

Table (III-13)

Ratio of land under irrigation in some countries of the Middle East (%)

| Country   | % of total cultivated | Country | %    |
|-----------|-----------------------|---------|------|
| Iraq      | 49.3                  | Syria   | 9.3  |
| Jordan    | 7.4                   | Lebanon | 29.3 |
| West Bank | 5.0                   | Israel  | 44.0 |

Sources: 1. Adbulla Arar, *op cit*, p 31.

2. Statistical Abstract of Israel 1980, *op cit*, p 9.

While the foregoing statistics emphasize the significant role of rainfed patterns of agriculture, irrigated farming is much more significant than is implied statistically. Thus while irrigated agriculture occupies only 5% of all cultivated land, its contribution to agricultural income amounts to about one third of the total net income. Furthermore, it is quite clear that irrigated farming lends itself much more easily and rapidly to technological change and intensive production. Therefore it is important for any forthcoming Palestinian authority to expand water use in agriculture to whatever limits are imposed by political realities. But in the meantime it is rainfed agriculture which will continue to maintain a critical role in West Bank's socio-economic life.

The importance of rainfed agriculture relates to many attributes of the West Bank economy, politics, and social structure. Its contribution to the domestic product (GDP) as could be assessed from Table (V-16) is certainly sizeable and amounts to about one fourth of the GDP for most years. But when the figures of output and income are viewed on a regional basis the share of certain patterns of farming in local economies can be far more substantial (examples: grapes in Halhoul, olives in Salfit, grains in Jenin and sheep in Yatta). Furthermore, it could be

argued from a distributional point of view that small size family holdings provide a critical shock-absorbing capacity for peasant families in the lower levels of the economic strata.<sup>1</sup> In this sense it is observed that the importance of most rainfed products as sources of staple food for local communities goes much beyond their purely monetary remuneration.

The labour absorption potential of rainfed agriculture deserves special notice. Although there is no detailed statistical evidence on the vocational distribution of agricultural workers, yet it is clear that the vast majority of them are absorbed in non-irrigated forms of agriculture.

But the real absorptive capacity of rainfed agriculture is certainly much greater than is indicated in statistics on labour distribution. The important point to remember is that dry farming patterns have drawn heavily on forms of labour which have a markedly low opportunity cost (eg. old family members, women and children, and the spare-time workers). In this way it has been possible to mobilize certain forms of non-marketable labour into active production and at reasonable levels of efficiency, given the constraints imposed by existing political and socio-economic realities.

The ramifications of land use in rainfed agriculture deserve special attention. In the first place it should be re-emphasized that this kind of agriculture utilizes about 95% of all cultivated land.<sup>2</sup> The economic rationale here is clear enough, and it focuses

1. A widely common proverb in rural communities says that "the family need not worry as long as it has got two lions at home: wheat and (olive) oil" - both are rainfed products.

2. Administered Territories Statistics, Quarterly 1980, *op cit*, p 95.