from friends and family living in Palestine or abroad.

⁵ Affected population are reducing the quality of the food buying frozen meat instead of fresh meat, wings instead of full chicken, decreasing their expenditure on fresh food.