



CEMOFPSC

Seminar on humanitarian aid effectiveness: new humanitarian actors in in the Middle East

March 9th, 2016

Ambassadors Hall - Arab House

#CEMOFPSC_EFICACIA_AH

#CEMOFPSC_HA_EFFECTIVENESS



MINISTERIO
DE ASUNTOS EXTERIORES
Y DE COOPERACIÓN



Fundación
Promoción
Social de la
Cultura





New Humanitarian Actors

09/03/2016

MOHAMMED EL BAKRI

Director General at Union of Agricultural Work Committees
Palestinian Territories

General introduction

The conditions set after the last war against the Gaza Strip –the so-called “operation Protective Edge”– that took place during July and August 2014, have provided us with new challenges and difficult choices. Among them, the foremost challenge is the rehabilitation of the economy and the reconstruction of thousands of homes and structures totally or partially destroyed and also the need to provide livelihoods to the people affected by the war.

In this regard, we must understand the system of domination imposed on the Gaza Strip –which hosts 1,8 million within a surface of 360 km²– by the Israeli occupation, the dismantling of power relations, and control of all movement and access through the border crossings and areas of isolation. This affects the movement of goods, materials and tools that are required for the reconstruction in the short, medium and long terms, and this often depends on the overall developments and the effects of the political process and its tracks complex, generating frustration both internally and externally.

Within this context, we are trying to maximize the effectiveness of our lobbying and advocacy efforts both at regional and international level in order to modify those tracks and to serve the interests of the reconstruction and of the segments of the population most affected by the war, especially those that are still suffering from high levels of need and economic vulnerability of livelihoods.

Based on the data collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), we see that the ratio of workers in the West Bank at the end of the first semester of 2014 reached about 81% of the total workforce and the equivalent of 632.367

workers, with an unemployment rate of no more than 19% and the equivalent of 148.333 unemployed.

At the same time, the ratio of workers in the Gaza Strip before the beginning of the war in July 2014 presented a ratio of 67.4% and the equivalent of 274.720 workers, compared with the ratio 32.6% of unemployed and the equivalent of 132.876 unemployed until mid 2014.

In light of the results of the war on the Gaza Strip that started in the evening of 7 July 2014 and continued for 51 days until 28 August, we saw the total or partial destruction of more than 150 factories, the devastation of more than 200 agricultural facilities, the demolition of more than 10.000 houses and residential facilities, in addition to commercial shops and small workshops, which led to the paralysis of economic life turning the Gaza Strip into a disaster zone.

This led to an incremental rise of unemployment in the Gaza Strip since 1 September 2014 until the date of preparation of this paper of 50% of the total workforce which stood at approximately 427.000 workers, from which 213,500 unemployed are waiting for end the blockade and restore economic activity in all sectors of production and service related to the process of financial support for the reconstruction pledged.

Thus the existence of at least 213.500 unemployed in the Gaza Strip, and if we assume that each household is in charge of a minimum of four people, it means and refers to the fact that there are approximately 854.000 citizens (49%) of the total population who are suffering from poverty and food insecurity, that is, they live under the abject poverty level (less than 2\$/day), compared with about 700.000 people (40%) living at the poverty line. It must be also pointed out that 70% of the unemployed are young graduates from universities, colleges and junior colleges category and who are looking to secure livelihoods and a decent life style.

After this presentation of the general data regarding unemployment, I would like to focus specifically on Agriculture and Food Security:

1. Food security

It is indeed difficult to talk about the issue of Food Security in the Gaza Strip, without considering the conditions and challenges of the local and national agricultural sector dimensions related to the lack of territorial unity of the occupied Palestinian territories.

In this aspect, I have to refer to increase on the ratio of agricultural lands in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal in September 2005, when the agricultural area increased from 170.000 *dunums* to 192.000 *dunums* after the dismantling of all the Israeli settlements and military bases in the Gaza Strip. But despite of this

breadth in the agricultural area, in recent years we have witnessed a decline in the agricultural area for many reasons.

The most important of them are the rapid population growth (3.5%), the fragmentation of agricultural properties (1.3 *dunums* per farmer), the urban sprawl and increase the demand for the purchase of the lands for housing construction, and the actions undertaken by the Israeli army to establish the buffer zone along the Gaza Strip's border with Israel (about 17.000 *dunums*). All these reasons have led to a decline in the agricultural area, which amounted to less than 100.000 *dunums* nowadays, leading to a decline in the ratio of self-sufficiency in some agricultural products to about 50% in addition to the decline in livestock production.

In this light, it was necessary to the absence of the rural agricultural scene entirely in favor of a scene and pattern the agricultural urban and semi-urban deformed requires planning and a new strategic approach to what is known as “urban agricultural development approach”: a realistic strategy to adapt in the face of positive cases of exposure and lack of food security and enhance the strength system of the local market in a region of characterized by extended crisis as Gaza Strip.

If we take a look at the fishing sector, we see that there are about 3.600 fishermen and their respective families suffering from exposure and unprecedented damage in order to secure their livelihoods which become very difficult to achieve, where still stranded within the fishing area of not exceeding 3 nautical miles. Although the Oslo Agreements approved a fishing area of 20 nautical miles, the recent agreement reached after the last war pointed to just 6 miles expandable to 9 in some specific areas.

However, the reality imposed by the Israeli occupation is still far from all these obligations, worth noting that the annual production of the fisheries sector in Gaza is at the moment between 2.000 to 2.500 tons, while the actual annual need will of more than 8,000 tons per year. In the face of this complex situation a number of fishermen enable in cooperation with farmers to develop a positive adaptation strategy successful and encouraging to find alternatives for the production of fish out of the sea water through private aquaculture farming projects.

2. A snapshot of water and environmental conditions

Regarding the deteriorating water and environmental situation in the Gaza Strip, it was noted by several national and international reports on the subject of population growth during the last two decades and its impact on increasing water consumption rates of aquifer are so consumption ratio for domestic, agricultural, industrial and service purposes, etc. of about 160 million m³ annually, compared with 80 million meters³ fed into the aquifer from rainwater.

We have to take into account that the aquifer is our only natural source, which means that the Gaza Strip –according to the theory of communicating vessels– already floats on the groundwater tank of sea salt water and waste water by more than 90% of it, where it became the stock water at present are not suitable for human use, threatening to further aggravate the crisis and health risks and extend the economic, agricultural and environmental exposure areas.

In such a situation from scarcity of fresh drinking water, about 70% of the citizens of the Gaza Strip are forced to buy water for drinking and domestic use which led to the increase of family burdens for thousands of families in addition to the very poor families cannot buy fresh water and forced to use the available water.

In this context I would like to remind you that international standards emphasize the water poverty line is 500 cubic meters per person per year which means that 1.3 cubic meters per day. But unfortunately this standard is not fulfilled under the conditions of the Gaza Strip. At the same time I would like to highlight the importance of local community initiatives such as positive adjustment strategies of some rain water harvesting projects (from the roofs of greenhouses), grey water treatment and wastewater for agricultural uses.

Nevertheless, the problem of providing drinkable water remains a top priority: it requires accelerating the establishment of plants for seawater desalination to secure 80 million cubic meters per year, including fresh water consumption for the Gaza Strip's population.

3. Integrated intervention approach

This leads us to another challenge related to strategies to respond and to implementation of an intervention approach –both institutional and programmatic– expected towards all the relief, recovery and reconstruction operations.

An intervention approach that should be integrated, consisting of enhanced initiatives and strategies for positive adjustment created by the local community and its institutions for relief and development which it was sometimes as close to the development approach, based on strengthening the resilience and strength of factors in front of cases of exposure and severe crises especially in the creation of economic, social alternatives and volunteer activity cushions emerging under the blockade and during the recent war and beyond.

The residents of the Gaza Strip expect a different response and intervention approach this time. This new approach should be driven by a strategic development perspective and enhance the resilience and strength of factors and self-reliance and the resources available (the scarcity and difficulty availability) in times of crisis, either by the Israeli occupation or by natural catastrophe factors.

This new integrated approach should be based on the community's participatory development and on the respect for the previous experiences and build upon existing frameworks that should enable, and not cancel, the approach in which the first and last voice is given to the Palestinian citizen. A citizen that is dealt with neither as affected, poor and needy, nor awaiting aid consumables, unemployment projects and temporary relief.

The expectation of the affected citizens of the Gaza Strip and of Palestine in general consists of integrated programmatic interventions that are complementary to the local and institutional efforts based on the principles of institutional partnership and comprehensive development with Arab, regional and international institutions and which must respect and enhance the rights and dignity of the Palestinian rights and sovereignty over sources and resources, pressure and advocate to emancipate from the blockade imposed on us by the Israeli Government and, also since the military coup which took place in 2013, by the Egyptian Government as well.

In this respect we must remember one of the most important lessons that we have learnt in Gaza, which is to enable the Palestinian society under the blockade and the war to enhancing and rooting adaptation strategies and positive societal solidarity. One of these examples of the role played by home gardens to provide food security for many poor families.

A paradigmatic example of this took place when hundreds or even thousands of families opened their houses –as a spontaneous social movement– to host the thousands of homeless families on internal displaced persons (IDPs) during and after the war, taking care of most of their basic needs from food and drink and provided them financial and psychological support for free.

If we calculate the cost of the community solidarity efforts and the will of steadfastness and positive adaptation to the crisis, we can see how the Palestinian people, the local community and the national culture relate to the concept of social solidarity, required of us all are the work to strengthen and build on them which will contribute to reduce the risk at the time of crisis.

However with all objectivity, I would like to emphasize that any talk of decline in the ratio of self-reliance in enhancing and achieving food security in the Gaza Strip are not resolved except through economic integration in general and agriculture in particular between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank through the logic of State-building and geographical sovereignty from one hand and by emphasizing the need for an independent Palestinian State in accordance to the international legitimacy and UN resolutions on the pre-1967 borders and its capital in East Jerusalem.

On the other hand, the West Bank amounts a total area of 5.800 km² with about 1.6 million arable *dunums*, in addition to about one additional million *dunums* valid for

the pastoral agriculture that can cover our needs for meat and to support animal production and its byproducts.

The total of those spaces and in the case utilization and planning can cover the needs of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from the agricultural products. Also, those vast spaces alone can form an integrated food basket and provide sustainable safety net for the system of the Palestinian food security and sovereignty for the future.

4. Recommendations

After the previous description of the context we live in nowadays in the Gaza Strip –after three wars and several smaller military operations since the Israel withdrawal in September 2005 and the gradual imposition of the blockade since Hamas won the legislative elections in January 2006 and later on took over by force in June 2007– I would like to raise several recommendations:

- Accelerate the implementation of the plan for rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, taking into account the experience and expertise and local resources –socially and institutionally– particularly with regard to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of land and facilities and the agricultural livelihoods with its multiple aspects depending on the approach of “urban agriculture development” enhanced to immunity, continuing producers, manufacturers and the local markets in the framework of a Palestinian national comprehensive plan.
- Facilitate the capacity development for the actors and the local community and its institutions in the field of the development of value chains and enhancing the approach of making markets work better for the poor and the disadvantaged known as M4P.
- Interest the affected groups: their abilities, resources, experience and accumulated initiatives, and build upon without excluding them. This will contribute to enhance the societal and institutional ownership and responsibility in the reconstruction process.
- Necessity to take care of the institutions, international, regional and Arab donors which implement the projects and programs in order to build real development partnerships and enhance the local role, action, voice over the active participation in the planning and real operations and monitoring and evaluation of the overall projected interventions.
- Capacity building of the affected communities and local institutions in fields such as contingency planning for pre-crisis situations, risk reduction, crisis management and conflict resolution so they participate fully in the projects and programs of the expected interventions.
- Interest the sectors of small and micro-enterprise start-ups with more technical programs and incubators for innovation, as well as with initiatives for the young graduates of both sexes.

- Interest in filling the knowledge gaps and research among universities, research centers, various community and its institutions.
- Enhance, facilitate and support the role of the private sector institutions for financial support and the creation of mechanisms for communication and integration with the programs and projects of food security and sovereignty.
- Facilitate and encourage the introduction and development of initiatives and projects of modern agricultural technology to suit the agricultural and urban realities of Gaza in the fields of agricultural land use, diversification and profitability crops, agricultural alternatives, marketing, agro-processing, department of water and wastewater sources, development of agricultural extension system, quality control, agricultural production and environmental, search and urban agricultural education, energy and alternative energy sources, etc.
- Encourage and facilitate more networking and coordination initiatives in the field of exchange of experiences and cooperation through regional and global networks, forums and federations of agriculture and food security.
- Facilitate and support the establishment of the Palestinian National Sovereign Fund to alleviate crisis situations, whether natural or man-made.
- Facilitate and support initiatives and programs, lobbying, advocacy and protection –locally, regionally and internationally– of Palestinian rights regarding the right to access natural resources at the buffer zones and the right to use it in order to serve and enhance the orientations of the Palestinian food security and create more real economic and employment opportunities, especially for the young men and women of the Gaza Strip.
- Strengthen the role of women –as farmers as well as producers– putting them at the heart of the system of programs and projects for food security with need to recognize the great role performed by women in the agricultural and food security activities in the farms, and also in the home and family environment. At the end of the day, women have been able to bear the large share of the burden and of the suffering, during and after the Palestinian agricultural production processes by more than 50%, especially in protracted crisis conditions.