



Executive Summary

This United Nations (UN) Common Country Analysis (CCA) examines the state of development in Palestine* as the Israeli occupation of its territory enters its 50th year. The report focuses on the most vulnerable groups in Palestine and seeks to identify the key drivers of their vulnerability and the challenges they face under Palestine's current development course. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, the report analyses why some groups in society are systematically more disadvantaged than others in accessing Palestine's development gains.

This report will serve as the analytical basis of the UN's development strategy for Palestine for the next five years, to be elaborated in the next United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the period 2018-2022. Its findings also bolster Palestine's historic accession to seven of the nine core human rights treaties during 2014, and respond to the Government's new National Policy Agenda, which seeks a more 'citizen-centric' development path.

The deliberate focus on systematic disadvantage and vulnerability in this analysis derives from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda imperative to leave no one behind on the path of progress.

Development under Occupation: The Inherent Vulnerability of All Palestinians

Any discussion of development in Palestine must start with the fact that the largest and most visible constraint on Palestinian development is the occupation. After nearly 50 years of occupation every Palestinian living in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is vulnerable to some degree. Though the occupation affects different groups of Palestinians in unique ways, for most Palestinians there is scarcely any sphere of life that the occupation does not touch.

Lifting the occupation is the single most important priority to enable Palestinians to chart a successful course to the SDGs. Development actors need to be conscious about the limits on both Palestine's development prospects and the impact of donors' development investments in a country under occupation, where the government has highly restricted control over the levers of development. As long as it remains the occupying power, the ultimate accountability for Palestine's ability or failure to reach the global goals articulated in the 2030 Agenda remains largely with the Government of Israel.

The occupation impacts the movement of people and goods, fragments the territory geographically and socio-politically, stunts economic growth, and restricts Palestinian use of critical resources such as land, water and minerals. With the very same instruments, it hinders policymaking, governance and service delivery by the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Restrictions on Movement: Israeli restrictions on the movement of people, both Palestinian and international, have far-reaching consequences for both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Restrictions are implemented through a complex system of checkpoints, permits, military roadblocks, settlements, a bypass road system, parallel legal regimes and the Barrier.¹ Such restrictions have fragmented the Palestinian landscape. They have created isolated communities, undermined social cohesion, ruptured a common identity and reduced economic activity within and among the fractured Palestinian populations of the territory. The Barrier not only separates West Bank Palestinians from Israelis but also Palestinians from each other.

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Stunted Economy: Restrictions on economic and productive activities, including restrictions on movement of goods, severely impair the Palestinian economy and its potential for growth. The ability of the private sector to function, let alone thrive and generate employment, is limited.² Frequent military assaults on Gaza have crippled its economy, while the closure has prevented reconstruction and magnified the effect of shocks. As a result, the Palestinian economy remains highly dependent on its public sector, which in turn is highly dependent on external budgetary support.

Trade barriers have been in place since Israel imposed its external trade and fiscal regime on the oPt in 1967. The flow of Palestinian labour and goods to Israel was allowed under non-reciprocal restrictions and imports to the oPt were subjected to Israeli tariff structures and quotas. Palestinian producers became increasingly cut off from their traditional trading partners and had to reorient trade towards the Israeli economy. Over time, Palestinian exporters lost much of their competitive edge while Israeli products enjoyed unhindered access to Palestinian markets.³

From 2000-2015, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been volatile and structurally unbalanced in favour of sectors not exposed to foreign competition. Total GDP grew on average by over 3%⁴, but agriculture—the main sector exposed to foreign competition and a key driver of inclusive growth—contracted.⁵

Inequitable Access to Resources: Both horizontal (land area) and vertical (intensification) expansion of the agriculture sector have been restricted for decades.⁶ Horizontal expansion is limited by restrictions on essential land and water resources. Vertical expansion of agriculture is limited by lack of access to markets, high costs of production and lack of access to pesticides and equipment, and in Gaza, restrictions associated with the closure. Constraints on trade have deprived the agriculture sector of low-cost inputs and markets for its products. Bans by Israel on the import of items deemed 'dual use', such as fertilizers, reduce productivity and profitability of Palestinian farming.

The industrial sector is also profoundly affected by limits on land availability and by limited opportunities for quarrying and mining of minerals. Israeli settlements, military zones, nature reserves, and the Barrier make up 70% of Area C (or about 44% of the overall West Bank). The remaining 30% is heavily restricted for construction; Palestinians can build on less than 1% of the land.⁷ Some 40% of area C is private Palestinian land on which settlements are built.⁸ The construction industry in the West Bank is constrained by so-called 'zoning rules' imposed by the Israeli authorities.

Palestinians face major water shortages in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel controls all shared surface and ground water resources and utilizes 85%, leaving only 15% for Palestinian use.⁹ Restrictions related to water affect the livelihoods of communities, deepening poverty levels and further increasing vulnerability.

Policy-making constraints: Palestinian attempts to overcome these numerous hurdles to development are likewise circumscribed by the occupation. In 2011, the World Bank stated that "the PA has continued to strengthen its institutions, delivering public services and promoting reforms that many existing states struggle with. Significant reforms still lie ahead for the PA—but no more than those facing other middle income countries".¹⁰ Nevertheless, the PA to this day has limited space for policy development and implementation, restricting its ability to deliver on its obligations as a duty bearer to its people. In the process, the most vulnerable and structurally disadvantaged groups—the ones that most need government support—are those that suffer the most.

The Palestinian government has no control over its borders—land, air or sea—or of its customs revenues. It does not have its own currency or authority to print money. It lacks access and policy prerogative over Area C. It lacks influence over Gaza, due to territorial fragmentation and internal Palestinian division that prevents the operationalization of a government of national consensus in all of oPt. The PA's fiscal space is restricted. A major part of the PA's revenue (60%-70%) comes from the clearance revenues system in which all taxes and revenues due at borders, seaports and by air on Palestinian goods and services are collected by the Israeli fiscal authorities on behalf of the PA in return for a 3% administrative charge to Israel.¹¹

The PA also has limited space for the development of effective local government and local development policies. Israel's planning regime in Area C and East Jerusalem is discriminatory and restrictive. It is not designed for the benefit of the protected population. Palestinian local governance and service delivery is limited by increasing territorial fragmentation. Freedom of movement and lack of jurisdiction in large parts of the oPt for example hamper rule of law, maintenance of security, and the delivery of justice services by the Palestinian state. Palestine's control over its development prospects remains highly circumscribed. A government that does not control its borders, its revenue, and its monetary policy and cannot access much of its natural resources is embarking on the 2030 Agenda with an overwhelming handicap.

Who is Left Behind? Vulnerability and Disadvantage in Palestine

While all Palestinians are vulnerable on account of the occupation, some appear to be perpetually more vulnerable, and systematically at a greater disadvantage, than others. A set of 20 disadvantaged or vulnerable groups was identified to inform an analysis of what are the key drivers of vulnerability in the country.

These groups are: adolescent girls; women exposed to gender-based violence (GBV); food-insecure households headed by women; children facing obstacles in accessing schools; children in the labour force; children subject to violence; out-of-school children; youth; the elderly; communities in Area C; Bedouins and herder communities living in Area C; Gaza residents without access to clean water or sanitation; Hebron H2 residents; persons living in the Seam Zone¹²; persons with disabilities; individuals in need of urgent medical referrals; refugees living in abject poverty; refugees residing in camps; small-scale farmers, non-Bedouin herders, fisher folk, and the working poor.

These marginalized groups were found to be most impacted by one or more of the following five structural drivers of disadvantage and vulnerability in the Palestinian context: location (or place of residence), exposure to violence, economic factors, institutional and political factors, and socio-cultural norms. This report calls for concerted efforts by policy makers and development partners around these five structural challenges.

Locational Drivers of Vulnerability

Where people live within the oPt is central to understanding their vulnerability and disadvantage. Location determines who has jurisdiction over delivery of basic services, who the duty bearers are, and the quality of service delivery.

Area C¹³ covers approximately 60% of the West Bank, and is the site of Israeli settlements and other land set aside solely for Israeli use. Bedouin and herder populations living in Area C¹⁴ are often at risk of forced displacement by the Israeli authorities and face persistent restrictions on their movement and access to resources and services. Bedouin, small-scale farmers and livestock herders living in Area C have limited access to markets and inputs, including land, and water for animal husbandry and irrigation.¹⁵ Planning and zoning restrictions in Area C make it difficult for Palestinians to build homes, businesses or other critical infrastructure such as water, sewage or power networks. If they build without a permit, residents risk the structure's demolition.

In Hebron H2, over 120 physical obstacles, including 18 permanently-staffed checkpoints established by the Israeli military segregate the restricted areas from the rest of the city.

¹⁵ Palestinians living in the restricted areas of Hebron H2 face serious challenges in accessing water and sanitation facilities and services. Children and teachers' ability to reach schools in the Old City is hampered by checkpoints and settler harassment. Businesses are often shuttered, lacking clientele.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinian residents are deemed 'permanent residents' of Israel. Since 1967, on average six Palestinians per week have had their residency rights revoked, meaning they can no longer live or work in the city, or access public services.¹⁶ Poverty rates are high in East Jerusalem with 83.9% of Palestinian children living below the Israeli-defined poverty line.¹⁷ Most Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem suffer from high density, poor living standards, deteriorating housing, and inadequate public facilities and services. There is a chronic shortage of classrooms. School dropout rates are much higher here than in the rest of the oPt.¹⁸

The Seam Zone refers to the area between the Barrier and the 1949 Armistice (Green Line), excluding East Jerusalem, which has been declared a 'closed military area' by the Israeli army and is cut off from the rest of the West Bank. Most Seam Zone communities lack basic health, education and other services, with residents having to pass through a checkpoint to reach agricultural land, workplaces and essential services, and to maintain social relations with family and friends on the 'Palestinian side' of the Barrier. Residents with Jerusalem IDs have to pay municipal taxes but do not get services of the municipality.

Finally, Gaza, home to 1.9 million people, has witnessed a dramatic process of de-development, due to recurring cycles of violence, demographic pressures, and the closure imposed by Israel. Physical destruction during successive rounds of hostilities has impacted all aspects of personal, public and economic life. Over 60% of the housing stock incurred significant damage as did service infrastructure (including water, energy, health, and education facilities and government buildings) and private sector facilities and assets during the 2014 hostilities. The effects of this most recent escalation were estimated at \$1.4 billion in damages and \$1.7 billion in economic losses.¹⁹ The land, sea and air closure imposed by Israel since 2007 severely restricts the movement of people and goods into and out of the Strip, with all of the resulting effects of isolation on employment, education, healthcare, commerce and social ties. The on-going division between Fatah and Hamas also compounds the impact of the closure on Gaza's population.

Violence as a Driver of Vulnerability

Pervasive violence, which causes physical harm and limits daily options in the oPt, is a key driver of vulnerability. For 18 of the 20 disadvantaged groups analysed for this report, both political violence and social violence constrain possibilities and potential. The average Palestinian may experience, witness, and engage in violence in the public sphere, at home, at the workplace or school, and within the community. The counterparties are agents of the Israeli and Palestinian states, as well as other individuals. As noted below, violence is layered

with location and other drivers of vulnerability, compounding the crisis for those most in need.

Both Israeli and Palestinian security forces engage in violence against Palestinians. Violence at checkpoints, clashes, search and arrest operations, detentions, demolitions, evictions, and forced displacement are among the chronic forms of violence experienced primarily in Area C, East Jerusalem and Hebron H2.

In addition, there have been three escalations of hostilities, regular ground incursions and airstrikes in Gaza since 2007, resulting in widespread death, trauma, disability and destruction. Accountability for violations of international law by both Israeli and Palestinian actors during these escalations remains elusive.

Palestinian refugees who reside in the West Bank refugee camps are particularly vulnerable to Israeli armed forces violence during clashes and search operations. Male youth are more likely to be targets of search and arrest operations and harassment at checkpoints, as well as participants in clashes. In 2015, over 1,000 Palestinian children were arrested by Israeli forces and prosecuted before military courts on security-related charges. Children detained by the Israeli military are often denied their rights.

Palestinian security forces and authorities are also generally not held to account for violations of international law,²⁰ despite concerns over the detention and torture of political prisoners in Palestinian jails and the use of force and violence by Palestinian security forces.²¹ The spread of incitement to violence on social media has gained momentum since October 2015, and is particularly affecting youth.

Attacks by Palestinian civilians against Israeli security forces and civilians have negatively impacted the security atmosphere in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, particularly since the last quarter of 2015. The attacks were not coordinated and were carried out by individuals, presenting a disturbing trend where young men and women, in some cases boys and girls, many without prior history of politicization, engaged in attacks knowing that death was almost inevitable.

Settler violence has a direct impact on nine out of the 20 vulnerable groups reviewed for this report.²² These are individuals who live or work in Area C, especially Bedouin and herder communities and small-scale farmers and non-Bedouin herders, people living in the Seam Zone, Hebron's H2 area and Old City of Jerusalem, children facing obstacles in accessing schools or exposed to violence, adolescent girls and youth.

GBV is a key protection concern in the oPt, with women being particularly vulnerable. Limited support services are available and these existing services are highly inaccessible to women due to long distances, mobility restrictions, and fragmentation of areas and services. Six of the 20 analysed vulnerable groups, specifically women exposed to GBV, children, adolescent girls, youth, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, are highly vulnerable to domestic violence.²³ They are also vulnerable to other types of social violence.

Economic Drivers of Vulnerability

Poverty, inequality of economic opportunity and high dependency rates, exacerbated by limited employment opportunities as well as increasing environmental constraints on livelihoods, are some of the key economic drivers of vulnerability in Palestine. Economic factors appear to contribute to disadvantage and vulnerability among at least 17 of the 20 groups analysed.

Some 25.8% of Palestinians are poor.^{24, 25} Some 12.9% of Palestinians (7.8% of those in the West Bank and 21.1% of those in Gaza) are living in "deep poverty".²⁶ Poverty also increases risk of human rights violations. For instance, the poor with disabilities and the elderly poor are less likely to be able to afford care and support than their more affluent counterparts. Poverty and inequity of income distribution is associated with inequities in reproductive choices as well. The total fertility rate for the poorest quintile of Palestinians is five, while it is 3.3 for the richest quintile.²⁷ Lack of sufficient income and assets also reduces an individual's ability to cope with shocks.

Inequality of opportunity manifests in unequal access to productive resources and assets, unequal access to decent employment, and an unequal burden of unpaid work. Women are among those most affected by the unequal burden of unpaid work, even without including care work undertaken at home — usually by women and girls. Additionally, women are the dominant unpaid agricultural labour force. Still, women and female-headed households are often deprived of assets due to discriminatory inheritance laws. And lack of access to productive assets like livestock and agricultural land impacts women's economic self-sufficiency and food security. Less access to assets, and hence collateral, also translates into fewer formal sources of credit.

Unemployment is a major driver of vulnerability for youth. Unequal access to decent work is often associated with unequal access to the right networks and/or affiliation with political parties. Young women are more affected by this than young men.

A high dependency ratio in Palestine²⁸ together with very high unemployment creates vulnerability. The dependency ratio in Palestine (74.8%) has been declining over time,²⁹ but is still high compared to other Arab countries.

Environmental threats are also undermining Palestine's economic potential and affecting different parts of the population to varying degrees. Those who engage in climate-dependent livelihoods (agriculture, fishing, herding) and manual labour, for example, are being undermined by environmental threats, including global warming.

Institutional and Political Drivers of Vulnerability

Poverty is layered with geographical and political marginalization to compound these groups' vulnerability. In turn, patterns of vulnerability and disadvantage in Palestine appear to reflect the precedence of some groups over others when creating policy and law.

It is important to view the institutional and political drivers of vulnerability of affected groups in the context of the limits that the occupation places on the Palestinian government's policy space.

The PA does not have effective access to East Jerusalem and the Seam Zone. It has very little operating space to provide basic services in Area C and Hebron H2 or to impose law and order in Area B where Israel is still responsible for security and order. The government is highly dependent on direct budgetary support from international donors which declined by a third between 2014 and 2015³⁰. Constrained fiscal space including Israel's control of clearance revenues also restricts the Palestinian government's ability to deliver as a duty-bearer. However, these factors do not fully explain how and why some groups appear to receive less policy support than others. Many of the 20 vulnerable groups, for instance, have less access to basic public services than do others.

Two sets of gaps in service provision in the oPt stand out. First, some groups have inadequate access to quality education and healthcare. Further, groups like the elderly and persons with disabilities have additional special needs that are inadequately met. When their needs are not met, they are at an additional disadvantage vis-à-vis the rest of the population. Second, there is a lack of services that enable and empower groups such as youth or small-scale farmers to seize economic opportunities and thereby become drivers of change for themselves and for the rest of society.

The Palestinian Basic Law recognizes that "Palestinians are equal before the law and that there should be no discrimination because of ethnicity, sex, colour, religion, political opinion or disability".³¹ However, some groups—especially women—feel the negative effects of discriminatory laws that prevent them from exercising their human rights and fulfilling their potential.

Institutional and policy-making gaps tend to reflect lack of influence within the existing socio-political system. Two elements of that lack of influence are lack of voice and participation, and the limits to free media, freedom of speech and access to information in the oPt.³² National-level elections have not taken place in Palestine in a decade. With the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) suspended, laws are passed by presidential decree or by limited members of the Hamas PLC Bloc in Gaza. The narrowing of parties involved in policymaking likely increases exclusion of those on the margins.

Another manifestation of institutional vulnerability is the absence of adequate data on specific groups. Up-to-date and periodic disaggregated data are lacking on out-of-school children, children in labour, persons living in the Seam Zone and Area C, and persons with disabilities, in particular.

Civil society provides external oversight to monitor government institutions. It also plays a key role in amplifying the voices of the voiceless. However, attempts by both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to impose greater control on civil society activities and funding streams affect their independence and their ability to advocate for human rights.³³

Sociocultural Drivers of Vulnerability

As in all societies, economic, institutional and political determinants of development in Palestine are also heavily influenced by sociocultural norms.³⁴ Some social norms and traditional values can have a positive impact on development and human rights. Others have been used to justify gender-based inequalities, discrimination and violence.³⁵

Palestinian society is predominantly patriarchal.³⁶ Patriarchal norms lead to asymmetrical gender roles. While women are more directly affected than men, the culture of dominance favours the able over the disabled, the physically strong over the weak, and the mainstream over the marginal. This engenders models of masculinity that contribute to male-on-male violence and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Adolescent girls and women of reproductive age are among the first victims of gender discrimination rooted in patriarchal norms. These norms are among the key drivers of Palestine's high fertility rates, of women being the primary caregivers in families, of the vast majority of unpaid work devolving upon women by default. Traditional attitudes and behaviours that focus on the reproductive role of women also contribute to early marriage, and often early childbearing. Persons with disabilities, especially those with mental disabilities are more vulnerable than other groups to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, on account of discrimination, isolation, and exclusion from mainstream processes.

The Palestinian Labour Law does not prohibit discrimination in pay or promotion. It makes no reference to harassment in the workplace. It also prevents women from working in a number of occupations defined as hazardous or hard work, where exceptions can be made if the employer provides safety guarantees. The delay in amending such laws impacts women's private lives as well as their freedom to participate in public spaces.

Patriarchal attitudes and practices that condone unequal power relations between men and women often enable and condone acts of violence.³⁷ Such norms contribute to the notion of domestic issues being a private family matter, resulting in a widespread acceptance of intimate partner violence. The same mindset is among the main drivers of the blame, stigmatization, social exclusion and reprisals towards women subjected to GBV. This is not unique to Palestine but is observed in patterns of femicide and GBV worldwide.

Leaving No One Behind—What Will it Take?

Seven key imperatives have been identified to translate these findings into action, a process that will intensify with the elaboration of the forthcoming UN DAF.

Closing data gaps: Almost all groups that are falling behind are less visible in the statistics, thus difficult to track, rendered less visible to policymakers, and often assigned lower priority than others when resources are limited. Upgrading the current data sets to catch and track these trailing groups will require considerable investment and coordination.

Opening up to new voices and new partners: How do these vulnerable or disadvantaged groups participate in our development processes? For the UN DAF, the aid community and government will need to 'walk the talk' and open itself up to a greater cross-section of voices from Palestinian society.

Investing in integrated cross-sectoral planning processes: The analysis clearly shows that multiple drivers of vulnerability often affect the same vulnerable group. The drivers themselves are inter-linked. For instance, several economic drivers of vulnerability derive directly from locational and institutional factors. Hence, the strategies to address the needs of the most vulnerable will require a much greater integration of efforts cutting across traditional sectors to address the multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

Factoring political realities into development interventions: While the State of Palestine has committed itself to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, the accountability to reach these goals is a shared one as long as Israel remains an occupying power. Israel's progress towards the SDGs will necessarily be measured by the progress of Palestinians as well. The SDGs' emphasis on equity, access, and justice will increase the scrutiny on Israeli policies in the oPt.

Countering fragmentation through development interventions: A geographically and politically fragmented Palestine requires a response from development partners

calibrated to that reality. Policies around the closure (Gaza) or annexation (East Jerusalem) or security (central Hebron) have created a patchwork of 'development micro-climates'. In the spirit of 'do no harm', development interventions must avoid creating or further entrenching fragmentation of the policy and development landscape of Palestine. The Government of Palestine needs to keep making policy for all Palestinians. Where donors or their implementing partners are delivering programmes to communities that the government has limited or no access to, there is an obligation to ensure that these efforts are aligned with government policies and coordinated with government programmes.

Bridging the development-humanitarian divide: The chronic and political nature of the protection crisis that drives Palestine's humanitarian need challenges any notion of the short-term nature of emergency response. A much closer collaboration between humanitarian actors and the government is necessary in such an environment. Humanitarian action in Palestine also extends to less traditional areas of intervention. A number of the vulnerable groups mentioned here are subjects of both humanitarian and development interventions. Both interventions run in parallel in Area C, the Seam Zone, and Gaza.

Towards a new UNDAF: The UN DG in Palestine will work to support the Government of Palestine in implementing the 2030 agenda with the SDGs at its core. It will also continue to advocate strongly for Israel to fulfill its obligations as the occupying power to ensure that all Palestinians can exercise their basic human rights, and partake in progress.

The UNDAF for 2018-2022 will align with the Palestinian government's development priorities for the next six years as outlined in its NPA, and will seek to complement its key sectoral strategies. The content of the UN programming under the UNDAF will be driven directly by the imperative to address the five drivers of vulnerability identified in this report. By placing its most vulnerable groups and the key drivers of their vulnerability at the core of its development planning, the UN DG in Palestine will seek to ensure that no one is indeed left behind.

End notes

*On the use of the terms "Palestine", "State of Palestine" and "occupied Palestinian territory, please refer to the Definition section.

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