

Conversely, Arab and United Nations interest in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been largely confined until a few years ago, to political rhetoric which has had very little impact on the realities of life in the occupied territories. But the situation changed in the late Seventies. In the first place a number of "voluntary" agencies, mainly American, started channelling modest funds, to agricultural and community projects, though in most cases these efforts were explicitly or implicitly resisted by Israel. In 1978 Arab leaders meeting in Baghdad decided to channel substantial volumes of aid to the occupied territories for the purpose of bolstering their "steadfastness". The assignment was delegated to an agency set up by those leaders under the name of the "Palestinian - Jordanian Joint Committee" (PJJC).

Another major move in the same direction was launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which established a special Task Force representing the Economic Commission for West Asia (ECWA), the United Nations International Development Organisation, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the assignment of "undertaking an initial identification of the social and economic needs of the Palestinian people and working out a list of national projects for meeting their needs in conformity with the General Assembly Resolution 33/147."

As soon as they commenced their activities, voluntary agencies, the PJJC, and United Nations bodies were all confronted with two major obstacles. First, Israel refused to cooperate and began to obstruct developmental effort which it considered conflicting with its own interests and policies in the occupied territories. Second, all

interested donor bodies were handicapped by weak communication channels concerning reliable sources of information and data. Israeli sources of information were either of a strictly statistical nature or were felt to be affected by political motives. Furthermore, conducting independent research required official approval, which was frequently conditioned by various pressures. Clearly enough, the development economist needs an accurate exposition of existing circumstances, problems and constraints, and actual needs and political pressures made this difficult to achieve.

Understandably, much of the interest displayed by Arab and international agencies has focused mainly on agriculture and rural development. Yet it is this sector which has suffered most from the lack of adequate studies and unreliable sources of information, for reasons which will be discussed under "methodology".

This study has come as a partial response to the afore-mentioned needs. Its primary objective is to ascertain and evaluate the problems and constraints which impede better exploitation of land and labour in rainfed areas. Consequently it attempts to put forth a developmental strategy which accomodates itself with the long-term national aspirations of the Palestinian people. Although it tries to provide ideas and courses of action conducive to a healthy and speedy development of rainfed agriculture, this study is not intended to be a substitute for more comprehensive feasibility studies of individual projects, nor is it conceived as a full-fledged developmental plan. These assignments are beyond the scope of this research.

To summarize, the present study is specifically addressed to achieve the following objectives:

1. An overall review of the role of agriculture in the West Bank