The Pauperization of Palestinian Women, Men and Children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

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This paper views poverty as a feature of socio-economic, political and cultural processes that generate different forms of inequality, including gender and generational inequalities. The focus is exclusively on impoverishment among Palestinians in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) while continuing to be strongly aware that poverty need to be mapped and analyzed among the other Palestinian communities; i.e., within the Green Line, and in the diaspora or al-shatat. Israeli colonial settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) whose numbers exceeded half a million by the end of 2008 do not feature in the Palestinian poverty map. The causes of the sharp rise of poverty in the last decade in the WBGS are explored.

Mapping impoverishment in the WBGS

The first comprehensive survey of poverty in the WBGS was published in 1998. It relied mainly on an analysis of a survey of household consumption and expenditure. Using the same methodology the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) published a national poverty report for 2006: other reports on poverty in WBGS have been issued by the World Bank, UNDP, and UNRWA among others.

Comparing data on poverty before and after the second intifada reveals the following features of poverty in the WBGS in the last decade:

1. There has been a substantive increase in the incidence of impoverishment

The poor (i.e., those living under the national poverty line) formed, in 1998, a fifth (20%) of the total households in the WBGS, while in 2006 they formed 30.8% of total households. Before the eruption of second intifada, there was a relative decline in the incidence of poverty corresponding to a decline in unemployment rates resulting from a relative ease of Israeli closures, and in response to the generation of new employment opportunities in the Palestinian labour market, particularly in the government sector, and to a lesser degree in the private and NGOs sectors. This was accompanied by a tangible increase in the average daily wage at the time. The eruption of the second intifada, following the failure of final status Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in July 2000 was met with ruthless Israeli repressive measures which included constricting the employment of Palestinian labour from WBGS within the Green Line, the imposition of curfews, closures, erecting hundreds of military checkpoints with the aim of restricting the movement of people and goods, and the
construction of the Segregation Wall. Unemployment consequently rose among Palestinian in the WBGS rose from 11.8% in 1999 to 31.3% in 2002, and 22.2% (15.9% in the WB and 36.0% in GS) in the 2nd quarter of 2009.

The poverty and unemployment gaps widened between the WB and GS as a result of the blockade imposed on the latter. Unemployment in GS reached the highest in world in the fourth quarter of 2008, more than double the rate in the WB (44.8% in GS, and 19.8% in WB).\(^7\) A United Nations’ report in 2002 concluded that a total economic collapse in WBGS has been averted only by the continued injection of budgetary support from international donors, the release of some of the PA revenues withheld by Israel, and by humanitarian aid.\(^8\) A similar conclusion that foreign aid has prevented the Palestinian economy from total collapse was reached in the summer of 2009 by UNCTAD.\(^9\) In 2008, foreign aid represented a third of GDP, at a time when GDP per capita in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was 30 percent lower than 1999 figures.\(^10\)

**Inequality also rises**

PCBS’s data confirms a widening of inequality between the richest and the poorest in the WBGS. In 2007, the poorest 10% of the population in the WBGS consumed 3.4% of the total monthly household consumption compared to 4.4% in 2006. The richest 10% households consumed 26.6% of total monthly consumption in 2007 compared to 20.7% in 2006. In the WB the increase was from 21.6% in 2006 to 25.8% in 2007, and in GS it jumped from 17.2% in 2006 to 31.8% in 2007. In other words the richest 10% of households in the WBGS consumed in 2007 eight times more than the poorest 10% of the households.\(^11\)

**2. The territorialisation of impoverishment**

There is a distinct uneven territorial distribution of poverty which presents itself in the following ways:

**Poverty incidence in GS is significantly higher than in WB, and poverty is unevenly distributed within the two regions:** Significant differences in the incidence of poverty exist, by region and type of locality. Impoverishment is much more widespread in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. In 2006, the incidence was 24% in the WB compared 50.7% in GS, and deep poverty stood at 13% in the WB compared to 34.8% in the GS.\(^12\) Factors accounting for this wide disparity are: the absence of economic (and territorial) integration between the two regions, the weaker economy of the GS in comparison with the WB,\(^13\) the higher percentage of refugees in the Strip, the extremely high population density in the GS, and the brutal blockade imposed on GS by Israel and the international community.

Variations in poverty incidence are also found at the sub-region level within the two areas: In 1988, the West Bank poverty incidence increased as one moved away from the central districts (Jerusalem\(^14\) and Ramallah) to both the north and the south of the West Bank.\(^15\) In the Gaza Strip the incidence of poverty increased as one moved from the north to the south.\(^16\)
In 2005 variations in the poverty incidence (measured by actual consumption of the household) within the sub-regions of the WB were extensive; 22.5% in northern WB compare to 34.9% in southern WB and 11.0% in the centre. Significant variation in the incidence of poverty existed also within each governorate.

The incidence of poverty in the WB decreased, in 2007, by 13.2% whereas it increased by 8.1% in the Gaza Strip. This increase in poverty gap between the WB and GS (19.1% in WB, and 51.8% in GS) is indicative of the widening geo-political and economic polarization between the two regions. Not only there are more poor households in Gaza than in the WB, but also the poor in the GS are much poorer than in the WB.

3. Profiling poor people, not “the poor”

The poor are not a homogeneous group. Impoverishment is generated and maintained by power structures that operate at level of the household, the local community, the society, as well as regional and international levels. They are the same structures that generate and maintain inequalities in wealth (income, and property), access to jobs, entitlements to basic services (education, health, housing, healthy environment, running water, electricity, etc.) and opportunities for political, social and cultural participation. The impact of militarized settler-colonialism, dispossession and ethnic cleansing are factors that need to be recalled to explain the origins of ongoing processes of impoverishment related to control of natural resources, the confiscation of land, the imposition of collective punishments, demolition of houses, imprisonment, killing and maiming, restriction of movement, control of borders, territorial fragmentation, and various modes of repression and oppression. This is the backdrop of any meaningful discourse of poverty and deprivation. But that does not invalidate the need to refer to the dynamics that relate to class, gender and locality in Palestinian society that make certain groups more vulnerable to poverty than others. The following are the groups that data show to be more exposed to poverty in the WBGS:

a. Large households have a higher incidence of poverty

In 1998 the highest poverty rate was recorded for the largest households with ten or more members. If one exclude childless households (about 15% of all households), then the incidence of poverty increases consistently as the number of children per household increase. The same feature was found in 2006 where the incidence of poverty increased as the size of the household increased; it rose from 13.1% for loner households to 15.7% with households of two to three members to reach 57.8% with households composed of ten or more members. There are two reasons. First, most institutional assistance tends to exclude households that have able-bodied male adults in working age, even if they are unemployed. Second, most emergency assistance for the unemployed does not take into consideration the number of dependents.

b. Female-headed households have a higher rate of poverty than other households

In 1988, the incidence of poverty among female-headed households was 25.6% compared to 19.8% among male-headed households, and deep poverty was 16.8% compared to 12.1%
among male-headed households. In 2006 the incidence of poverty among female-headed households was 35.6% compared to 30.3% among male-headed households. Deep poverty among female-headed households was estimated at 23% compared 18.2% for male-headed households. It is worth recording that refugee camps have a higher incidence of female-headed households while villages recorded the lowest incidence, and the WB had a higher incidence of female-headed households than GS.

The participation rate of men in the labour force remained, in 2009, lower than it was prior to the start of the second intifada, while there was an increase in the participation rate of women as more of them sought employment in the labour market in an attempt to compensate for the loss of income of men, as further explored in the chapter on labor and employment.

The majority of Palestinian households are one-earner households and they depend, therefore, on the income of the male breadwinner. This fact means that divorce or widowhood increase the vulnerability of women since most are not in paid employment and women have, on average, a longer life expectancy than men and are less likely to re-marry after widowhood or divorce. In 1998 divorcees and widowers had a higher rate of deep poverty than did households whose heads were married and households whose heads had never married. In 2006, some 8.6% of women (aged 15 years and above) were divorced, separated or widowed compared to 1.1% of men (aged 15 years and above). Widowed, and divorced women, as well as wives whose husbands have been martyred or held captive by the colonial state tend to attract the attention of charities, relief agencies and PA support institutions. The fact that they continue to have higher rates of poverty than male-headed households can only mean that the assistance they receive is less than what is required to raise them above poverty lines.

Poverty incidence varies by the source of income of the household; the highest incidence of poverty was found in households that had their basic income from transfers and relief assistance (42%). Women in paid employment are concentrated in certain occupations, in lower grades than men in the public sector, private sector, and the NGOs sector. The average daily wages earned by women do not exceed 83% of the average daily wage of men.

**c. Children are the major victims of poverty**

Children (under the age of 18 years) in the WBGS represented in mid 2009 nearly half the population (49.4%) and children under the age of 15 constituted 42% of the total population. Data on poverty in WBGS is conclusive that households with more than 4 children tend to be highly vulnerable to poverty: In 2006, no less than 39.1% of households with 5 to 6 children were poor, and 25% were in deep poverty. Households with 5 or more children constituted 43.6% of all poor households (including households without children), and formed 47.5% of all households with deep poverty (including households without children). This gives an indication of the degree to which children are the greatest victims of relative and absolute poverty. It is not surprising to find out that more than 70% of nine-month-old children in Gaza were, in 2008, anaemic, and that a large percentage of children in WBGS, get little or inadequate protections from PA institutions, international agencies and local NGOs.
The PCBS labour force survey for the second quarter of 2009 revealed that the percentage of employed children, whether paid or unpaid, amounted 3.9% of the total number of children in the age group (10-17 years). Over 70% of total employed children were unpaid family members. The same data also showed that the average weekly working hours for employed children in the age group (10-17 years) was 43.3 hours.

d. The old are more exposed to poverty than other age groups

Households whose heads were 65 years old or more had, in 1998, the highest rate of poverty, revealing the inadequacy of both formal and informal support systems for the aged. In mid-2009 those aged 60 years and more represented 4.4% of the total population of the WBGS (4.9% in the WB and 3.7% in GS). In 2007, some 7.6% of the people aged 60 and over in the WB were widowed males compared to 47.6% of that age who were widowed females. In 2007 half of those aged 60 and over were under the poverty line, but the GS was more pronounced: 39.5% for the WB, compared to 75.3% for GS.

e. Refugees have a higher incidence of poverty than non-refugees

Data on poverty in WBGS indicate clearly that the refugee status of the head of the household increases the likelihood of poverty (both income and consumer poverty). It is reasonable to relate this to the dispossession and dispersal that refugees were subjected to in 1948. In 2006, a third (33.3%) of households headed by refugees was poor, which is higher than the rate found among households that were headed by a non-refugee (29.1%). The difference is more striking with deep poverty; it reached 29.1% for refugees compared to 17.0% for non-refugees. Households in refugee camps have higher rates of both relative and deep poverty than either town or village dwellers.

f. Those with low “cultural capital” are more vulnerable to poverty

Poverty is negatively correlated with education (i.e., “cultural capital”). The higher the level of education the lower rate of poverty is. This was evident in data for 1998 and in data for 2005.

4. Relation to the labour market as a determining factor

Data confirms that employment, as such, does not provide adequate protection against poverty. Indeed, the employed poor formed, in 2006, nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of the total poor in that year, the unemployed poor formed 15.5% of the total poor and those who were outside the labour force formed 19.8%. However it is necessary to make the following observations:

-Participation in the labour force lowers the incidence of poverty but does not protect against it. In 2006 the incidence of poverty (based on real consumption) for households whose head was in the labour force was 29.3% (27.2% for those employed and 43.0% for those unemployed but seeking employment), while the incidence for those outside the labour
force was 38.3%. Similarly the incidence of deep poverty for those inside the labour force was for the same year 16.6% (14.8% for those employed and 28.7% for the unemployed) and 28.9% for those outside the labour force. What is noticeable is the decline in the rate of male participation in the labour force (from 70.7% in 1999 to 66.8% in 2008), and a rise in the participation rate for women (from 12.3% in 1999 to 15.2% in 2008), and this applies to both the WB and GS.

B. Conceptualizing direct mechanisms of impoverishment

On the level of daily life of the majority of Palestinians in WBGS the first decade of the current century has been a decade of extreme insecurity and a highly fragile economy hooked on foreign aid, fuelled by a divided political movement with paralyzed and obsolete national institutions, and enforced by a blockade of Gaza Strip amounting to mass starvation. The fact that the battered and fractured Palestinian economy did not collapse completely under the Israeli pressures was explained by the World Bank by the cohesion and resilience of Palestinian society, the continued delivery of basic services (by the PA and UNRWA and relief and charity organizations), and donor support which enabled the PA to continue employing a sizeable percentage of the employed work force.

A number of factors intervene to determine to determine the groups that are subjected to impoverishment and by what direct mechanisms. Clearly factors of class, gender, age, education, type of locality, and region are all pertinent in determining the following:

1. Position in the labour market: this encompasses the employment status of the head of the households (and other adults in it). It makes a difference whether one is a paid employee (salaried or daily wage), or an unpaid family worker; or self-employed (either as a professional or as a skilled or semi-skilled craftsman or mechanic), or unemployed (for a short, medium or long period). Position in the labour market also covers the work-situation which determines whether the position of the individual in the labour market is secure, insecure, or marginalized for one or more of a number of reasons (disability, gender, age; lack of skills, illiteracy etc).

Certain groups have weak negotiating position in the labour market. Women, sizeable sectors of the disabled, the old, and those with no or little education and skills stand in a weak negotiating position in the labour market and are likely to be exposed to unprotected employment. The possession of “cultural” capital (such as education) reduces the chances to poverty, as it can be cashed into the labour market for better jobs and high salaries. The possession of “social capital” (networks of social relations) can minimize the risk of poverty through increasing chances to employment and to job advancement (i.e., using “wasta”)

2. Possession of and access to property (wealth)
The lack of material capital or property exposes the individual to higher chances of poverty in comparison with those who possess such material. The chances of impoverishment...
increase if the lack of material capital is combined with low “cultural capital” (high education and skills) and low “social capital”. Women in Palestinian society tend to be excluded from inheritance of land and estate and tend to possess less material capital. Most Palestinian women are governed by patriarchal power relations within the household. Power relations within the household affect the distribution of income and resources between the members of the household. Studies are needed on the impact of power reaction within the family on patterns of consumption. Data from surveyed on Palestinian households reveal that the majority of women - regardless of level of education - do not spend their income on their personal welfare.44

3. Access to systems of social security
Poverty can result from the deficiency of entitlements to institutionalized and/or informal social protection. Access to the institutionalized or the informal social protection is essential to individuals who are excluded from the labour market and have insufficient material, cultural or social capital. Studies on the Palestinian poor have indicated that they tend to be or become socially isolated (to minimize their social interaction and relations).45 Other studies have suggested that the poor tend to have less “social capital” (i.e., membership in formal and informal associations) than others, to escape poverty or to guard against it.46

4. Access to basic services
Access to basic services such as health and education is not evenly accessible to all (in terms of location and quality). Major hospitals and higher educational institutions are located in towns in the WB and access to towns for villagers has been made difficult as a result of road blocks, check-points, the Separation Wall, colonial settlements, by-pass roads, and imposed closures. Also not all the poor have access to information on what services are available to them and how and where to access them.

C. How citizens confront their impoverishment

A participatory poverty assessment report that covered all the 16 governorates of the WBGS with their urban, village and camp communities as well as the different categories of the poor during the summer and winter of 2001/2 described how the poor understood the making of their poverty and how they confronted it. The causes of their poverty, as conceptualized by them, can be grouped under the following headings.47

- The turbulence of the labour market; within this context unemployment, low wages, and insecure employment were mentioned. Communities which are relatively far from towns, and other centres of employment, and which lacked basic services, emphasized these facts as factors facilitating the generation of poverty in their community. Israeli colonial policies were frequently mentioned as factors that directly affected Palestinians’ access to work and movement.

The lack of access to basic services and infrastructure; these were referred to frequently in relatively isolated villages and communities lacking electricity, asphalted roads, piped water, a public sewage system, schools and clinics.
- Disablement of the breadwinner: illness, particularly chronic illness of the breadwinner, and disability, lack or low level of formal education were recognized as factors generating poverty. Old age, addiction to drugs and alcoholism (mostly in the Jerusalem area) were specified as factors responsible for the inability to earn a sufficient income.

- Earlier dispossession and forced exile: this was mentioned most frequently by camp dwellers as the dominant cause their poverty, and was mentioned by returnees who where expelled from Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf War.

- Male attitudes towards women working outside home: restrictive male attitudes were mentioned by women as undermining their ability to seek work outside their homes. Having a large family and early marriage were frequently cited, mostly by women, as factors generating poverty.

- Nepotism and patronage: unemployed young people, particularly university graduates and particularly in the Gaza Strip, linked their poverty to lack of access to connections in the political and economic fields. They blamed wasta (connections) and mahsubia (patronage) as practices to blame for their failure to get employment and falling into need.

Various strategies were mentioned by heads of poor households (women and men) to address or alleviate hardship. Many of these strategies pointed to a crucial role for women in implementing measures to minimize the impact of income reduction or cessation on household members. The following the mostly frequently mentioned strategies:

1. Cultivating new sources of income and maximising participation in the labour market. This meant initiating tiny enterprises (such as vending sweets, selling fruits or sandwiches and the like), investing very small amounts of capital (“penny capitalism”) raised from family savings or borrowed from credit organizations, in very small businesses. This explains, partly at least, the rise in the labour force of the percentage of the self-employed when there is high rate of unemployment. It also meant throwing new members of the household into the labour market, and/or it led the unemployed to seek work than they shunned, for various reasons, previously. A corollary of higher rates of poverty has been the readiness of more households to accept the idea of women seeking work outside home. With economic hardship evolved more tolerant attitudes towards women engaging in paid employment. It also meant adopting radical measures such as immigration. Lastly, it involved in some cases members of the households taking up a second job (usually in the evening) to reduce loss of household income.

2. Rationalizing spending and reallocating resources. Households, whose income are reduced or stopped, respond, first of all, by re-prioritizing their spending to address basic needs of the households. Basic needs were defined by the Palestinian poor as food, housing requirements, clothing, education and health. Cuts are made on expenditure on these basic needs as income is diminished, including health and education. Poor households tell of resorting to herbs when they cannot afford to buy medicine from the pharmacy and of seeking traditional healing when they cannot afford the doctor’s fee. Some stopped sending their children (or some of them) to school, and find them work or apprenticeships.
admitted accepting to marry off their daughters very young to reduce household consumption.

3. **Minimizing socializing.** Many of the poor consciously reduced the number of visits to relatives in order to cut the expenses incurred through travel and gift giving, particularly on social and religious occasions. This inability to fulfil social obligations explains why prolonged poverty could entail gradual social isolation or self-imposed exclusion.

4. **Spending savings and selling valuables.** Those with savings used them, and those with valuables (such as jewellery, which usually belonged to women) started to sell them to spend on basic needs of their family.

5. **Seeking assistance from relatives and/or social support institutions.** Seeking support from both formal (governmental and non-governmental relief) institutions and informal solidarity networks is one common strategy of poor households.

6. **Borrowing.** Poor households reported resorting to borrowing from relatives, friends and store owners in their neighbourhood. Borrowing implied a tacit understanding that repayment will be made as soon as it is possible to do so, and often resulted in tension in cases were repayment was delayed (particularly with shopkeepers). Neighbourly relations involved mutual acts of support, particularly in borrowing basic food necessities and in paying electricity and water bills.

7. **Joining political parties, seeking NGOs activities and joining saving cooperatives.** Some hinted that they have joined political parties hoping to receive assistance and patronage of one kind or another. Others said they attended courses sponsored by NGOs, which provided in kind assistance for those who attend. A popular device that was used was the establishment of joint savings cooperatives. These are set up between individuals (in most cases women) in the same neighbourhood or from the same kinship group where participants pay a regular monthly amount of money which is given (by rotation) to one participant each month.

In conclusion, the poor are in constant struggle and use various initiatives to overcome the diversity of hardships that they face.

**D. The limits of the operating social support schemes**

**A social insurance law has been shelved, and the law concerning the disabled is not implemented**

The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) passed on June 2001 a law of social insurance and it was signed by the PA president in 2003. A board of directors was established for the public institute of social insurance with representatives of workers, employers, and the government. The law provided for social protection for those employed in the private sector and in civil
society institutions in two areas; work accidents (to be transferred from labour law to the social insurance law), and an old age pension for all employees (apart from those in the public sector) based on a system of deductions from both the employee and the employer. This applied equally to men and women. In response to recommendations from the World Bank the Legislative Council was asked to amend the law so that it can be applied by stages. In effect the law was frozen to give priority to poverty alleviation. Thus an effective pension scheme was, practically, sabotaged, and no tangible poverty alleviation took place.

It has been argued rightly that programmes for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons because of their opposition to the Israeli occupation, and families of martyrs and those who are wounded as a result of actions initiated by the military settler-occupation should be differentiated from other programmes of social assistance. Martyrs, freedom fighters in captivity and those injured confronting the Israeli occupation and settlers they should have a special fund providing entitlements normally reserved for those that render a service to their national cause.

A Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection was proposed, in 2004 to create jobs, to finance small projects, and to provide training facilities. However efforts to secure the necessary funds ceased following the paralysis of the PLC. Similarly a food security project which was supported by the European Union was also withdrawn for the same reason. Food insecurity is estimated to have risen in the WBGS from 34% in 2006 to 38% in 2007 (reaching 56% in GS). The Israeli war against Gaza has resulted in a 20% increase in food insecurity. The overall level of food insecurity has been raised to 75% of the population as estimated by FAO/WFP, adding risks to nearly 80% of the population already dependent on assistance before the war. 52

A proposed law for the protection of the unemployed has been presented to the Legislative Council but since January 2006 the Council was unable, because of sanctions, restrictions on movement, and imprisonment of a large number of its members by Israel, to attend its tasks.

E. The failures of existing anti-poverty programmes

The continued high rates of poverty (both income and consumption) indicate that social support programmes (formal and informal) have not been meeting the basic needs of the majority of the poor households. A survey on patterns of consumption in mid 2006 revealed that two thirds of households in WBGS (58% in the WB, and 84% in GS) had to reduce their spending on basic needs during the period between mid 2005 and mid 2006. Reductions of spending included education (51% of households) and health (62%). The reduction in food consumption is likely to have an effect on children, women and the elderly. 61.5% of those surveyed said they do not have the money to pay for their basic daily needs. 53 72% said of those surveyed said they had to reduce expenses. 45% said they borrowed money and three-quarters postponed paying their bills. 54
Following the Israeli war on GS late December 2008 and January 2009, households there increased their expenditure on basic needs at the cost of expenditure on education, and general health. Unemployment has also exacerbated the ability of impoverished families to send their children to school.

The fact that 18% of those receiving assistance in the WB consider relative and friends as their first source of assistance is a sign of the weakness of the formal support system (PA, UNRWA, Relief and charitable organizations, zakat committees, etc), not necessarily a sign of the strength of the informal support system.\(^5^5\)

The Ministry of Social Affairs acknowledges the existence of 165 thousand families in deep poverty in the WBGS in 2009. Its two programmes of cash assistance covers only five thousand families selected from “the poorest of the poor”, and another assistance program covers 51 thousand families selected from “hard cases”, that is the Ministry’s programmes leave two-third of families in deep poverty without social assistance. The ministry also acknowledges a decline in the services provided by UNRWA towards the camps as there has been a reduction, for political reasons, in the donations to the Agency by two of the largest international donors (USA and Canada).\(^5^6\)

**The amount of assistance is too small to make an impact**

PCBS data points to the following features concerning social assistance:

1. Two-thirds of Palestinian households reported (in 2005 and 2006) they needed assistance.\(^5^7\) In the second quarter of 2006 some 29.4% of Palestinian households stated that they received assistance during that period, compared to 27.2% in the last quarter of 2005. Data reveal wide regional differences; only 15.3% of the West Bank households received assistance compared to 56.9% in the Gaza Strip. During the quarter of 2006 two-thirds of the households which received assistance received it once (66.7% in WB, and 68.4% in GS); a fifth received assistance twice (16.5% in WB, and 23.5% in GS), the rest received assistance three times (16.8% in WB, and 8.1% in the GS).\(^5^8\)

2. The bulk (80%; 62.4% in the WB and 86.7% in the GS) of assistance is provided in the form of food, and only 18% is in form of cash (31.2% in the WB, and 10.2% in the GS). 2.5% received emergency employment, and the rest (i.e. 2%) in other forms.\(^5^9\) This clearly shows that the aim of all assistance programmes is to prevent malnutrition and hunger, i.e., to alleviate severe poverty, not to eradicate it.

3. The average assistance received by most households amounted in 2006 to less than 70 USA dollars in a period of three months; 47.8% of the assistance received was valued at less than 200 NIS (less than US$ 46.5 at the time), 24.5% at between 200-299 NIS (between US$ 46.5 and US$ 69.5 at the time), and those who received more than 300 NIS (US$ 70.0) constituted 27.7% of the aid receiving households. The Mean value of received assistance was 200 NIS (US$ 46.5), and for the GS it was 150 NIS (USA$ 35).\(^6^0\) In other word, the
amount of assistance given is intended to prevent starvation. Only 13% in the WB and 15% in the GS received assistance every month.  

4. One in every ten households in WB depended (in 2006) totally on assistance (formal and informal), in comparison to one in every four households in the GS. These figures refer to households that social assistance formed their main source of income, and not the percentage of households that received assistance. The latter formed (in the 2nd quarter of 2006) just above 29% of all households (15% in WB and 57% in GS).

5. A progress in the percentage of the population with health insurance did take place. Just over 80% of the population (74% in the WB, and 97% in GS) of the population had, in 2005, basic health insurance, compared to just over half in the year 2000. This is partly due to measures taken by the PA that undertook to cover maternal and child health care and that extended the health insurance coverage to vulnerable groups including the unemployed. In 2007 a survey found about two-third (64%) of households in WBGS enjoyed some type of health insurance coverage, while 17% of households indicated that they had partial coverage and a fifth had no coverage at all.

A postscript

Palestinian society in the WBGS remains under the control of a settler-colonial power engineering an apartheid and racist regime. The WBGS went through a geo-political polarization facilitated by a “bantustan-like” territorial fragmentation and a dislocated and enfeebled economy that is highly dependent on foreign aid and donor strategies. Palestinian society has also witnessed the widening of inequality between the rich and the poor since the establishment of the PA. In many ways “rent-seeking has become a dominant feature of PA (in both its manifestations), of the sectors of private sector, and of most civil society organizations. With the PA institutions paralysed and the PLO institutions outdated and their legitimacy challenged, the Palestinians, including those in the WBGS, are not only without national institutions but also without with a national leadership.

The empowering of Palestinians in the WBGS to organize themselves to defy and challenge the colonizing apartheid state, requires being guided by the principles of equality and social justice in fashioning their society, and not leaving it to the whims of the colonial power, the donors, or the market. There is a need for legislation to establish a decent minimum wage, to provide formal protection to the unemployed, and to re-activate the social insurance law to be implemented in accordance to resources available with special attention to those with special needs. A strategy of widening the free provision of health care and education to cover all citizens would be an empowering strategy. Such a strategy should be based on an appreciation of women’s role in the provision of care and right to participate in the paid labour force.
Footnotes & References

1 The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), estimated the population of the Israeli Jewish settlements to be 500,670 at the end of 2008 (see; Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), Economic & Social Monitor. Volume 17, September 2009, p.3.

2 The definition of poverty developed by the Palestinian Poverty Commission in 1997 and adopted officially by the PA combines both absolute (deep) and relative features. It was based on a budget of basic needs for a household of 6 individuals (2 adults and 4 children). Two poverty lines were established according to actual spending patterns of Palestinian families. These were termed “deep poverty” line, and a “relative poverty” line. The first was based on a budget for food, clothing and housing (the absolute basic necessities), while the second line added other necessities, which included education, health care, transportation (for work), personal care, and housekeeping supplies. The two lines were adjusted to reflect the different needs of families based on their consumption (i.e. household size and number of children). National Poverty Eradication Commission (NPEC), Palestine Poverty Report 1998. Ramallah: Palestinian National Authority,1998.


6 The average daily wage increased from 54.3 NIS (New Israeli Shekels) in 1996 to 68.5 NIS in 1998 (PCBS, February 2000, 10).


8 United Nations, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO). (October 2002). The Impact of Closure and Other Mobility Restrictions on Palestinian Productive Activities. 1 January 2002 - 30 June 2002 (pp. 5-10).


12 Ibid., p.21.

13 Ibid., p.16.

14 According to Israeli figures, 35% of households were in 2007 below the poverty line in Jerusalem; 23% for Jewish households compared to 67% to Arab households (see; Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies; http://www.jiis.org/upload/news/jer_day_2009.pdf).

15 Poverty incidence in Jerusalem governorate was 3.1% (with deep poverty at 2.3%) in 1998. The low incidence of relative poverty in East Jerusalem is related to the fact that most of this governorate was annexed by Israel in 1967, and a high percentage of the families has access to work both inside Israel and in the Palestinian areas. These families come under Israeli jurisdiction and thus have access to the welfare provisions which are not matched in Palestinian areas. However according Israeli poverty measures Palestinians in Jerusalem have a higher poverty incidence than Israeli Jews.


17 PCBS, Poverty in the Palestinian Territory, 2006, op.cit., (table 3).


20 Data for 1998 show that access to land does reduce the likelihood of poverty. About 16% of households with access to land were, in 1998, poor compared to 22% for those without such access such access. Moreover, poor households lacking access to land are worse than poor households having access to land (PCBS, February 2000; 22).


22 PCBS. Ibid. (table7).

23 Ibid. (p. 19, and table 3).

24 In 2003 the incidence of poverty for female-headed households were as follows; 9.7% for camps; 9.3% for towns, and 8.0% for villages (see; Palestine, Human Development Report 2004. Berzeit University; Human Development Programme, 2005. (p. 161).
The Pauperization of Women, Men and Children in the WBGS (Jamil Hilal)

30 The percentage of average women wages to those of men was estimated at 70.6% in 1996, 71.0% in 1999, and 75% in 2001, and 82.67% in 2003 and 81.4% in 2008 (MAS, Social Monitor. Issue Number 8-May 2005. & PCBS, Annual Report; Labour Force Survey 2008. Ramallah; 2009.
31 Ibid., (table 1, p. 30).
38 PCBS, February 2000, op.cit.; table 11
41 Ibid. PCBS, Poverty in the Palestinian Territory, 2006, op.cit., (table 1, p.30).
43 Jamil Hilal, Saleh Al Kafri, and Eileen Kuttab, Unprotected Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, ILO (Regional Office for the Arab State) and Center for Arab Women Training and Research, June 2008.
48 The percentage of those classified as self-employed in the WBGS rose from 18.7% in 1999 when unemployment was 11.8% to 27.8% in 2003 when unemployment was 25.6% (MAS, Economic & Social Monitor, September 2009, op.cit. (table 4).
49 It seems the PLC did amend the law to read that it could be applied in stages, but no time was set for its implementation. However the collapse of the Palestinian economy, the Hamas electoral win, and the sanction imposed meant that nothing was done to rescue the scheme.
52 WFP & FAO, Report of Rapid Qualitative Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA); Gaza, 2009.
54 PCBC, September, 2006, ibid., (table 4-5).
56 See; http://www.alhourriah.ps/ar/?page=det&id=3872.
57 MAS, *Economic and Social Monitor*, op. cit., Vol. 5 (p. 70).
58 PCBS, *Survey of the impact of Israeli unilateral measures on social, economic and environmental conditions of the Palestinian household; Main Findings*, September 2006; (table 4-8 and table 4-9).
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid (table 4-11).
61 PCBS, *Survey of the impact of Israeli unilateral measures on social, economic and environmental conditions of the Palestinian household; Main Findings*, November 2005; (table 9).
62 Survey by Near East Consulting, “Survey of Health in Occupied Palestinian Territory”, posted on May 24, 2009. According to the survey the most prevalent obstacles to care delivery were financial and capacity constraints; 25% of respondents said they could not afford care, 23% that there were too many other people waiting, and 17% that there was not enough staff attending to them.