

## 174th Session of the FAO Council

### **Item 5: The situation in Gaza related to food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**

Since the onset of the conflict between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) on 7 October 2023, the situation, particularly in Gaza, has led to a humanitarian and food security crisis. Over half of Gaza's population, totaling 2.1 million people, has been internally displaced, with the majority in urgent need of food assistance. Even before the current crisis, over 1.8 million Palestinians required food security and livelihood assistance, covering 53 percent of the population in Gaza and 11 percent in the West Bank.

The primary cause of food insecurity before 7 October was the lack of economic access to food due to high levels of poverty driven by unemployment. Significant transaction costs resulting from limitations under the occupation on movement, access, and trade pose immediate impediments to Palestinian economic growth, followed by energy and water insecurity.

Prolonged restrictions on access to the sea, land and markets for inputs and exports have adversely affected agricultural activities, deepening the vulnerability of agricultural livelihoods. In the West Bank, agriculture-dependent communities, particularly Bedouins and herders in Area C, have faced challenges accessing water, grazing land, and animal health services. In the Gaza Strip, up to 35 percent of agricultural land was inaccessible due to Israeli military restrictions, and access restrictions to fishing areas have undermined the fisheries sector.

While the OPT heavily depends on imports to meet domestic demand for agricultural products, particularly cereals and animal feed, it is largely self-sufficient in vegetables, grapes, figs, olive oil, meat, eggs and honey – fundamental elements of a healthy and diverse diet. Fishery production is also vital in Gaza and serves as a major source of nutritional diversity. Livestock accounts for 45 percent of the total agricultural value, with small-scale farmers, herders and fisherfolk being the primary agricultural producers.

Beyond the immediate impact on lives, displacement, production and the availability of food and fuel, the conflict will have long-lasting implications for food security, nutrition and agriculture. The long-term implications of the current conflict on agriculture, agricultural-based livelihoods and access to healthy diets will be far greater than in previous conflicts. While the extent of the damage is still unknown in Gaza, it is likely that most of the agricultural infrastructure, soil and land will be negatively affected, and the current stock of livestock will be decimated due to the inability to feed and water animals as well as emergency consumption. Reconstruction of the agricultural sector will require significant resources, and FAO stands ready to contribute with its technical expertise.

Agriculture plays a significant role in the Palestinian economy, contributing significantly to income, food security and job opportunities. Agricultural land in Gaza is concentrated in the eastern and southern peri-urban areas bordering Israel. In case of a land attack, crops are expected to be destroyed.

Protracted conflict and the current escalation in Gaza are expected to further erode the economic viability and long-term sustainability of various sectors, including agriculture, and exacerbate the already critical food insecurity levels. The limited availability of and constrained access to natural resources hamper domestic food production, leading to increased dependency on food imports, which are currently constrained. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, persistent violence, land loss, property destruction and restricted access to territory, natural resources, markets and essential services continue to undermine livelihoods.

For FAO's interventions, two operational scenarios need to be considered. The first involves assessing the support that can be obtained from Egypt in terms of logistics and procuring agriculture inputs. The second scenario pertains to logistics and fodder procurement through Israel when the borders are reopened.

Under the updated Humanitarian Flash Appeal, FAO requires USD 20 million to provide emergency assistance to 13 100 farmers and herders (70 660 people). FAO's priority interventions for Gaza include USD 4.7 million for the provision of animal fodder, water tanks and veterinary kits; USD 5.3 million for livestock restocking; and

USD 5 million for the provision of time-critical agricultural inputs. Moreover, FAO's appeal includes USD 5 million to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable farmers in the West Bank, affected by increasing hostilities and movement restrictions.

FAO Palestine will participate through the Food Security Cluster and in coordination with the entire Humanitarian System, implementing various assessments, including a Rapid Damage Assessment. FAO Palestine is gearing up to conduct a rapid assessment using geographic information system spatial data with the support of HQ, once a ceasefire is announced. The team is preparing an assessment via satellite imagery.

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