

## V THE SITUATION TODAY: LIVELIHOODS, ACCESS TO FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL VULNERABILITY

### Summary

A vulnerability assessment was undertaken to better understand the factors and conditions affecting livelihoods, food security and nutritional vulnerability of the population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This information can be used to better design, target and implement policies, strategies, action programmes and interventions to protect and promote food security and improve nutritional status. The vulnerability assessment concluded that in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (a) food is generally available but access is limited due to physical (curfews, closures) and economic reasons (high unemployment, depletion of resources, exhaustion of coping strategies and strained social support networks); (b) the resultant food insecurity is a reality for some and a (near) constant threat for a large and growing number of people.

Coping mechanisms that households rely upon for their survival were examined in depth to better understand their viability, whether they still are being used effectively, to what extent they have been exhausted, have deteriorated or are no longer available, and how long they can be continued. This assessment on the role of coping mechanisms confirms the findings of other recent studies that households continue to cope and so far have been able to manage in the difficult circumstances albeit with dwindling resources and increased vulnerability to shocks. However, resilience has been greatly weakened, vulnerability increased and coping mechanisms severely strained by the rapid and inexorable decline in the economy and of the continuation and further tightening of closures and curfews.

Fieldwork was conducted in all of the districts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in urban, camp and non-urban/remote locations and comprised 950 semi-structured interviews, 240 focus group discussions and 80 key informant interviews. The assessment estimates that about 40 percent of the population of both the West Bank and Gaza Strip are currently food insecure with approximately a further 30 percent under threat of becoming food insecure in the near future. The annexes contain 16 maps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip districts indicating levels of food insecurity at sub-district level. The fieldwork findings conclude that past and present closures have directly created this situation and are contributing to its continuing deterioration, and that the removal of such restrictions can reverse this trend. However, the prolongation of these restrictions risks permanently damaging households' recovery and undermining their ability to attain food security in the long-term. Vulnerability profiles are summarised here and described in detail along with recommendations for safeguarding and improving the food security situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the technical reports are contained in the Annexes.

Households in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip have responded to severe livelihood constraints by adopting a variety of short-term coping mechanisms that have helped them get by until now but that risk undermining their ability to recover in the future. With plummeting incomes, vulnerable households are forced to find alternative means to provide food for their families, seeking out informal petty trade and piecemeal agricultural work, going into debt, selling assets and cutting consumption. Farming households shift to production for home consumption although this cannot meet all of the households' food requirements. Many households skip meals and reduce their expenditures on the more expensive foods such as meat, vegetables, fruits and milk essential for a healthy diet. Rent and utility payments are a significant burden for urban dwellers. Those who cannot pay such bills are worried about losing their home and having their supply of water and electricity cut. Those living in urban areas have more income earning opportunities than other locations and rely more on a monetary income. Gazans and refugees living in camps are more dependent on food and welfare aid and have fewer assets than in other locations and are unlikely to have access to land. In non-urban areas, the cost of living is lower as wood can be used as fuel and it is easier to produce food. Credit lines at shops are more resilient during difficult times in non-urban areas and camps than in urban areas because community bonds are stronger.

## Concepts, Methodologies and Instruments

Concepts of livelihoods, food security and vulnerability as defined below underpinned the assessment:

LIVELIHOODS	FOOD SECURITY	VULNERABILITY
<p>Capabilities;</p> <p>Assets including both material and social resources;</p> <p>Activities required for a means of living.</p>	<p>All people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. This implies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggregate food availability;</li> <li>• Household food access;</li> <li>• Individual food utilisation</li> </ul>	<p>The probability of an acute decline in food access or consumption in reference to some critical value that defines minimum levels of human well being. Vulnerability implies:</p> <p>Defencelessness, Insecurity, exposure to risks, shocks and stress; Coping difficulties, strain and lack of resilience</p>

Food insecurity differs from poverty. People can be rich in assets such as skills, education, livestock and financial capital and still be food insecure. Bedouin communities are traditionally asset-rich but are now food insecure because of their isolation. They have lost their income from the sale of dairy produce because of the difficulty they face reaching markets and the increased costs of inputs such as fodder. Fisher folk who own boats and nets may now be unable to bring home fish for their family meals if they are forbidden from going out to sea. Similarly, an olive farmer who cannot sell his olives on the usual markets or locally may not have received an income for two years and consequently be unable to afford food. Wealthy people in cities that have undergone prolonged curfew, such as is the case in Nablus, may be temporarily food insecure if they cannot leave their homes to purchase food. The newly unemployed who received good salaries working in Israel and invested in constructing a large villa appear well-off but may be without cash for food.

The vulnerability assessment followed a participatory qualitative methodology to examine food insecurity from a community and a household perspective. The assessment was preceded by a review and analysis of a number of secondary sources of information related to poverty, food security, food consumption and nutrition issues. The assessment involved extensive field visits, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, pair wise comparison ranking, household observations, key informant and individual interviews. Full details of the methodology including tools and survey instruments as well as results of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are provided in the Annexes of this report.

Efforts were made to understand how social networks and household relations shape people's ability to turn material and human resources into strategies for achieving food security. Both internal and external factors affecting household food security were examined. Household's resources and the internal relations between household members are important factors determining the capacity of the household to cope with each emergency and shock and with inexorable economic decline. External factors such as assistance from the Palestinian Authority and/or from humanitarian aid agencies and the contribution of remittance incomes were also considered.

Reports and studies on the deterioration of the economy and increasing levels of poverty among the general population (reports by the Palestinian Authority, World Bank, UNSCO, UNDP-PAPP and Oxfam), provided useful information on factors affecting the overall food security situation and on how livelihoods have changed during the second *Intifada*. This assessment was designed to identify the households and vulnerable groups that are food insecure and those that are under threat of becoming food insecure, and to describe their socio-economic profiles and coping mechanisms. Efforts were made to identify location-specific factors believed to be contributing to higher food insecurity in a given area and thereby to map the spatial distribution of food insecurity.

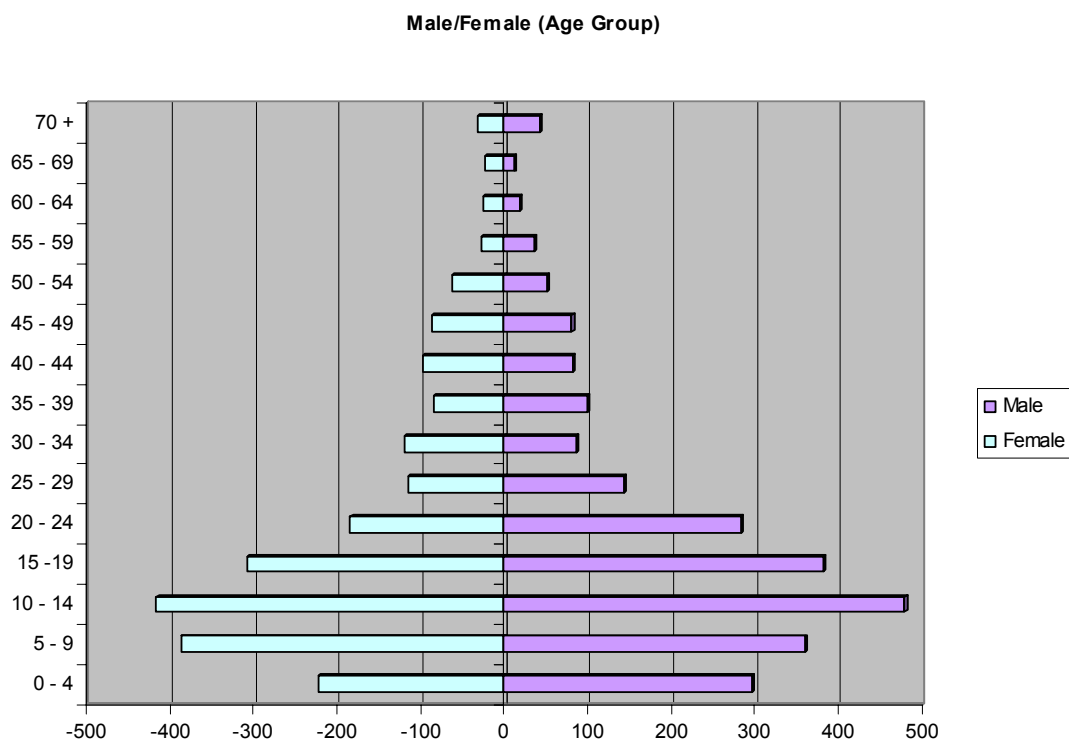
Fieldwork was conducted in all 16 districts of the West Bank (11) and Gaza Strip (5) in urban, camp and no-urban/remote locations and comprised 950 semi-structured interviews, 240 focus group discussions and 80 key informant interviews. Interviews with traders, farmers and fisher folk provided information about the production and supply of food and its availability to the local population. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with men, women and children at the household level provided information on vulnerability and food insecurity. Respondents were chosen purposely according to their ability to report on various aspects of vulnerability. In most instances, women were interviewed as they were assumed to be the most knowledgeable with respect to household food utilization issues. Interviews with children focused on their perceptions of the distribution of food within the household. Table V.1 and Figure V.1 below on the composition of the households

interviewed, show the high numbers of children and young people in respondent households. This is reflective of the large young populations in WBGS and, as was mentioned in chapter IV, combines with high unemployment to produce high dependency ratios. Large households that are struggling to survive with many dependents face particular problems securing enough safe, nutritious food for all their members.

**Table V.1: Composition of the 950 households interviewed, by age and sex, in WBGS**

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0 – 4	297	222	519
5 – 9	361	386	747
10 – 14	480	416	896
15 -19	382	308	690
20 – 24	283	184	467
25 – 29	144	115	259
30 – 34	86	120	206
35 – 39	100	85	185
40 – 44	82	98	180
45 – 49	81	87	168
50 – 54	52	62	114
55 – 59	36	28	64
60 – 64	19	26	45
65 – 69	12	23	35
70 +	43	31	74
Total	2458	2191	4649

**Fig.V.1: Composition of the 950 households interviewed, by age and sex, in WBGS**



Focus group discussions were conducted with different groups. The chronic poor (female headed households, widows, households with chronically sick or disabled members, households without a breadwinner); the new poor (recently unemployed and households where the main income earner had lost income in the last two years); households that had lost assets (e.g. their homes have been demolished or their land confiscated); the elderly (women and men); and children. A ‘shop’ group selected from those ‘living on account’ and those cut off from this credit source through shops’ credit lists (women only) was added as a control group to facilitate the process of comparing coping strategies of vulnerable groups.

A key informant-based pair wise comparison tool based on people’s perceptions of the spatial distribution of vulnerability was used to compare and contrast information on the extent and severity of food insecurity and nutritional vulnerability across and between districts. The tool developed jointly by WFP Cairo and WFP Jerusalem’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Units (VAM) played a critical role in the overall assessment process. The information generated by VAM allowed the mission to estimate both the size of the food insecure population and their location at a relatively disaggregated scale. Such information will be useful for more effective geographic targeting and resource allocation in the future

The objective of the pair wise ranking exercise was to better understand the extent of food insecurity and its geographic and spatial distribution. Key informant interviews were held with staff from the Palestinian Authority, UNRWA, and local NGO’s. The selection of key informants was based on their knowledge of the food security status of the population under evaluation and their professional experience working with humanitarian aid, poverty relief, or agricultural development organizations. Informants were expected to be familiar with the situation in the entire district in order to compare and contrast levels of food insecurity of populations.

Using structured interviews, key informants were asked to qualitatively evaluate levels of food insecurity for sample areas within each of the 16 districts. In the absence of maps showing administrative boundaries below the district level, a set of geographic sampling units that sub-divided the boundaries into smaller sample areas was collectively identified. Ninety-six geographic sampling units were created in total. That all key informants had a firm and common understanding of food security was crucial for ensuring consistency with regard to the key informant’s responses. Key concepts and a common definition of food security were reviewed with respondents prior to the actual data collection.

Key informants were asked to compare the percentage of the population that is food insecure between two areas indicated on a map of the district and were given a list of nine pre-defined qualitative “response options”: namely that the percentage of food insecure in area-1 as compared to area-2 is: “very much higher”, “much higher”, “higher”, “slightly higher”, “the same or similar”, “slightly lower”, “lower”, “much lower”, or “very much lower”.

Interviews proceeded until all possible combinations (area pairs) within a district were compared. Key informants were also asked to compare the percentage of food secure for each area. The data for both groups (i.e. the food insecure and the food secure) later allowed estimates to be produced for a third group - those understood as being in the ‘middle’ with regard to food security status. The food security status of the middle group is shaped by the impact of socio-economic changes that either increase or decrease their risk. They may be considered to be under threat of becoming food insecure in the near future should current conditions persist or further deteriorate. The key informant response data gathered during the interviews were later coded with scaled fractional values to reflect each district’s comparative standing, or relative position, within a district pair, as shown in the table below.

**Table V.2: Code Values for Key Informants Responses**

<b>Key Informant’s Response:</b>	<b>Very Much Lower</b>	<b>Much Lower</b>	<b>Lower</b>	<b>Slightly Lower</b>	<b>Same/ Similar</b>	<b>Slightly Higher</b>	<b>Higher</b>	<b>Much Higher</b>	<b>Very Much Higher</b>
Code Assigned:	1/5	1/4	1/3	1/2	1/1	2/1	3/1	4/1	5/1

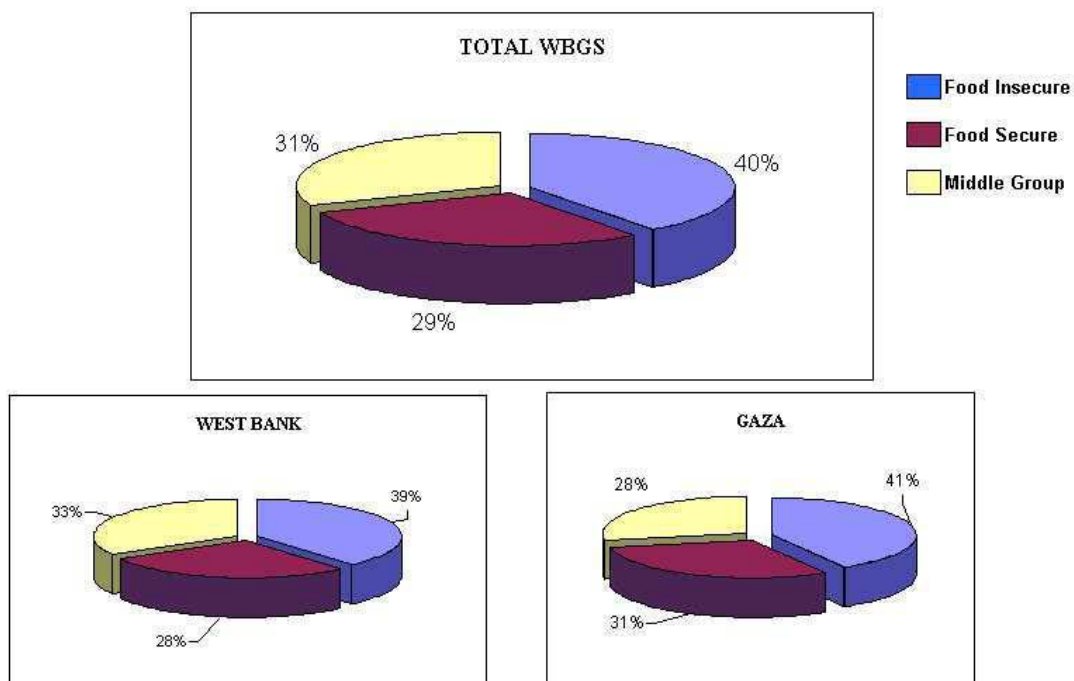
The coded data made it easier to perform consistency checks (quality control), during the data processing. The coded data were also used to generate numeric “weight” values. The value of an area’s weight reflects its importance in terms of its food insecurity rate. Areas with higher weighted values are associated with higher food insecurity rates, and vice versa. The weight values were then used to rank the areas within a governorate. Key informants were then asked to focus only on those areas ranking “worst” and “best” respectively within a governorate, and to estimate the percentage of the food insecure. Percentage estimates for the remaining areas were then interpolated using the weights thus allowing a comparison of results across governorates.

These steps resulted in area level “percentage food insecure” estimates for each key informant interviewed. The statistical measure “variance” was used to identify the “three out of five key informants” whose estimates were closest to one another. The closest estimates were then averaged together to produce a final set of “percentage food insecure” estimates for each area. Finally, these percentage figures were applied against the base population figures for each area (1997 population census data projected to 2003) resulting in final estimates of food insecure per sampled area. Information on the percentages of food insecure is presented in the pie chart graphics (Figures V.2 and V.3) and in the maps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip which follow. A further set of 16 sub-district maps are provided in the Annexes while the detailed results of the pair wise ranking exercise are available on request.

It is important to bear in mind the limitations of the pair wise comparison tool. While providing valuable information and estimates of “where” and “how many” are food insecure at a relatively disaggregated scale, it does not provide an exact picture of the food security situation with pinpoint accuracy. Rather, it is an initial estimation of the food security situation that allows us to better understand conditions at a local level based on local expert knowledge. Its findings complemented and were analysed alongside the findings of the other assessment tools described above.

The fieldwork was organised by the two mission socio-economists who divided the responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza Strip between them. WFP gave full support to the mission through the provision of programme staff who provided inputs throughout the process, in particular in the design, implementation, analysis and mapping of the pair wise geographical information. Two training workshops, one each for the West Bank and for the Gaza Strip were conducted with fieldworkers from UNRWA, WFP and FAO Food Monitors. Team leaders were selected for the West Bank and two staff members of the UNDP poverty assessment programme were seconded to the assessment as PRA coordinators in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Field workers input data into the database developed for the assessment by Al Quds University Nutrition and Health Research Institute. Though closures, curfews and often long delays at checkpoints significantly hampered the speed by which the vulnerability assessment could be conducted, the fieldwork was completed in less than two months.

**Fig.V.2: Results of the pair wise ranking for West Bank and Gaza Strip: Percentage breakdown of population by food insecure, food secure and middle groups<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> The middle group is understood as those who are vulnerable of becoming food insecure in the near future should current conditions persist or further deteriorate.

Fig.V.3: Percentage breakdown of Governorate population by food insecure, food secure and middle groups

