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## Infrastructure for Palestinian refugees

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## Infrastructure for Palestinian Refugees

Michael D. Smith

### INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There have been Palestinian refugees ever since the State of Israel was created out of conflict from the former nation of Palestine. Considerable numbers of Palestinian Arabs were driven from their homes, or fled from them, during the months before and after the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. (Ref. 1)

There are three possible solutions in attempting to resolve conventional refugee problems: repatriation, emigration from the country of first asylum, and integration into the country of first asylum. The Palestinian refugee problem is, however, different from that faced by most other refugees. To illustrate this, it is useful to consider each of the usual options in turn:

Repatriation. The possibility of the Palestinian refugees returning to their homes, on any significant scale, was rejected by the Provisional Government of Israel on security grounds (Ref. 1) and has been rejected by Israeli governments since.

Emigration. The Palestinian refugees wished to return to their homes at the earliest opportunity, and saw themselves not as refugees, but as temporary absentees. (Ref. 1) Even today, some forty years later, many Palestinians consider their home to be where their family lived prior to 1948.

Integration. This option remained as a possible solution. The refugees saw this as a temporary solution, prior to repatriation, and were willing to work (if work was available) in the host countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Gaza Strip. (Ref. 1)

Emergency relief was initially provided by various agencies, until in 1950 UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) started operations as a temporary agency. (Ref. 1) Forty years later, that temporary agency is still operating because the Palestine problem has not yet been resolved. The present *Intifada*, or uprising, has been in operation since December 1987, with the Palestinians pursuing a policy of non-cooperation with the Israeli administration.

Over the past forty years, the number of refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has increased considerably, as a result of natural population increases. Nearly 200,000 refugees fled from these territories when they were occupied by Israel in 1967. (Ref. 2) In September 1989, the refugee population of the Gaza Strip was approximately 474,000, of which about 261,000 were living in the 8 refugee camps. In the West Bank, the total refugee population at that time was approximately 402,000, of which about 107,000 were living in the 19 refugee camps. (Ref. 4)

### PHYSICAL PLANNING OBJECTIVES

This paper is based on a period of sixteen weeks spent by the author in the Israeli-occupied territories of The West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was as a member of a Feasibility Study Team assembled by Llewelyn-Davies Planning, and funded by the British Government through the Overseas Development Administration. The Feasibility Study Team reviewed work that has been undertaken by UNRWA, and drew up recommendations to improve the agency operations in the future. The operations of UNRWA are divided into three sections: Health, Education and Training, and Relief.

From the outset, the Feasibility Study Team identified clear objectives (Ref. 4, adapted) of a practical nature:

- a. To identify practical means of improving living conditions for camp refugees.
- b. To provide UNRWA with a planning framework in which immediate, early, mid-term and longer-term programmed improvements can be undertaken.
- c. To identify constraints to, and requirements for, implementation.
- d. To improve the quality of information on which projects are planned and implemented.
- e. To propose measures which:
  - are low cost,
  - maximise benefits to camp residents,
  - realistically reflect recurrent expenditure problems; and
  - are attractive to funders.
- f. To use shelter and infrastructure programmes to stimulate economic development, and to further other development programmes.

This paper deals only with aspects of physical infrastructure, although all aspects of the ongoing refugee programme were reviewed.

#### REVIEW OF EXISTING FACILITIES

It is not possible, in a brief review, to provide a detailed description of typical conditions for Palestinian refugees. Not all refugees live in camps. Conditions vary between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and between individual camps. Camps in the Gaza Strip range in size from about 11,000 to 56,000; while those in the West Bank have smaller populations from about 700 to 13,000. (Ref. 4) The Gaza Strip now has one of the highest population densities in the world, at approximately 1,900 people/square kilometer. (Ref. 2)

In the various sectors associated with physical infrastructure (shelter, environmental sanitation, refuse disposal, water supply, roads and paths, electrification) the level of facilities available now is generally better than that provided for the original refugees. Some improvements were made by the agency (UNRWA), others by individual refugee families. The quality of most

facilities has deteriorated over the years, for reasons such as staff or funding shortages, inadequate maintenance, or the continuing population growth. There is therefore an urgent need for upgrading and maintenance.

#### PLANNING FOR FUTURE FACILITIES

In all sectors of activity it is possible to identify specific projects that need to be, and could be, implemented. Development is possible in spite of the numerous severe constraints that limit the options for implementation.

#### Needs and Constraints

The plight of the Palestinian refugees has, all too often, been seen as a temporary problem. Planning for the future has therefore largely been neglected, with many projects being postponed until the last moment, and then implemented hastily.

The weaknesses of the lack of forward planning show in various ways, and fundamental planning techniques can be applied to alleviate these in the future. Needs, solutions and constraints should all be identified.

For each field of activity it proved helpful to adopt the following simple procedure:

- Identify the needs;
- Identify the strategic options;
- Identify the detailed options; and
- Identify the factors influencing the selection of options.

The various constraints that influence the selection of options are more severe than in most other situations. Identification of these constraints show that some could be overcome within a relatively short period, while others are more long-term. Some constraints are inherent in the prevailing conditions, others can be removed by appropriate action. The following list, (Ref. 4, adapted) while not comprehensive, gives some indication of the problems that hinder development of physical infrastructure for Palestinian refugees.

- Community attitudes can only be changed through education, example and demonstration. Evidence of community interests may provide opportunities for attitudes to be changed.
- Operational difficulties will be constraining factors so long as strikes, curfews and disturbances continue.
- Limitations on physical space will continue to be a problem while the refugee population increases and the areas occupied by the camps remain fixed.
- Funding and staffing will continue to be major constraints if facilities are introduced that are both expensive to provide and costly to maintain. A fast growing population with a need for essential services will require significant funds and trained staff.
- Some constraints are internal to the agencies working for the Palestinian refugees. Greater co-ordination and improved planning can reduce the effect of these constraints.

- The restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities create major constraints in all fields of development activity.
- Some constraints, associated with the physical and geographical situations of the various camps, will persist whatever political or other changes take place.

Linkages between different sectors

A major constraint to development has been the lack of integrated and co-ordinated programmes. (Ref. 4) It is convenient to distinguish between individual sectors of activity, such as sanitation and road construction, yet such distinctions are inevitably false. A development project that is primarily associated with one sector will have linkages (strong or weak) with other sectors (see Figure 1). Due consideration needs to be given to the linkages that exist if there is to be co-ordinated development.

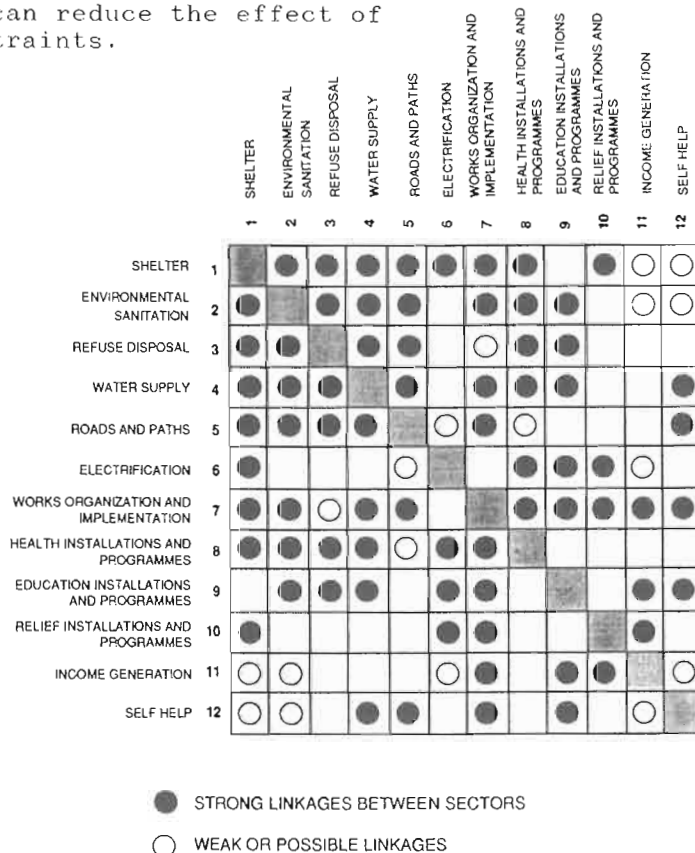


FIGURE 1 LINKAGES BETWEEN DIFFERENT SECTORS (Ref. 4)

### Phasing of developments

Different time periods were identified to encourage the gradual introduction of improved planning techniques, to correspond to the periods for which constraints may apply, and to allow for political changes. The various phases, and the sectoral objectives, (Ref. 4) are as follows:

Immediate phase: (first 12 months) To improve the development performance of key parts of current activities.

Early phase: (next 36 months) To strengthen the development role of currently planned activities, in line with mid-term and long-term objectives.

Mid-term phase: (from end of early phase to political solution of the refugee problem) To promote and support local enterprise and self-help, in line with long-term objectives.

Long-term phase: (the period following a political settlement) Objectives cannot be predicted at present.

### CONCLUSIONS

The development problems for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are extremely difficult to resolve. Careful use of planning techniques would nevertheless allow significant co-ordinated improvements to be made in various sectors.

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